



HANDBOOK OF
DISASTER RITUAL
MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES,
CASES AND THEMES



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HANDBOOK OF DISASTER RITUAL

LITURGIA CONDENDA

Liturgia Condenda is a series published by the Institute for Ritual and Liturgical Studies (Amsterdam, NL), serving as a forum for innovative research into liturgical and ritual studies by researchers of various nationalities. Its rationale is the conviction that liturgy and ritual form a complex and interrelated research object, the exploration of which must be performed both in its context (past and present) and in close contact with other (sub)disciplines. This gives the series its outspoken multidisciplinary profile.

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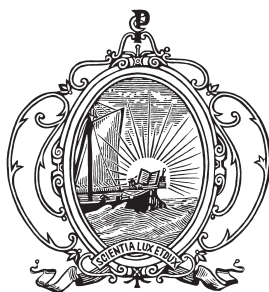
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PREFACE

We present the current volume of the series *Liturgia Condenda* as a ‘handbook’ of disaster rituals. As ambitious as this sounds, this is what we are aiming for. The core objective of an academic handbook is to present an overview of the relevant literature, perspectives, methods, concepts, and themes regarding a specific topic. In this *Handbook of Disaster Ritual*, we present several perspectives on the study of disasters and disaster rituals (Part I); 19 case studies through which the concepts, methods, and approaches of disaster rituals are presented (Part II); and various themes that recur in the case studies that can be seen as key elements in disaster rituals (Part III). The choice of themes in the last part, we have to admit, is somewhat arbitrary; we could have added a few more themes, such as national or institutional protocols for disaster rituals, monuments, ownership, agency, and resilience. Even a handbook is never complete and remains open to further research, themes and perspectives.

The idea to compile a disaster ritual book originated from my colleague Paul Post. In November 2018, he drafted a first version of what would later become the longer introduction to this handbook. Paul presented his idea on several occasions, and it gradually grew into an extensive joint book project between the ‘Ritual in Society’ Research Group (Department of Culture Studies, School of Humanities and Digital Sciences, Tilburg University) and the Institute for Ritual and Liturgical Studies (IRiLiS).

In earlier years, the disaster ritual was already a research topic for Tilburg’s ‘Ritual in Society’ Research Group. Some members of the group, including, among others, Paul Post and Tineke Nugteren, participated in publishing a work on disaster rituals in the Netherlands, which was translated into English one year later and extended with some case studies beyond the Dutch situation.¹ In those two publications, the disaster ritual

¹ P. POST, A. NUGTEREN & H. ZONDAG: *Rituelen na rampen. Verkenning van een opkomend repertoire* (Kampen 2002); P. POST, R.L. GRIMES, A. NUGTEREN, P. PETERSON & H.J. ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual. Explorations of an emerging ritual repertoire* (= *Liturgia condenda* 15) (Leuven etc. 2003).

was evaluated as an ‘emerging ritual’, as something new and in development. The many case studies in this present volume show that the disaster ritual is right now a well-established ritual practice. Perhaps it has always been, but in the last two decades, it has at least emerged as a topic considered worthy of research in academia.

For the realization of this handbook, we were able to call upon many authors. It has thus become an international collaborative project for which we are grateful. We have case studies from Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Namibia, Japan, the United States, etcetera. Despite the broad spectrum of case studies, the book is still western-oriented regarding its focus, the selection of case studies and the literature referenced by the authors. Here lies a challenge for further collaboration with colleagues in the Global South (i.e., South America and Africa) and Asia.

During the work on this book, the world was beset by the coronavirus crisis. Suddenly, we were in the middle of a disaster in the form of a pandemic. In some chapters, the impact of this worldwide disaster is mentioned. We also decided to ask some authors of the international team to present COVID-19 related rituals from the regions in which they live. This first impression of COVID-19 disaster rituals is presented in Chapter 27.

Disaster Ritual as a Category

In the multidisciplinary field of ritual studies, we are accustomed to categorizing rituals. What kind of category is the “disaster ritual”? In the lectures in the Culture Studies curriculum at Tilburg University, I like to use Catherine Bell’s taxonomy. She settles for six ritual categories, with “function” serving as the main criterion for distinguishing between one category and another.² Bell mentions the following categories:

1. Rites of passage accompany major life events, such as birth, coming-of-age initiations, marriage, and death. There is a link between age and biological order, but in essence, these rituals and related life events refer to a sociocultural order.
2. Calendrical rituals give socially meaningful definitions to the passage of time, and there are two types: seasonal and commemorative rituals.

² C. BELL: *Ritual: perspectives and dimensions* (New York 1997) 93-137.

3. Rituals of exchange and communion concern mainly sacrifices. In a religious context, the sacrifice realizes the communion between humans and the gods. In a secular context, we can think of flowers sent to a friend on Valentine's Day as an example.
4. Rituals of affliction are attempts to rectify a state of affairs that has been disturbed, such as the event of an illness.
5. Feasting, fasting, and festivals are public displays of commitment and adherence to basic (religious) values.
6. Political rituals construct and reaffirm power with the use of symbols and symbolic action to depict a group of people as a coherent and ordered community based on shared values.

Disaster rituals seem to fit best in the fourth category, the rituals of affliction, for in many cases, they are attempts to heal a disturbed situation, console victims, and strengthen the resilience of the affected group of people. However, disaster rituals might also be calendrical through yearly commemorations (Category 2); they might be religious prayers for protection against, among other things, drought, danger, or a pandemic (Category 3); or, they may be a mixture of commemorative and political rituals (Category 6) in situations where a commemoration is at the same time a display of governmental power and agency. In other words, the disaster ritual fits into at least four of the six categories mentioned above, for it has more than one function. Moreover, we can trace disaster rituals within several cultural fields or domains; in some cases, they are part of religion, and in other cases, they belong to a society's yearly memory culture and take shape through artistic practices.³ Thus, by studying disaster rituals, we are able to obtain a full overview of what a ritual is, how it functions, and how it gets its shape in a variety of contexts and in several cultural fields.⁴

Acknowledgments

We want to express our gratitude to all those people who have contributed to this book. First and foremost, we thank the authors who were willing to write chapters for this book and present their research to

³ P. POST: 'From identity to accent: The ritual studies perspective of fields of the sacred', in *Pastoraltheologische Informationen* 33, no. 1 (2013) 149-158.

⁴ M.J.M. HOONDEERT & P. POST: 'Introduction to Special Issue: Exploring Ritual Fields Today', *Religions* 12 (2021) no. 3, 210.

an international audience. We thank Paul Post for taking the initiative to start this book project, for inspiring us through his never-ending search for new literature and insights, and for all the energy and effort he put into this project to bring it to an end. We thank Mirella Klomp and Marcel Barnard from IRiLiS for the collaboration and their efforts in finding authors, writing texts, and reviewing chapters, and Mirella specifically for preparing the manuscript in the final phase and being the *liaison* to the publishing house Peeters in Leuven. Thanks to Sam van Alebeek, who as a student assistant in 2019-2020 managed a great part of the correspondence with the authors and edited parts of the chapters. We also thank Edward Jacobson, who thoroughly edited all the chapters and made sure that all the footnotes were in the format of the book series *Liturgia Condenda*, in which this volume has been published. Finally, we thank Peeters Publishers in Leuven for their support, patience, and realization of this (perhaps too voluminous) book.

Tilburg, March 2021

Martin Hoondert

INTRODUCTION
SOME CONCEPTUAL AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL
EXPLORATIONS ON RITUAL, DISASTER,
AND DISASTER RITUAL

PAUL POST

1. OPENING

In my opinion, innovative and topical research is being conducted in interdisciplinary thematic clusters.¹ Studies of rituals and of disasters and crises are striking examples of this. Often, urgent research is situated at the interface of such academic clusters. This also applies to the study of disaster ritual.

As indicated in the Preface, this handbook project links up with an earlier project that led to both a nationally Dutch-oriented publication as well as an internationally oriented one.² In this volume, the theme is approached much more comprehensively – the collaboration is international, with more participating authors and disciplines, and addresses a significantly wider range of disasters and crises. Furthermore, more attention is paid here to important contextual processes, such as globalization, (super)diversity, and digitization, which were barely discussed in the earlier project.

This rather extensive introduction is primarily conceptual and historiographical in nature. I provide an account of our choices regarding working definitions, parameters, and perspectives of the central concepts examined in this handbook in relation to disaster rituals.

As was the case in the above mentioned earlier project on disaster ritual, we focused on three central concepts typically involved in the study of disaster rituals: ritual, disaster, and disaster ritual. With respect to project design and outline, every research project on disaster ritual is

¹ Many thanks to Georg Frerks for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this Introduction.

² P. POST, A. NUGTEREN & H. ZONDAG: *Rituelen na rampen. Verkenning van een opkomend repertoire* (Kampen 2002); P. POST, R.L. GRIMES, A. NUGTEREN, P. PETTERSON & H.J. ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual. Explorations of an emerging ritual repertoire* (= Liturgia condenda 15) (Leuven etc. 2003).

confronted with these three central concepts and their related basic clusters of questions:

1. *Ritual*: What is the perspective here, exactly, and how wide or narrow does one perceive ritual to be? This question is directly related to the positions in ritual theory and the methods within ritual studies.
2. *Disaster*: Here, too, a working definition and demarcation are required. This cluster relates to the theories and methods in disaster studies, and it includes classifications, typologies, taxonomies, characteristics, and qualifiers of a disaster.
3. *Disaster ritual*: Combines 1 and 2. What repertoire is on the agenda when we speak of disaster ritual? A ‘disaster ritual’ is usually a ritual that takes place *after* a disaster – i.e., a post-disaster ritual – although this is not a prerequisite; there are, after all, also rituals that take place prior to disasters, especially with the aim of preventing them, as well as those that occur during disasters. This handbook pays special attention to ‘anticipatory’ disaster rituals (Chapter 34) and long-lasting or slow disasters, such as the refugee crisis (Chapter 16 and 29), #MeToo (Chapter 24), food crisis (Chapter 25), and climate change (Chapter 26).

In addition, when elaborating on disaster ritual, there is also the question of which cases, themes, and issues are relevant for selection. Here, classifications and typologies are relevant.

First, I follow the sequence of central concepts presented above and describe the ‘state of the art’ of the research in the fields of ritual, disaster, and disaster ritual, respectively.

2. RITUAL AND RITUAL STUDIES

For the central concept of ‘ritual’, I can directly refer to previously established working definitions and descriptions. Nevertheless, the concept of ritual is not an undisputed one. On the contrary, just as we will see when exploring the concept of disaster, a lot has been written and debated about the definition of ritual – as shown in the inventory of definitions and descriptions of ritual compiled by Ronald Grimes in his 2014 overview *The craft of ritual studies*.³

³ R. GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* (Oxford 2014) 185-197; online the Appendix 1 contains 7pp. Definitions of ritual: <http://oxrit.twohornedbull.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/grimes-craft-appendixes.pdf> [last accessed February 2018].

I provide a brief synthesis of some existing conceptual perspectives that – in reading this volume – could be useful as working definitions of ritual, practices with a ritual dimension, and ritual repertoire, presenting an overview of ritual functions and qualities. I also add a small note on ritual studies. Later on, I separately address the so-called ‘useful/useless trap’ (see Section 7).

With respect to *ritual*, I employ the following open description:

Ritual is a more or less repeatable sequence of action units which take on a symbolic dimension through formalization, stylization, and their situation in place and time. On the one hand, individuals and groups express their ideas and ideals, their mentalities and identities through these rituals; on the other hand, the ritual actions shape, foster, and transform these ideas, mentalities, and identities.⁴

In order to keep the working definition of ritual open, we also need to recognize all kinds of *ritualizations*. By ritualization or ritualizing, I do not refer to David Knottnerus’s notion of ritualization, for whom ritualization is equivalent to ritual (see Subsection 5.2.), nor to the use of the term by Ronald Grimes, who sees ritualizing as a particular mode of ritual, i.e., actions that are on the way to becoming ritual but have not yet been culturally accepted as such.⁵ Instead, I observe that there are many practices with a ritual dimension that never become ‘full’ rituals. Here, I am in line with the theoretical legacy of the late American ritual studies scholar, Catherine Bell (1953–2008), who mainly connects ritualizing with what she labels as “ritual-like activities”. By this, she refers to common activities that are ritualized to a greater or lesser degree.⁶ In summary, Bell argues that “examples of ritual-like activity suggest that what’s going on in ritual is not unique to religious institutions or traditions”.⁷ There are many ways of acting ritually and many degrees of ritualizing. Some refer to these practices as ‘rituals’, in quotation marks, as Tine Molendijk does in an investigation into how Dutch Srebrenica veterans ritually deal with “moral injury”.⁸

⁴ For working definitions of Ritual and Ritual Repertoire, I refer to P. POST: Encyclopedia article: ‘Ritual Studies’, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York/Oxford 2015). Available online at <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-21>, p. 6.

⁵ GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* 192s.

⁶ C. BELL: *Ritual, perspectives and dimensions* (New York/Oxford 1997) 138–169.

⁷ BELL: *Ritual, perspectives and dimensions* 164.

⁸ T. MOLENDIJK: ‘Oude en nieuwe rituelen voor Moral Injury’, in *Religie & Samenleving* 12/2-3 (2017) 221–229.

In the case of practices after a disaster, for instance, there are specific practices that can be labeled as rituals of compassion and solidarity.

In a globalized world with numerous information flows via mass media, there is a direct and global response to a disaster. Well-known are the expressions of sympathy by authorities, prayer meetings, fundraising campaigns, etc. However, there are many other manifestations of compassion and solidarity that have a ritual dimension. After recent terrorist attacks in Paris (2015), Nice (2016), Manchester (2017), Barcelona (2017), Utrecht (2019), and Vienna (2020), we see a relatively fixed and recognizable ritual repertoire – marking the place of the attack, prayer and flower tributes, memorial services in churches, and impressive public funerals. Yet there are also all kinds of compassion and solidarity practices in which we unmistakably see a ritual dimension. After many attacks, people get commemoration tattoos as a mixture of protest, sympathy, and expression of grief.⁹ The practice of illuminating landmarks in world cities in the color of the country in which an attack took place is also well-known.¹⁰ I do not intend to start a discussion about whether or not these practices can be called ‘full’ rituals. I simply speak of practices that have a ritual dimension or introduce the label ‘ritual practices of compassion and solidarity’.¹¹

These are only some examples of compassion rituals and practices with a ritual dimension. In this disaster ritual handbook, many other cultural practices are highlighted that have a clear ritual dimension, such as practices around relics and remnants, disaster (‘dark’) tourism and visiting ‘guilty places’, establishing monuments and museums, apologies, art projects, and set-up documentation projects.

A disaster ritual is an example of what I call a *ritual repertoire*. A repertoire can be seen as a complex of rituals that show a certain coherence with respect to form, participation, occasion, or context. Thus, a ritual repertoire

⁹ S. CADELL, M. REID LAMBERT, D. DAVIDSON, C. GRECO & M.E. MACDONALD: ‘Memorial tattoos. Advancing continuing bonds theory’, in *Death Studies* (2020).

¹⁰ W. ARFMANN: ‘Ritual selectivity. Commemorating the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and Beirut’, in P. POST & M. HOONDEERT (eds.): *Absent ritual. Exploring the ambivalence and dynamics of ritual* (= Ritual Studies Monographs) (Durham, NC 2019) Ch. 6, 103-118.

¹¹ P. POST: ‘The Lampedusa tragedy. Chronicles of absent and emerging ritual repertoires’, in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek/Yearbook for Liturgical and Ritual Studies* 31 (2015) 19-43 open access: <http://rjh.uh.rug.nl/index.php/jvlo/article/view/19534/17012>; IDEM: ‘Refugee rituals. Exploring ritual repertoire of victimhood’, in M. HOONDEERT, P. MUTSAERS & W. ARFMAN (eds.): *Cultural practices of victimhood* (= Routledge series: Victims, Culture and Society) (London/New York 2019) 55-80.

is a genre or category of ritual. One can think here of death rites, initiation rites, rites of passage, pilgrimage rituals, memorial rituals, etc.

Partly in reaction to the often-unsatisfactory search for adequate definitions of ritual, the tendency arose to search for *functions, qualities, and dimensions of ritual* (I use these terms interchangeably) in ritual studies instead. There are different sets of functions available that, together, provide a good picture of ritual characteristics. Inspired by Grimes and Gerard Lukken,¹² I developed the following set of functions or ‘qualities’ of ritual that can assist us in describing the many layers or dimensions of ritual acting:¹³

- discharge function: channeling feelings and emotions, coping;
- ethical function: ritual refers to authentic human conduct, is never without obligations and engagement;
- prophylactic, apotropaic function: healing, banning of evil, protection, and again coping;
- expressive function: ritual affords the possibility to express feelings and convictions;
- social function: ritual creates identity, at an individual and community or group level; and
- recreative function: ritual offers a contrast to daily life, interrupts it, and offers a moratorium.

All these dimensions of ritual are discussed in this handbook. However, discharge, prophylactic/apotropaic, expressive, and social functions of ritual are of particular importance in this volume, both in terms of case studies and the set of selected themes. These dimensions can be brought together under the general dimension of banning evil and coping with problems.

When it comes to the domain of *ritual studies*, I opt for an open description and approach. Ritual studies is a field of research. It is neither a method nor a discipline. In that respect, disaster studies and ritual studies are related. They both seamlessly fit into an important academic trend. As previously noted, more and more academic research is done within multi-/interdisciplinary thematic clusters. I explicitly see this disaster ritual handbook as such a thematic multi-/interdisciplinary project.

¹² G. LUKKEN: *Rituals in abundance. Critical reflections on the place, form and identity of Christian ritual in our culture* (= Liturgia Condenda 17) (Leuven etc. 2005) Ch. 2.

¹³ POST [et al.]: *Disaster ritual* 41s.

There are several good overviews of ‘ritual studies craftsmanship’. The best and most recent is, as mentioned above, *The craft of ritual studies* by Ronald Grimes.¹⁴

3. DISASTER AND DISASTER RESEARCH¹⁵

3.1. What is a disaster? The Handbook of Disaster Research (HDR)

A good place to start on the topic of what I consider to be a disaster are two editions of the *Handbook of Disaster Research (HDR)* from 2007 and 2017.¹⁶ In particular, the richly documented opening article by Ronald Perry, ‘What is a disaster?’ (first edition), retitled to ‘Defining disaster. An evolving concept’ (second edition), is useful as well as two other introductory chapters about the heuristics of disaster research and the crisis approach.¹⁷

The *HDR* is primarily a sociological project, and Ronald Perry outlines his reflections on what a disaster is from a social science perspective. In his article, he focuses on three elements for defining of disaster: (1) the meta aspects that are involved (what happens when we are looking for a definition?); (2) the exploration, contextualization, and valuation of existing definitions; and (3) the observation of whether consensus elements evolve in research over time.

¹⁴ GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies*.

¹⁵ I created a private database document with hundreds of titles on disaster research. For a first overview I only mention two multidisciplinary studies: D. MCENTIRE (ed.): *Disciplines, disasters and emergency management. The convergence and divergence of concepts, issues and trends from the research literature* (Springfield, IL 2007); R. DAHLBERG, O. RUBIN & M. THANNING VENDELØ: *Disaster research. Multidisciplinary and international perspectives* (Abingdon/New York 2016). There are special journals for disaster research, most of them have a management profile. One of the oldest is *Disasters* (1977ss. Wiley): [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1467-7717](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1467-7717) [last accessed March 2018].

¹⁶ H. RODRÍGUEZ, E.L. QUARANTELLI & R.R. DYNES (eds.): *Handbook of disaster research* (New York 2007); H. RODRÍGUEZ, W. DONNER & J. TRAINOR (eds.): *Handbook of disaster research* (= Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research) (New York 2017²).

¹⁷ R. PERRY: ‘What is a disaster?’, in RODRIGUEZ, QUARANTELLI & DYNES: *Handbook of disaster research* 1-15; R. PERRY: ‘Defining disaster. An evolving concept’, in: RODRÍGUEZ, DONNER & TRAINOR: *Handbook of disaster research* 3-22. E. QUARANTELLI, P. LAGADEC & A. BOIN: ‘A heuristic approach to future disasters and crises’, in RODRÍGUEZ, QUARANTELLI & DYNES: *Handbook of disaster research* Ch. 2, 16-41. A. BOIN [et al.]: ‘The crisis approach’, in *Handbook of disaster research* Ch. 3, 42-54; 2nd ed.: A. BOIN, P. ‘T HART & S. KUIPERS: ‘The crisis approach’ 23-38.

Perry extensively discusses what a definition is, what types of definitions there are, and what is involved in the process of finding descriptions. He strongly emphasizes the purpose, perspective, and audience of a definition. In his view, these are ultimately decisive and guiding factors. He also sees a close relationship between the definition of a disaster as a conceptual issue and as an indication of a research area. He chooses a pragmatic inductive path and wants to avoid a deductive immersion in conceptual processes. I like to follow him in this approach.

We also need to be aware of ‘who does the defining’, especially in case of a disaster. There are various groups and interests involved in a disaster – for instance, the people who experience it firsthand as well as the governments and authorities that are strongly focused on crisis management. However, many other ‘agencies’ are also drawn in, such as journalists, politicians, religious experts, doctors, and historians.

Furthermore, the search for a description and definition does not take place in a vacuum but has a long historiography. Perry outlines this quest and the important stages in it from a sociological perspective.¹⁸ In the initial phase of disaster research, hardly any explicit attention was given to the definition issue. This only began to change with publications (starting in 1987) by Enrico/Henry Quarantelli (1924-2017). Perry outlines the search for a (working) definition in three phases or traditions, which also constitute the major phases of disaster research: “the classic approach and variants”, “the hazards-disaster tradition”, and “the explicitly socially focused tradition”.

The classical tradition refers to a period that begins at the end of World War I and ends with Charles Fritz’s influential 1961 definition of disaster as an event that impacts an entire society or subdivision, with an emphasis on the fact that “essential functions of that society are prevented”.¹⁹

In *the hazards-disaster tradition*, geography and geophysics are dominant. It now primarily focuses on earthquakes, tornadoes, and floods, with an emphasis on ‘event and agent’ as well as ‘vulnerability and resilience’. However, ‘social impact’ also comes into view here, and there is convergence with the classical tradition.

¹⁸ See, for the mentioned authors and references, the chapter by PERRY: ‘What is a Disaster?’ in the 1st edition of the *Handbook of disaster research* (2007).

¹⁹ C.E. FRITZ: ‘Disasters’, in R.K. MERTON & R.A. NISBET (eds.): *Contemporary social problems. An introduction to the sociology of deviant behavior and social disorganization* (New York 1961) 651-694, p. 655. Cf. R.W. PERRY & E. QUARANTELLI (eds.): *What is a disaster. New answers to old questions* (Philadelphia 2005); PERRY: ‘What is a disaster?’ 6.

This line of social impact continues in the third phase, *the explicit socially focused tradition*, where disaster is primarily understood as a social phenomenon. Perry cites five defining features formulated by Quarantelli in 2000, where disasters are “sudden-onset occasions, seriously disrupt routines or collective units, cause adoption of unplanned courses or action to adjust disruption, have unexpected life histories in social space and time, pose danger to valued social objects”.²⁰

As a result of his exploration, Perry indicates some lines of consensus, mentioning two fundamental ideas that are constantly returning.

1. It is not wind or storm, event or agent, that make an event a disaster, but the *impact* on groups and individuals.
2. A disaster is rooted in a *social* system that is in a process of change. Thus, a disaster is not necessarily measured in terms of lives lost and damage made but in the degree of disruption to a socio-cultural system. In other words, a disaster is a social phenomenon. It is precisely in this context that concepts such as vulnerability and resilience became central to disaster research.

These lines of consensus with regard to what makes a disaster a disaster also explain that it matters whether a disaster takes place in a modern Western society or in a developing country. At the end of the chapter, Perry briefly discusses the issue of typologies and classifications. A well-known triad is that of disasters, catastrophes, and crises.

The influence of new developments on classifying and defining disasters is explored in the second *HDR* chapter, ‘A heuristic approach to future disasters and crises. New, old, and in-between types’ by Quarantelli [et al.].²¹ Here, new risks and threats are brought to the fore, such as chemical, nuclear, and biological ‘agents’, all kinds of group conflicts, hostage-taking, genocides, refugee crises, famines, and climate change. In relation to this, we can refer to the work of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck on modernity and risk and to their analysis of new man-made risks as part of the modernization process.²²

²⁰ PERRY: ‘What is a disaster?’ 10.

²¹ QUARANTELLI, LAGADEC & BOIN: ‘A heuristic approach’ 16-41; 2nd ed. ‘Studying future disasters and crises. A heuristic approach’ 61-83.

²² ‘Risk Society’ is a term introduced by Giddens and Beck to indicate that however humans always are confronted with risk such as natural disasters, modern societies are exposed to risks that are the result of the process of modernizations itself. Giddens therefore introduced two types of risks, external and manufactured. The last are produced

The cause and origin, as well as interpretation and experience, of a disaster are important in addition to its impact. The interpretation of victims is part of the reflection on the concept of disaster in current disaster research. In other words, there is growing insight into the fact that a disaster is always a construction that depends on appropriation by diverse groups. More and more often, we encounter ‘crisis’ as an overarching concept in this context.

New developments force disaster research to adopt an open attitude in relation to demarcation. Quarantelli speaks of three basic types of disasters: “old, new, and in-between”. Many events can still be called ‘old’, but there are more and more situations that can be less directly integrated into existing formats and definitions. Think of the heatwave that hit France in 2003, during which around 1,500 mostly elderly people died. Was that a disaster? Furthermore, what about large-scale power failures, AIDS, financial crises? This leads Arjen Boin to introduce a broader type of characteristics, such as the series of ‘un-ness’ aspects that characterize a crisis:²³ “unexpected, undesirable, unimaginable and unmanageable”.²⁴ To which I would like to add “undeserved”.²⁵

In this context of global dynamics, the demarcation between natural and man-made crises is especially put into perspective. In Georg Frerks and Dorothea Hilhorst’s chapter in this handbook (Chapter 1), they state that “disasters are in effect not ‘natural’ phenomena, but as much produced by human activity and politics as triggered by natural causes”.²⁶

So far my exploration of the concept of disaster via the *HDR*. For a historiographical overview of disaster studies, I also refer to Chapter 1 in which Frerks and Hilhorst present a set of shifts in focus during the last fifty years. Although their focus is on natural disasters (as we noticed

by human acting, such as pollution, the environmental crisis, health problems, crime, war. Cf. A. GIDDENS: *Consequences of modernity* (Cambridge 1990); U. BECK: *Risk society. Towards a new modernity* (New Delhi 1992).

²³ A. BOIN [et al.]: ‘The crisis approach’, in *Handbook of disaster research* (2007) Ch. 3, 42-54; BOIN, ’T HART & KUIPERS: ‘The crisis approach’, in *Handbook of disaster research* (2017²) Ch. 2, 23-38.

²⁴ BOIN: ‘The crisis approach’, in *Handbook of disaster research* (2007) 42.

²⁵ Cf. under Subsection 5.2. via DAVIES. See also the terminology ‘a sudden undeserved death’ used in the context of cases of dead through ‘senseless violence’. cf. POST [et al.]: *Rituelen na rampen*; IDEM: *Disaster ritual*.

²⁶ FRERKS & HILHORST: Chapter 1, p. 54.

above, they and others put that ‘natural’ character in perspective), as well as on management and governance of disasters, they describe a development from a vulnerability perspective to an agency perspective, with an emphasis on capacities and resilience, and ultimately focus on governance with an emphasis on the role of the public sector and public policies. This development also marks the shift from merely responding after a disaster to risk reduction. In the opening of their contribution, Ferks and Hilhorst offer a set of key elements for defining a disaster.

I shall present our own sensitizing description of a disaster, including a classification, after I explore the ritual perspective (see Section 10). I can now already indicate that the impact factor is a dominant qualifier. A disaster is an event or situation that causes a significant disruption of society or group and that evokes collective public and/or individual reaction with expression of mourning, compassion, indignation, protest, call for justice, recovery, reconciliation, and consolation. In this description, it is clear that the impact factor receives a ritual translation through the expressive element but also includes the other ritual functions mentioned (see Section 2). Next, I focus on exploring current disaster research, where the issue of what we consider to be a disaster is included.

3.2. Disaster research: a selective overview

Four major clusters of research

I see four major disciplinary clusters that have dominated disaster research from the 1960s onwards: (1) sociology, (2) psychology and trauma studies, (3) geology and geophysics, and (4) public administration and management studies. Disaster research has traditionally been very practice driven. Initially, American sociology was clearly its central research domain. In addition to all sorts of government agencies, I mention the Disaster Research Center in Delaware (located there since 1985; previously located in Ohio, where it was founded in 1962).

Within the sociological cluster, focus is placed on how a society or a part of it (sub-society) is affected by a disaster and how it collectively deals with it in the process of adjusting. Within the psychological cluster, research focuses on the individual – on trauma and coping – and there is a close relationship with other medical disciplines. The management cluster has a strong orientation toward policy practice and has links with climate studies, urban studies, development studies, economics, political

science, architecture, communication and media studies, digital sciences, data studies, simulation studies, conflict studies, etc. Other than dealing with the consequences of disasters, there is also a strong emphasis on the prevention of and preparation for disasters.

The Disaster Research Center is currently working on infrastructure risk management, public health, humanitarian assistance, protective actions, warning and risk perceptions, and response.²⁷ Another venue for various perspectives to approaching disasters can be found in *The World Disasters Reports*, which are thematic issues published by the International Federation of Red Crosses and Red Crescent Societies in Geneva. The 2020 report is on climate change.²⁸

Disaster research in some other disciplines

The four clusters, of course, do not tell the whole story of disaster research. In my explorations, I have repeatedly come across the theme of disasters in the field of *anthropology*, especially social anthropology.²⁹ Influential in this arena are two older books by Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman,³⁰ and anthropology took part in the post-9/11 research boom.³¹ I regularly see courses on disaster anthropology at universities and encounter disasters as thesis topics.³² Since 2014, the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) has developed a

²⁷ <https://www.drc.udel.edu/> [last accessed February 2018].

²⁸ World disasters report 2020 – International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (ifrc.org) [last accessed March 2021].

²⁹ For an older overview, see W.I. TONY: 'Anthropology and disaster research', in *Disasters* 3/1 (1979) 43-52. Cf. A. OLIVER-SMITH: 'Anthropological research on hazards and disasters', in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996) 303-328; D. HENRY: 'Anthropological contributions to the study of disasters', in D. MCENTIRE (ed.): *Disciplines, disasters and emergency management. The convergence and divergence of concepts, issues and trends from the research literature* (Springfield, IL 2007) Ch. 8, 111-123.

³⁰ A. OLIVER-SMITH & S. HOFFMAN (eds.): *The angry earth. Disaster in anthropological perspective* (New York 1999); A. OLIVER-SMITH & S. HOFFMAN (eds.): *Catastrophe and culture. The anthropology of disaster* (Santa Fe 2002).

³¹ See for 9/11, <https://anthropologyworks.com/2011/09/11/cultural-anthropology-of-911-3/> mentioning over 30 articles [last accessed March 2018].

³² C. ANDERSKOV: *Anthropology and disaster* (= special thesis Aarhus University, Department Ethnography and Social Anthropology 2004): http://www.anthrobase.com/Txt/A/Anderskov_C_03.htm [last accessed March 2018]; U. NGOC BUI: *After the storm. Natural disasters and development in Vietnam* (= thesis University of Bergen, Department Social Anthropology 2008): <http://bora.uib.no/handle/1956/3014> [last accessed March 2018].

Disaster and Crisis Anthropology Network (DICAN)³³ and published special journal issues.³⁴ In the *Palgrave Studies in Disaster Anthropology*, edited by Pamela Stewart and Andrew Strathern, three volumes were published.³⁵ In general, the use of anthropology and ethnography is on the rise, especially for in-depth research among affected populations.³⁶

For quite some time, there has been *historical* interest in disasters – in cultural history, historical geography, historical anthropology, medical history, and history of religion – clearly inspired by the history of mentalities (*histoire des mentalités, nouvelle histoire*). A prominent example is the Darmstadt scholar in medieval history, Gerrit Jasper Schenk.³⁷ Recent terrorist attacks and, especially, the COVID-19 pandemic are also drawing attention to historical studies into disasters, diseases, and catastrophes.³⁸ In addition, just on the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic, some good overviews were published that provide a global picture of epidemics from the medieval plague to the present day.³⁹ In the Netherlands,

³³ <https://www.easaonline.org/networks/dican/> [last accessed March 2018].

³⁴ D.M. KNIGHT & C. STEWART (eds.): *Ethnographies of austerity. Temporality, crisis and affect in Southern Europe*, special issue *History and Anthropology* 27/1 (2016); Z. HRDIČKOVÁ & H. SWEE (eds.): *Living with disasters. (Re-)production of knowledge*, special symposium of *Nature + Culture* 12/1 (2017).

³⁵ J. BRYANT-TOKALAU: *Indigenous pacific approaches to climate change* (2018); L. CARTER: *Indigenous pacific approaches to climate change* (2019); P. STEWART & A. STRATHERN (eds.): *Palgrave studies in disaster anthropology* (2021).

³⁶ See P. STEWART & A. STRATHERN: 'Disaster anthropology', in IDEM (eds.): *The Ashgate research companion to anthropology* (Farnham 2015) Ch. 20, 411-422; IDEM: *Ritual. Key concepts in religion* (London etc. 2014) Appendix 2: 'The anthropology of disasters and disaster rituals' 139-143. See now IDEM: *Diaspora, disasters, and the cosmos. Rituals and images* (Durham, NC 2018). Cf. also the mentioned *World Disasters Reports* (see our note 28).

³⁷ G.J. SCHENK: 'Historical disaster research. State of research, concepts, methods, and case studies', in *Historical Social Research* 32/3 (2007) 9-31; IDEM (ed.): *Katastrophen. Vom Untergang Pompejis bis zum Klimawandel* (Ostfildern 2009); IDEM (ed.): *Historical disaster experiences. Towards a comparative and transcultural history of disasters across Asia and Europe* (Cham 2017); A. JANKU, G.J. SCHENK & FR. MAUELSHAGEN (eds.): *Historical disaster research in context: Science, religion, and politics* (New York 2012).

³⁸ B. DE GRAAF: 'Een pandemie is te temmen. Beatrice de Graaf trekt lessen uit de geschiedenis', in *Historisch Nieuwsblad* 20 March 2020, via www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/nl/artikel/51762/een-pandemie-is-te-temmen.html [last accessed April 2020].

³⁹ F. SNOWDEN: *Epidemics and society. From the Black Death to the present* (New Haven 2019); M.L. HAMMOND: *Epidemics and the modern world* (Toronto 2020); J. BYRNE: *Encyclopedia of pestilence, pandemics, and plagues* (Westport 2008); M. DOBSON: *Disease: The story of disease and mankind's continuing struggle against it* (London 2007); Fr. WALTER:

the work of the Utrecht historian Beatrice de Graaf has attracted attention during the recent pandemic. Her work clearly shows how security or, even better, *securing* has become an important concept in historical disaster studies.⁴⁰ This reflects a more general trend that can also be illustrated in current politics and governance in which, apart from resilience, security is a key concept.

Disaster research within interdisciplinary thematic fields

Parallel to what I outlined for the study of rituals, the study of disasters is increasingly occurring within interdisciplinary thematic domains. In some places there is a separate field of disaster studies, like at the center in Delaware and at Wageningen University (the Netherlands), created by the appointment of Georg Frerks as a professor of Disaster Studies in 1998 and, later on, by Dorothea Hilhorst who joined him when she was appointed as a professor of Humanitarian Aid in 2007.⁴¹ However, disaster research is more often part of a broader thematic field of study. As indicated earlier, the emphasis is often strongly placed on prevention, coping, reconstruction, and management, where the central domain is conflict and crises studies. The

Catastrophes – Une histoire Culturelle, XVI-XXIe siècle (Paris 2008); W. DE BLÉCOURT, W. FRIJHOFF & M. GIJSWIJT-HOFSTRA (eds.): *Grenzen van genezing. Gezondheid, ziekte en genezen in Nederland, 16e tot begin 20ste eeuw* (Hilversum 1993). A classic study is W.H. MCNEILL: *Plagues & peoples* (Ann Arbor 1976, repr. New York 1998).

⁴⁰ B.A. DE GRAAF: *Heilige strijd. Het verlangen naar veiligheid en het einde van het kwaad* (Utrecht 2017); IDEM: *Tegen de terreur. Hoe Europa veilig werd na Napoleon* (Amsterdam 2018); B.A. DE GRAAF, I. DE HAAN & B. VICKS (eds.): *Securing Europe after Napoleon – 1815 and the new European security culture* (Cambridge 2019).

⁴¹ G. BANKOFF, G. FRERKS & D. HILHORST (eds.): *Mapping vulnerability, disasters, development and people* (London 2004); G. FRERKS: 'Principles ignored and lessons unlearned, a disaster studies perspective on the tsunamis experience in Sri Lanka', in D. B. MCGILVRAY & M. R. GAMBURD (eds.): *Tsunami recovery in Sri Lanka. Ethnic and regional dimensions* (London/New York 2010) 143-162; G. FRERKS: 'Help or hindrance? The contribution of the resilience approach to risk governance', in U.F. PALEO (ed.): *Risk governance. The articulation of hazard, politics and ecology* (Dordrecht/Heidelberg/New York/London 2014) 489-494; M. DÜCKERS, G. FRERKS & J. BIRKMANN: 'Exploring the plexus of context and consequences – An empirical test of a theory of disaster vulnerability', in *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 13 (2015) 85-95; G. FRERKS: 'Citizen engagement and resilience in Dutch Disaster management. A black hole in Dutch policy and practice?', in J. BOHLAND, J. HARRALD & D. BROSNAN (eds.): *The disaster resilience challenge. Transforming theory to action* (Springfield, IL 2018) 140-155.

palette is wide and ranges from research into natural disasters and anthropogenic disasters to the study of conflicts and related humanitarian crises, interventions (e.g., by NGO's), conflict prevention, and management. Other research focuses on transitional justice and the role of memorial culture.⁴² While disaster studies started out at Wageningen University with a focus on natural hazards and disasters like famines and floods and resulting vulnerabilities, it soon also adopted a focus on conflict and related interventions.⁴³ For more details on the development of disaster studies, I refer to the chapter by Frerks and Hilhorst in this handbook (Chapter 1).

4. RITUAL AND DISASTER: A HISTORICAL NOTE ON DISASTER RITUAL

Let us now bring ritual studies and disaster studies together. After all, the topic of this handbook is *disaster ritual*. It is, in my opinion, appropriate to begin with a historical note before addressing modern studies on disaster ritual. Although this book does not have a historical perspective – the focus is always on contemporary, current ritual acting (which, incidentally, may be connected with a disaster in the past in some cases) – it is a good idea to briefly take a look at the history of disaster ritual. Doing so can take away the false impression that we are dealing with a completely new ritual that has recently emerged. Furthermore, a historical perspective contributes to important conceptual perspectives on disaster ritual as shown in Subsection 4.5.

Here, I dare to make two statements: (1) as long as there are disasters, there is disaster ritual; (2) as long as there are rituals, there is disaster ritual. There are indications that, in the case of disaster ritual, we are dealing with one of the most widespread and constant ritual repertoires in which we are touching upon one of the most fundamental, basic layers of ritual acting.

⁴² S. BUCKLEY-ZISTEL & T. WILLIAMS (eds.): *Perpetrators and perpetration of mass violence. Action, motivations and dynamics* (Abington 2018); S. BUCKLEY-ZISTEL & ST. SCHÄFER: *Memorials in times of transition* (= Intersentia, Transitional Justice Series vol. 16) (Antwerp 2014).

⁴³ D. HILHORST: *Disaster, conflict and society in crisis* (London/New York 2013); D. HILHORST, J. BAART, G. VAN DER HAAR, & F. LEEFTINK: 'Is disaster 'normal' for indigenous people? Indigenous knowledge and coping practices', in *Disaster Prevention and Management* 24/4 (2015) 506-522.

Over time, ritual manifests itself in various ways in the event of a disaster, tragedy, and crisis. It is frequently directly connected to an existing, often religious, ritual. Archaeologists and anthropologists have argued on the basis of their findings that rituals such as the worship of gods and ancestors, sacrifices, and ceremonies have been evoked and motivated by all kinds of setbacks and misfortunes in the past.

4.1. Different repertoires

For the past, and I am referring here specifically to Europe now, there are two major trajectories when it comes to disaster, tragedy, or crisis as a theme of ritual: (1) as part of regular ritual repertoire in the year or life cycle and (2) in the case of a concrete crisis. These two trajectories correspond to a very general – we could say ‘phenomenological’ – triple phasing of ritual and disaster. There is a ritual *prior* to a disaster, to prevent a disaster; there is a ritual *during* a disaster, to deal with the crisis and endure it; and there is a ritual *after* a disaster, to console, recover, or readjust. These phases and corresponding rites are closely linked and also merge into one another in the past and the present, although we can see a strong emphasis on rituals *after* disasters in modern Western culture.

In the past, a strong awareness of possible misfortune existed and was addressed in regular rituals and prayers. Throughout a calendar year, the Christian liturgical calendar f.e. includes the *Quatertemper* (or *Quatember*) Days or ‘Ember Days’ (from Latin, ‘four times’: *quatertempor*, *quat[t]uor tempora*; French: *quatre temps*). Four times a year there are set penitence days of fasting and praying as well as of thanksgiving – to both secure and give thanks for a safe and harmonious life without war, disease, and crop failure.⁴⁴ Furthermore, in many regular prayers, misfortunes, calamities, and crises are addressed. In the event of a disaster, one knew what to do, ritually, in the past. There was an established repertoire of rituals of death and dying, prayers, sacrifices, and memorial ceremonies, and there was an elaborate set of special rituals, such as special masses and processions, incantations and blessings, and novenas (devotion of nine days of prayer).

⁴⁴ ‘Quatertemperdagen’, in L. BRINKHOFF [et al.]: *Liturgisch Woordenboek* (Roermond 1965-1968) II, 2338-2342; ‘Quatember’ in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Freiburg etc. 1999³), t. 8, 764s. (A. HEINZ).

4.2. Dominant apotropaic and prophylactic function of ritual

Still speaking in a general sense, we can postulate for the past a dominant ‘exorcistic’ function of ritual. When we develop a better historical picture of disaster ritual in antiquity, the late antique world, and the medieval period, the dominance of the apotropaic and prophylactic function of rituals is confirmed in numerous ways. Several scholars point out the great role of ritual acting aimed at warding off calamities and misfortunes as well as banning evil and demons. I would like to emphasize the ‘magical’ character as a general dominant aspect of ritual in the ancient and late antique world, as described for the classical period in a study on magic by Fritz Graf⁴⁵ and for the late antique and early Christian periods by authors such as Josef Engemann,⁴⁶ Thomas Mathews,⁴⁷ and Risto Uro.⁴⁸

Furthermore, with the rise of Christianity, this dominant ritual pattern remained – but in different forms. The banning of evil via pilgrimages, the cult of saints, and the practice of prayers and blessings cannot be underestimated – when confronted with disasters and tragedies, people long for those repertoires. The sharp distinction between a more official ecclesiastical-liturgical line and a more popular religious line is, to an important extent, a construct created by modern scholarship.⁴⁹ Various repertoires, ‘official’ and ‘popular’, have existed side by side in an often non-competitive relationship. In the event of a threatening disaster, in a disaster *in actu*, as well as after a disaster, we see various rituals – special masses, marking the place of disaster (often with crosses), pilgrimages and processions, venerating special saints, short prayers, incantations, blessings, and novenas. Many rituals have a material dimension: prints, images,

⁴⁵ F. GRAF: *Magic in the ancient world* (Cambridge, MA 1997); IDEM: ‘Theories of magic in Antiquity’, in P. MRECKI & M. MEYER (eds.): *Magic and ritual in the Ancient world* (= Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 141) (Leiden 2002) 92-104.

⁴⁶ J. ENGEMANN: *Deutung und Bedeutung frühchristlicher Bildwerke* (Darmstadt 1997); cf. IDEM: ‘Zur Verbreitung magischer Übelabwehr in der nichtchristlichen und christlichen Spätantike’, in *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 18 (1975) 22-48.

⁴⁷ T.F. MATHEWS: *The clash of Gods. A reinterpretation of Christian art* (Princeton 1999).

⁴⁸ R. URO, J. DAY, R. DEMARIS & R. ROITTO (eds.): *The Oxford handbook of early Christian ritual* (Oxford 2018).

⁴⁹ Cf. M. GIJSWIJT-HOFSTRA & F. EGMOND (eds.): *Of bidden helpt? Tegenslag en cultuur in Europa, circa 1500-2000* (Amsterdam 1997), esp. ‘Inleiding: tegenslag en cultuur’ 1-10.

crosses, specific places, sacred water, Palm Sunday branches, relics of all sorts play a major role in it. During thunderstorms, the house is blessed using palm branches taken home from the Palm Sunday liturgy and immersed in sacred water, while the field is ‘palmed’ in the event that there is a risk of having a misharvest. All kinds of saints have, in particular, played a major role in the case of disasters and misfortunes during the medieval period, retaining their symbolic roles to this day. Some saints are prayed to for help in general, addressing a broad spectrum of misfortunes – like the Virgin Mary and Saint John. Others are ‘specialists’ and are invoked either against or during specific calamities – St. Roch against plague, St. Barbara against mine and fire accidents, St. Lawrence against fires, St. Cunera, St. Antony, and St. Cornelius against disasters affecting cattle (often, diseases), St. Donatus against thunder, lightning, and fire, and so on.

4.3. Restorative or preventing rituals

The ritual making of promises in order to be spared from a disaster is also a widespread practice. It can involve performing a procession, building a chapel or church, or going on a pilgrimage. Behind it, there is always the belief that there are certain causes of disasters. Specific behavior in a group or society, magic practices and sorcery, demons and devils, or a combination of these are believed to be able to provoke a disaster. Restorative or preventing rituals are therefore established. The disturbed relationship with gods or God must be restored. Many disaster rituals have this restorative dimension.

An example of this is the Christian ritual of ‘reparation’ (Dutch: *Eerherstel*; French: *réparation*), regularly performed from the medieval period to the middle of the twentieth century.⁵⁰ All sorts of calamities were directly associated with the idea that the relationship between the community and God (often addressed in the person of Christ) had been disturbed. The Christian community acted vicariously for the sinners – through prayer and fasting, through all kinds of devotions, especially those of the Sacred Heart, making an attempt to restore and reconcile that relationship.

⁵⁰ C. CASPERS: ‘Eerherstel. De belediging van God en de ervaring van tegenslag bij rooms-katholieken, van de twaalfde tot in de twintigste eeuw’, in GIJSWIJT-HOFSTRA & EGMOND: *Of bidden helpt?*, Ch. 7, 99-117; ED. GLOTIN: ‘Réparation’, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* XIII (Paris 1988) 369-413.

4.4. Continuity and change: Prayer Days

Often, we see both continuity and change together. The old tradition of praying and fasting in the case of a disaster was continued in the seventeenth century in the form of the so-called Prayer Days (*bededagen*).⁵¹ In the post-Reformation seventeenth century Republic of the Netherlands, public Prayer Days were organized by the authorities in the event of a disaster to restore the people's damaged relationship with God. God was pleaded to for assistance in bearing the disaster and for forgiveness for any missteps that could have caused the disaster. These Prayer Days were often held on Wednesdays or Fridays. People went to church two or three times, where there was a sermon with prayers before and after it. They worked as little as possible and there were no festivities. When the troubling event was over, the Prayer Day became a Thanksgiving Day (*Dankdag*). In practice, we often see a combination of fasting and prayer days with thanksgiving days. The disasters that led to this could be diverse: natural disasters, contagious diseases, as well as disasters of political and military nature, religious persecution, or economic problems. Here, too, we see the already mentioned merging of ritual before, during, and after a disaster or tragedy.

4.5. Studying disaster ritual of the past: the general and relative nature of disasters

As noted in our overview of disaster research, we see historical interest in disasters in – among others – the work of Gerrit Jasper Schenk, who is a prominent example.⁵² For the conceptual reflection and comparative and transcultural perspectives and limitations, in particular, interesting material can be found in Schenk's work.⁵³ In a popular scientific German radio magazine, Schenk discusses the general and relative nature of a disaster as follows:

Angesichts einer Katastrophe gibt es menschliche Reaktionen, die zu allen Zeiten und in allen Kontinenten ähnlich sind: Angst, Entsetzen, Furcht,

⁵¹ L. NOORDEGRAAF: 'Of bidden helpt? Bededagen als reactie op rampen in de Republiek', in GIJSWIJT-HOFSTRA & EGMOND: *Of bidden helpt?* Ch. 2, 29-42.

⁵² SCHENK: 'Historical disaster research'; IDEM (ed.): *Katastrophen*; IDEM (ed.): *Historical disaster experiences*; JANKU, SCHENK & MAUELSHAGEN (eds.): *Historical disaster research*.

⁵³ See the introductory first chapter in SCHENK: *Historical disaster experiences*: 'Historical disaster experiences. First steps toward a comparative and transcultural history of disasters across Asia and Europe in preindustrial era,' 3-44 within that the section: 'A short conceptual history of 'Disaster' and 'Catastrophe'', 15-23.

Flucht. Aber eben auch Solidarität, spontane Hilfe und der Versuch der Bewältigung. Unterschiede zwischen den Kulturen findet man allerdings bei dem Aspekt, wie Katastrophen wahrgenommen werden. Und damit beginnt eine gewisse Relativität der Katastrophe. Was in China als Katastrophe gesehen wird und was in der Schweiz, womöglich auch noch in unterschiedlichen Epochen, differiert stark. Für die Betroffenen ist eine Katastrophe natürlich immer gleich schlimm, aber wie die Gesellschaft damit umgeht, ist höchst unterschiedlich. Nimmt sie das Geschehene als etwas Gottgegebenes hin? Vielleicht sogar als eine Strafe? Oder betrachtet sie das als ein rein physikalisches Ereignis oder als Ergebnis mangelnder Prävention, zum Beispiel eines falschen Bebauungsplans?⁵⁴

Although the work by Schenk is challenging and thought provoking, there are – and rightly so – warnings about offering a simple transcultural image of disaster ritual, regardless of time and place. I am also reluctant to make comparisons between ritual repertoires at specific times and places. As far as I am concerned, the same applies to the use of certain general and global processes, such as disenchantment and secularization.

Schenk's citation brings a perspective to the fore that we come across as a standard in historical studies on disasters – not only on disaster ritual – which is called the 'chronotopic' perspective.⁵⁵ Disasters are seen and experienced very differently depending on the time and place in which they occur. This can be seen, for example, in the different naming of misfortunes and tragedies. It remains difficult, with regard to the past, to gauge whether there are differences in perception and experience of misfortune in different forms – for example, between incidental and structural disasters and between more collective and more individual tragedies. It is nevertheless certain that two elements always play a general and determining role in this – on the one hand, the frameworks of interpretation; on the other hand, the awareness of contingency and the

⁵⁴ Cf. DIE PROFIS (eds.): *Die Profis von radio eins. Beschränkt ist der grosse Bruder von Blöd. Klüger werden leichtgemacht* (Reinbek bei Hamburg 20100) = ro.wohlt digitalbuch 978-3-644-44511-6, sub 10: 'Perspektiven der Zeit – Die Geschichte mit der Geschichte' § 'Der Mensch und seine katastrophale Geschichte.' The book is based on the German radio magazine on Saturday morning *Die Profis*, a program by Radio Eins, Radio Berlin-Brandenburg (RBB).

⁵⁵ Originally this term was coined by M. Bakhtin in the setting of literary theory and philosophy of language. I use it here in a general sense of the determining contextuality of time and space.

vulnerability of human existence. Hence, the notion of living in a ‘risk society’ is anything but a modern invention, although it is, at the same time, a concept that underlines the chronotope perspective through emerging man-made disasters in the modern society.⁵⁶

This perspective of chronotopy does not only apply to the past but is a general principle of the contextuality of time and place. Thus, all aspects of disaster rituals and disasters that we have briefly mentioned here are addressed in more detail in subsequent chapters of this contemporary handbook project, with, as we shall see, full attention given to what is regarded to be and experienced as a disaster.

Still, I assert that, in this context, disasters and crises, large and small, have a privileged link with ritual acting and expression. In other words, as a basic layer, rituals always have to do with the banning evil and coping with fate, contingency, and misfortune. We see that in the past – just as we do in the present. I would like to quote Martin Stringer who finds that ‘religion’ ultimately consists of intimate relationships “with the non-empirical other” through ritual practices based on the need to “cope pragmatically with every-day problems”.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Jeanet Sinding Bentzen, an economist from Copenhagen, recently published the results of a major study in which she combined a global dataset of religiosity with spatial data on natural disasters.⁵⁸ For her, this provides a clear picture of the role of religious coping: people exhibit religious-ritual behavior in order to deal with unbearable and unpredictable life events. For me, this is a striking confirmation of the privileged link between disasters and rituals.

5. RITUAL AND DISASTER: STUDYING DISASTER RITUAL

Let us now focus on disaster ritual in the present and the ways of studying it. In the *HDR*, there is hardly something to find on ritual. However, attention is given to ritual culture in the first edition in the chapters by Gary R. Webb (‘The popular culture of disaster. Exploring a new dimension of disaster research’⁵⁹) and by Anne Eyre (‘Remembering.

⁵⁶ See our note 22.

⁵⁷ M. STRINGER: *Contemporary Western ethnography and the definition of religion* (London/New York 2008) 113s.

⁵⁸ J. SINDING BENTZEN: ‘Acts of God? Religiosity and natural disasters across sub-national world districts’, in *The Economic Journal* 129/622 (2019) 2295-2321.

⁵⁹ *Handbook of disaster research* (2007) 430-440.

Community and commemoration after disaster'⁶⁰). Both chapters have been removed from the second edition, which has a different design (first edition: 32 chapters, 611 pages; second edition: 14 chapters, 619 pages).⁶¹ However, in the second edition, there is a new chapter by Webb: 'The cultural turn in disaster research. Understanding resilience and vulnerability through the lens of culture'.⁶²

Let us also take a closer look at the four previously mentioned dominant clusters of disaster research, as well as at ritual studies and some smaller niches, like religious studies, where there is a long tradition of studying ritual and liturgy in the context of crises and catastrophes (see Section 3).

I use three major parameters for the selection of the studies that I discuss below. (1) The theme of disaster ritual must be central (there are of course many studies dealing with the theme more indirectly, cf. memorial and cultural memory studies, World War I, World War II, and Holocaust studies, etc.). Furthermore, the studies must present a broad spectrum of both (2) ritual repertoires after disasters, catastrophes, crises, etc., and (3) disastrous events. However, I admit, apart from these criteria, the selection is personal and intuitive.

5.1. Psychology, traumatology, therapy, victimology

First, there is the already mentioned area of *psychology, traumatology, and grief therapy*. We can now also add to this arena the field of *victimology* (although this field is also legal and culturally oriented (see Chapter 3)). The therapeutic perspective is central to psychology and trauma studies. Recently, research has been conducted in the Netherlands on the grieving process of the relatives of the 2014 MH17 air crash in Ukraine.⁶³

⁶⁰ *Handbook of disaster research* (2007) 441-455.

⁶¹ The second *Handbook of disaster research* edition of 2017 is mainly an update with full attention to recent developments, such as terrorist attacks, gender, climate change, social capital, and certain groups such as children, the elderly and the disabled.

⁶² *Handbook of disaster research* (2017²) Ch. 6, 109-122.

⁶³ It concerns a project led by Jos de Keijser (Groningen, 2014-2019). J. DE KEIJSER, P. BOELEN & L. LENFERINK: *Werkboek Rouw na vliegramp MH17* (s.l. 2016); J. DE KEIJSER, P. BOELEN & G. SMID: *Handboek traumatische rouw* (Amsterdam 2018); *Iets in mijn leven is kapot. De psychologische gevolgen van de MH17-ramp voor de nabestaanden* (Nieuwegein 2019); L. LENFERINK: 'Rouw na vliegramp MH17', in *Tijdschrift voor bedrijfs- en verzekeringsgeneeskunde* 25/9 (2017) 411s.

Certain ritual aspects are discussed (the influence of being able or unable to bury or cremate the victims, the role of monuments, commemorations), but the central aim is trauma therapy and research into the complex grieving process of relatives. Rituals are also central in research into the role of World War II commemoration in the Netherlands and its impact on war victims.⁶⁴ In psychology, attention is also given to the role of ritual in religious coping in particular. With respect to the collective dimension of ritual, there is an especially influential book edited by Ellen Zinner and Mary Beth WILLIAMS, *When a community weeps. Case studies in group survivorship* (1999).⁶⁵ In this collection there is no explicit definition of tragedy or disaster provided; the focus is entirely on the central concepts of community, trauma, loss, grief, and group survivorship. It is in this context that ritualizations and shared mourning and healing practices play a role. When it comes to the cases, an implicit division and classification is used:

- human made disasters (Challenger Shuttle disaster 1986; Estonia disaster 1994; Kemsey bus accident 1989 in Australia);
- natural disasters (earthquakes in Armenia in 1988 and in Kobe, Japan in 1995);
- loss of leaders and heroes (baseball hero Mickey Mantle, 1995); and
- terrorism and political action (Oklahoma City bombing 1995; Enniskillen, Northern Ireland 1987; unforeseen death in Kibbutz Gilgal, Jordan Valley, Israel).

This perspective of collective grief returns in many other disaster studies, especially those related to 9/11.⁶⁶

5.2. Sociology and anthropology

From the domain of *sociology*, I mention three examples here that indicate the wide range in this field, from empirical functionalist research to more qualitative cultural oriented studies. In my explorations, I have encountered a niche within the social science cluster in which ritual is

⁶⁴ B. VERLOOP & T. MOOREN: 'Herdenken, waar is het goed voor? Het effect van herdenken voor oorlogsgetroffenen', in *Impact Magazine* 2 (2017) 6-9.

⁶⁵ E. ZINNER & M. BETH WILLIAMS (eds.): *When a community weeps. Case studies in group survivorship* (Philadelphia/London 1999).

⁶⁶ See our note 31.

at the center of a theory that is often cited and applied in disaster research – the Structural Ritualization Theory.⁶⁷ David J. Knottnerus had begun developing this theory in the second half of the 1990s at the interface of sociology and social psychology. He published dozens of studies on the theory, and applied the theory to cases, including historical cases. For Knottnerus, ritual is a broad and open category, not only referring to religious, sacred ceremonial practices or ritualizations in the sense of practices with a ritual dimension (see Section 2), but also to a very general “routinized behavior in secular settings”. Rituals and ritualizations are equivalents for him; they are standardized routine activities that, as symbolic practices, form an important basis for the social behavior of people and meaning making. They concern a broad repertoire, such as family gatherings, music performances, recreations, feasts, festivals, etc. The Structural Ritualization Theory is now primarily interested in the function of those practices, which offer a society focus and stability. The other side of ritualizing is de-ritualization because, in the case of a disaster, these routine practices are interrupted. The challenge after a disaster is to provide individuals and groups with a grip again, to offer them perspective through the restoration of old ritual patterns or the construction of new ones.

Furthermore, in the context of studying the role of social capital and resilience of groups involved in a disaster, there is an explicit interest in ritual – especially in Japanese research.⁶⁸ The young Japanese sociologist, Yu Fukuda, researches rituals in Japan after disasters such as tsunamis as well as the two World War II atomic bombs. He is ambitious in the title of his paper from 2012: “Toward the theory of post-disaster ritual”.⁶⁹ In Fukuda’s theory of post-disaster ritual, the contingency experience is decisive. That

⁶⁷ See his curriculum including a bibliography: https://sociology.okstate.edu/images/stories/vita/Knottnerus_vita_2017.pdf [last accessed February 2018]. Cf. the remarkable ‘functionalistic’ application: R. BHAKTA BHANDARI, K. YAMORI & N. OKADA: ‘Interpreting an urban event in terms of improving the capacity to cope with disaster risk: A case study of Kathmandu’, in *Journal of Natural Disaster Science* 32/1 (2010) 39–49.

⁶⁸ R. BHANDARI, N. OKADA & H. IKEO: ‘Building a disaster resilient community through ritual based social capital. A brief analysis of findings from the case study of Kishiwada’, in *Annals of Disaster Prevention Research Institute Kyoto Uni* no. 53 B (2010).

⁶⁹ Y. FUKUDA: ‘Toward the theory of post-disaster ritual’ (paper read at the conference *Salvage and salvation: Religion, disaster relief, and reconciliation in Asia*, Singapore, 22–23 November 2012) 1–11. Available at https://www.academia.edu/4574789/Toward_the_Theory_of_Post-Disaster_Ritual [last accessed December 2017].

experience makes an event a disaster and determines the reaction and answer through the use of rituals and narratives: “Thus, the idea of ‘It could have happened to me’ is shared among people. Therefore, we define *disaster* as an event that brings about a sense of contingency that can be shared in society or subdivision of society.”⁷⁰ (see also Chapter 8). More generally, we have to situate this theory in the context of social constructionism.⁷¹

A contribution with an accent on cultural practices and disasters is an article by Douglas Davies in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion* (2001).⁷² This UK expert on death and dying studies reflects on loss and tragedy at personal, national, and international levels (also see his Chapter 5). He acknowledges that it is difficult to give an appropriate definition of disaster and comes to an open indication: “whether in the form of personal bereavement, natural catastrophe, accidents, crimes, terrorism, or warfare, certain events stir a range of emotional values including sadness, grief, despair, shock, and rage.”⁷³ Therefore, for Davies as well, impact is central and he indicates a series of both events and consequences. In his approach to disaster research, he chooses two sides – the personal and moral-somatic dimension and the social dimension – through the theme of ‘offending deaths’.

Davies places an emphasis on the experience of injustice in the case of the death and murder of a loved one. The well-being and stability of people are affected by the feeling and experience of injustice. This is why I added ‘undeserved’ to the set of ‘un-nesses’ (see Subsection 3.1.). The feelings of injustice and undeservedness can especially be found in cases of sudden unnatural death from an accident, murder, or suicide. Davies deals with several cases in which the feeling of injustice was expressed through practices in search for justice. For instance, there is the case of the racist murder of a black British teenager in 1993, where relatives sought justice themselves after the police failed in their investigation. There is also the case of the Hillsborough Stadium disaster (Sheffield, 1989) with 96 victims; the failures of the police on that day were still acknowledged for a long time after the event and, ten years after the

⁷⁰ FUKUDA: ‘Toward the theory of post-disaster ritual’ 5.

⁷¹ K. GERGEN: *Social constructionism in context* (London 2011); V. BURR: *Social constructionism* (London/New York 2003).

⁷² D. DAVIES: ‘Health, morality and sacrifice. The sociology of disasters’, in R.K. FENN (ed.): *The Blackwell companion to sociology of religion* (Oxford 2001) Ch. 22, 404-417.

⁷³ DAVIES: ‘Health, morality and sacrifice’ 404.

event, there was a memorial service held by the Hillsborough Families' Support Group using 96 roses as its central symbol. In the case of the Lockerbie Boeing 747 crash in Scotland (1988), international terrorism was blamed and, ten years later, the perpetrator was finally convicted in a special court in the Netherlands.

The second part of Davies's article on the social dimension of 'offending deaths' is about the massive, 'popular' reaction to death and tragedy. The deaths of certain individuals appear to touch certain sensitive strings when it comes to a group's identity – people feel insulted. This manifests itself in many ways: in the call for persecution and punishment, in protest. Davies discusses a series of examples here. After the 1998 massacre in Barrancabermeja, Colombia, caused by a right-wing death squad, the community responded with The Bogotá March, which used 'civil society is mobilizing' as its motto. The Irish bombing of Omagh in 1998 brought 60,000 people out on the streets in a flaming protest against terrorism. The Belgian White March in September of 1996 is famous as a protest against the way in which the authorities acted in the Dutroux affair, in particular, and government corruption, in general. The famine in Ethiopia led to the first Live Aid Concert in 1984. In connection to this, particular attention is paid to the death and funeral of (former Princess) Diana in 1997. The Diana case is very complex – there is diffuse guilt, a badly treated but much-loved public figure, impossible romantic love, illness, and vulnerability. All this cried for 'repair and reparation', for satisfaction. Davies points out the enormous power of rituals and symbols in this case – the flowers people brought for Diana could not just be thrown away (Davies makes a parallel with the handling of bread and wine after the Eucharist); they were used as the manure for a memorial garden. We also see that later on, in other public manifestations of mourning and remembrance, where the material signs and expressions of compassion (such as flowers, stuffed animals, toys, notes, etc.) are preserved. This is also what we have seen in the Netherlands, after the death of the politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and, more recently, in the rituals commemorating the MH17 air crash in 2014.

In conclusion, Davies, as in many of his other studies on death rituals, emphasizes the search for meaning and perspective through rituals. Death rites are "words against death" in which people are always looking for justice and recovery.⁷⁴ Sacrifice is an important notion in this context,

⁷⁴ DAVIES: 'Health, morality and sacrifice' 415. Cf. IDEM: *Death, ritual and belief. The rhetoric of funerary rites* (London 2017³).

“offering an innocent victim to achieve some social benefit by a symbolic removal of evil”.⁷⁵

For our context, it is important to note that Davies has an open vision of disaster with a strong emphasis on the impact side that, for him, has a primarily existential charge. He emphasizes “the importance of existential definitions of disasters”.⁷⁶ It should also be noted that Davies usually uses the term ‘disaster’ as an indication for a concrete case – in a more general sense, he prefers the term ‘tragedy’. When it comes to cases, they can also involve the tragic death of an individual. The impact is decisive – not the individual or collective nature of an event. With respect to ritual, Davies also maintains an open view. He is interested in how people react through cultural practices, death rites, and all sorts of other practices that have a ritual dimension.

5.3. Cultural geography

The domain of *cultural geography* has its roots in the United States. Here, I mention the rich study by Kenneth Foote: *Shadowed ground. America’s landscapes of violence and tragedy* (1997/2003)⁷⁷ (see Chapter 10). He focuses on spatially traceable commemoration practices after disasters, tragedies, massacres, etc., developing a dynamic taxonomy scale for the classification of these practices, with the extremes of sanctification and obliteration as well as designation and rectification in-between them. With respect to Foote’s use of disaster and the selected cases, Foote opts for an open and broad indication via a series of terms. Next to disaster, we also see the following terms: tragedy, violence, war, civil strife, natural calamity, accident, assassination, crime, and murder. The cases selected show a broad palette: deaths or murders of heroes and politicians, battles, ship disasters, fires, floods, gangster murders, storms, killed strikers, disturbances, tornadoes, epidemics, forest fires, bombings, killings, car and bus accidents, plane

⁷⁵ DAVIES: ‘Health, morality and sacrifice’ 415.

⁷⁶ DAVIES: ‘Health, morality and sacrifice’ 415. Cf. R.A. STALLINGS: ‘Disaster and the theory of social order’, in E. QUARANTELLI (ed.): *What is a disaster?* (London 1998) 143.

⁷⁷ K. FOOTE: *Shadowed ground. America’s landscapes of violence and tragedy* (Austin 1997; revised and expanded ed. 2003). See also: IDEM: ‘Shadowed ground, sacred place. Reflections on violence, tragedy, memorials and public commemorative rituals’, in P. POST & A.L. MOLENDIJK (eds.): *Holy ground. Re-inventing ritual space in modern Western culture* (= Liturgia condenda 24) (Leuven etc. 2010) 93-118.

crashes, collapsed buildings, and fallen heroes – just some examples to give an idea of the variety.

5.4. Religious studies and theology

Although it is a small niche with an often outspoken interdisciplinary character, we can nevertheless include some current projects from the domain of *theology and religious studies* in this small panorama of disaster ritual research. Here, the role of religion and religious ritual in a secularized society is an important incentive. The focus is on ritual in the public domain. I mention some studies here that reflect this scope.

A compilation by Kristian Fechtner Thomas Klie, *Riskante Liturgien. Zum Charakter und zur Bedeutung von Gottesdiensten in der Gesellschaftlichen Öffentlichkeit* (2011),⁷⁸ fits into our overview even though it is not explicitly a book about disasters and tragedies. Its starting point is celebrations, Christian liturgies in this case, in the public domain in the context of Germany and for all kinds of special occasions.⁷⁹ Apart from the introduction and the final chapter, each chapter deals with specific cases, almost all of which have a tragedy, disaster, war, or similar event as their occasion. The dimension of ‘risky’ is elaborated in various ways. It refers to the modern society that is characterized as the ‘risk society’. Life is risky, there are constant casualties, there are contingencies and ambivalences. A ritual after a disaster or tragedy is, like all rituals, risky – How authentic is it? What are the chances of failure? It is also risky for it to enter the public domain as religious ritual and it is risky to perform it – Which rites and symbols are appropriate? In this collection of articles, much attention is paid to the relation state, institutional religion, and the concept of ‘civil religion’ – Does it fit in Germany like it does in the United States? With risky performance, as in other studies (see below), the position of the perpetrator in the commemoration ritual is at stake – Is there a place in the ritual for the perpetrator(s)? In the memorial service after the Erfurt shooting in 2002, the perpetrator

⁷⁸ K. FECHTNER & T. KLIE (eds.): *Riskante Liturgien. Zum Charakter und zur Bedeutung von Gottesdiensten in der Gesellschaftlichen Öffentlichkeit* (Stuttgart 2011).

⁷⁹ See also for public liturgies B. KRANEMANN: ‘Gesellschaft im Katastrophentalarm. Liturgiewissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf öffentliche Trauerfeiern’, in *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 47 (2018) 263-271; B. BENZ & B. KRANEMANN (eds.): *Deutschland trauert. Trauerfeiern nach Großkatastrophen als gesellschaftliche Herausforderung* (= Erfurter Theologische Schriften 51) (Würzburg 2019).

received a red candle during the public commemoration ritual; in the service after the Winnenden attack in 2009, the perpetrator did not. An innocent-looking candle ritual turns out to be a risky ritual element.

The book covers the following series of cases: the 2005 commemoration service in Berlin Dom after the tsunami in the Indian Ocean (2004); the memorial services after the aforementioned attacks in Erfurt in 2002 and Winnenden 2009; the ceremonies in memory of German soldiers killed in Afghanistan on peace missions (2007 and 2010); the TV service marking the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II (2005); a commemoration for killed firefighters; the funeral of Bundespräsident Rau in the Berlin Dom in 2006; the celebration following the starvation of the five-year-old Lea Sophie in Schwerin-Lankow in 2007; and the celebration after the suicide of the goalkeeper of the national team, Robert Enke, in 2009.

I explicitly refer to the last three cases, where the death of these individuals became an occasion for a collective national ritual. We also see here a relatively new repertoire – ritual as expression of compassion with dramatic events occurring far away in other parts of the world.

In Wolfram Kinzig Thomas Rheinsdorf's *Katastrophen und die Antworten der Religionen* (2011), the focus is on the institutional religious dimension of disasters. In the partly conceptually oriented introduction, the terms *Katastrophe* (the German default translation of disaster) and *Katastrophenforschung* are discussed in parts II and III.⁸⁰ We get a brief impression of catastrophe research in Germany.⁸¹ In addition to a great deal of attention given to various interpretations of disasters in religious traditions, the presented cases mainly include ritual practices that follow natural disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis. In the chapter by Walter Bruchhausen, the genocide in Rwanda and the tsunami in Indonesia are discussed together.⁸²

The collection by Benedikt Kranemann and Brigitte Benz, *Trauerfeiern nach Grosskatastrophen. Theologische und sozialwissenschaftliche Zugänge* (2016), deals with collective commemorations after tragedies (see also Chapter 12).⁸³ This collection is based on presentations at a symposium

⁸⁰ W. KINZIG & T. RHEINSDORF (eds.): *Katastrophen und die Antworten der Religionen* (Würzburg 2011) 8-12.

⁸¹ KINZIG & RHEINSDORF: *Katastrophen und die Antworten der Religionen*, esp. via note 20 on p. 11.

⁸² KINZIG & RHEINSDORF: *Katastrophen und die Antworten der Religionen* 137-156.

⁸³ B. KRANEMANN & B. BENZ (eds.): *Trauerfeiern nach Grosskatastrophen. Theologische und sozialwissenschaftliche Zugänge* (Würzburg 2016).

in Erfurt in May 2014, and it uses the terms *Katastrophe* with the addition of the term *gross*, which indicates that there was a large number of victims. The following cases are selected: the shooting at the Columbine High School and Littleton (1999); the collective commemoration rites after the Oslo/Utøya attack (2011); the shooting in Winnenden (2009); the tragedy at the Love Parade in Duisburg (2010); the shooting at the Gutenberg Gymnasium, Erfurt (2002); and the German Wings crash (2015). Furthermore, Albert Gerhards deals with the tsunami of 2004, Winnenden, Germanwings crash, genocides (memorial service for the Armenian genocide, Berlin Dom 23 April 2015), the refugee crisis on the Mediterranean Sea, and the soldiers killed during peace missions. My contribution to this collection provides, in addition to an overview of disaster ritual research, an adapted working definition of disaster. Particularly inspired by the mentioned work by Foote, I adopted a more open use of the terminology surrounding disaster in which several terms are used, such as disaster, violence, tragedy, violence, and atrocity.⁸⁴

In particular, the terrorist attack by Breivik in Oslo and on the isle of Utøya on 22 July 2011 provides an important incentive for research into the role of (public) rituals. From the Faculty of Theology of the University of Oslo, Norway, the Reassembling Democracy: Ritual as Cultural Resource (REDO)⁸⁵ project was begun under the direction of Jone Salomonson. The research team includes leading scholars in religious and ritual studies such as Jens Kreinath and Michael Houseman. The project focuses on the meaning of religious and cultural ritual as well as on how these are effective or can be effective in society today.

Furthermore, from Oslo (Norwegian School of Theology) and with the perspective of resilience and recovery, Lars Johan Danbolt, a practical theologian, has been conducting research into rituals after disasters and accidents (also see his Chapter 15).⁸⁶ There are two main lines in his work.

⁸⁴ KRANEMANN & BENZ: *Trauerfeiern nach Grosskatastrophen* 52-54.

⁸⁵ <https://www.tf.uio.no/english/research/projects/redo/index.html> [last accessed September 2018].

⁸⁶ H. STIFOSS-HANSEN & L.J. DANBOLT: 'Public disaster ritual in the local community – A study of Norwegian cases', in *Journal of Ritual Studies* 25/2 (2011) 25-37; L.J. DANBOLT & H. STIFOSS-HANSEN: 'The function of ritual use after disasters. A practical theological perspective', in KRANEMANN & BENZ: *Trauerfeiern nach Grosskatastrophen. Theologische und sozialwissenschaftliche Zugänge* 40-50; IDEM: 'Ritual and recovery. Traditions in disaster ritualizing', in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 56/4 (2017) 352-360.

On the one hand, he maps out how disaster ritual developed in Scandinavia – Which new repertoire is establishing itself? On the other hand, he places focus on the meaning and function of that repertoire. Danbolt traces the emergence of new public rituals, particularly ones since the 1970s. This manifests itself in so-called *disaster services*, where new ritual elements go hand-in-hand with traditional liturgical forms. When it comes to meaning and function, he elaborates on the role of ritual as a recovery medium through two aspects: an individual aspect and a collective-social one. In the latter aspect, the concept of social capital is discussed.⁸⁷ Danbolt explicitly puts into perspective that a disaster would always be an event with many casualties and enormous damage. In his view, smaller accidents could also have an enormous impact for both individuals and communities. His most recent publication on disaster ritual was in the theological journal *Dialog*,⁸⁸ constituting one in a series of thematic articles on vulnerability and disaster from a theological perspective.⁸⁹

5.5. And ritual studies...?

In this literature overview, I have maintained a traditional classification via academic (sub)disciplines. I did, however, also indicate that there is always a multi- or interdisciplinary dimension. Through academic fields, I was able to map the broad spectrum of existing research into disaster rituals in a more or less orderly manner that, for a large part, is still parceled out through a variety of disciplines and subdisciplines. Nevertheless, I do believe that this primarily disciplinary approach will increasingly pave the way for interdisciplinary and thematically oriented platforms and partnerships. This handbook project is one such example.

⁸⁷ A.o. via R. PUTNAM & D.P. ALDRICH: *Building resilience. Social capital in post-disaster recovery* (Chicago 2012).

⁸⁸ DANBOLT & STIFOSS-HANSEN: 'Ritual and recovery'.

⁸⁹ *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* (Winter 2017): C. TIND JOHANNESSEN-HENRY: 'Listening for safe places. Networks of *Playing* and *Chalcedon* in disaster pastoral care' 337-351; N.H. GREGENSEN: 'Positive loss and tragic memory. On the preservation of community' 361-372; G. THOMAS: 'Divine disaster management. Cross and resurrection as an event of creative vulnerability' 373-381; H. SPRINGHART: 'Vulnerable creation. Vulnerable human life between risk and tragedy' 382-390; M.G. CHRISTOFFERSEN: 'Trust, endangerment, and vulnerability. An interdisciplinary conversation with Niklas Luhman and K.E. Løgstrup' 391-401; O. SIGURDSON: 'Mourning, melancholy, and humor. Psychotheology in Freud and Söderblom' 402-411; C. WELZ: 'A voice crying out from the wound – with or without words. On trauma, speech, and silence' 412-427.

For the study of rituals, such a platform was created in the mid-1970s through the medium of ritual studies. What I have presented thus far in terms of research on disaster rituals could, in principle, have also been presented under the banner of ‘ritual studies’.

Earlier, I elaborated on the profile and identity of ritual studies by mentioning, among other things, the constant central theme of ritual acting, pluralism of methods, the tendency toward an interdisciplinary way of working, an open ‘canon’ of themes, a strong theoretical interest, a cross-cultural and comparative view, and a growing professional academic tradition with manuals, journals, congresses, research programs, etc.⁹⁰ As mentioned, I regard this handbook project to be a ritual studies project. In the last part of this Introduction, the central theme of disaster ritual is confronted with a number of important themes and research perspectives from the ritual studies platform.

After providing an overview of the existing research into ritual, disaster, and disaster ritual, I now explore some research perspectives that are urgent within the current ritual studies arena and that may be of relevance to this project. The discussion concerns, successively: some ritual repertoires with a direct relationship to disaster rituals (Section 6), the useful/useless paradox of rituals (Section 7), the complexity of ritual repertoires due to different forms of appropriation, context, agency, and ownership of rituals (Section 8), and the ambivalence and ambiguity of rituals (Section 9). In this manner, this project examines disaster rituals with lenses provided by current ritual studies.

6. THE CONTEXT OF RELATED RITUAL REPERTOIRES

As a first perspective, I introduce what I call a *relevant explanatory context*. Disaster rituals, as a special form of ritual repertoire, are connected with and sometimes embedded in other related rituals. A descriptive exploration of contexts, of the ritual environment, provides a framework that helps in situating and analyzing a ritual repertoire. I have done so on various occasions through so-called ritual panoramas.⁹¹ From a

⁹⁰ P. POST: Encyclopedia article: ‘Ritual Studies’, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York/Oxford 2015). <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-21>.

⁹¹ Cf. P. POST & L. FARO: ‘Een Ritual Studies onderzoeksdesign. Ervaringen en perspectieven’, in *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* 33 (2017) 20-39, p. 27-29, with litt. in note 24. DOI: 10.21827/5a2e425c0ad55.

certain repertoire and from a certain point of view, I sketched and explored the ritual environment. Which repertoires are adjoining and related? Which are close and which further away?

The topic of disaster ritual directly touches the general repertoire of *death rites*⁹² and the dynamics we can trace there (see Chapter 5). It concerns the funerary culture with strong personalization and de-traditionalization that is generally noted for the modern Western culture. The influence of the funerals of public figures, celebrities, and heroes through the media cannot be underestimated. The interaction between this public setting and the ‘average’ funerals is described in many death and dying studies. One such classical example, as already mentioned, are the death rites for (former Princess) Diana.

With clear overlap with death rites, *commemoration ritual*, private and public, is a third important ritual contextual cluster for the disaster ritual topic.⁹³ I refer to the developments in relation to commemorating the dead on an annual basis (cf. all kinds of new forms of All Souls⁹⁴) – commemorating wars, the Holocaust, etc. There is an important role here played by spatial and material aspects.

In a recent book project⁹⁵ and subprojects on the refugee crisis,⁹⁶ the *practices of victimhood* are presented as a ritual category of its own. Recently, I put it like this:

Here, the identity and profile of the ritual repertoire are based on the victim’s perspective. Like there is a narrative repertoire or victimhood

⁹² Cf. T. WALTER: *On bereavement. The culture of grief* (Oxford 1999); K. GARCES-FOLEY (ed.): *Death and religion in a changing world* (London 2006); E. VENBRUX, TH. QUARTIER, CL. VENHORST & BR. MATHIJSSSEN (eds.): *Changing European death ways* (Münster 2013); J.M. STILLION & THOMAS ATTIG (eds.): *Death, dying, and bereavement. Contemporary perspectives, institutions, and practices* (New York, NY 2015); D. DAVIES: *Death, ritual, and belief: The rhetoric of funerary rites* (London/New York 2017 (3d ed.)); D. KHAPAEVE: *The celebration of death in contemporary culture* (Ann Arbor 2017); BR. MATHIJSSSEN: *Making sense of death. Ritual practices and situational beliefs of the recently bereaved in the Netherlands* (Münster 2017).

⁹³ A. EYRE: ‘In remembrance: Post-disaster rituals and symbols,’ in *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* Spring (1999) 23-29; IDEM: ‘Remembering: Community commemoration after disaster’, in: *Handbook of disaster research* (2007) 441-455; P. WILLIAMS: *Memorial museums: The global rush to commemorate atrocities* (Oxford 2007).

⁹⁴ W. ARFMAN: *Ritual dynamics in late modernity. The case of the emerging field of collective commemoration* (Leiden 2014).

⁹⁵ HOONDERT, MUTSAERS & ARFMAN (eds.): *Cultural Practices of Victimhood*.

⁹⁶ Post: ‘The Lampedusa Tragedy’; IDEM: ‘Refugee Rituals’.

(Kempny, 2011),⁹⁷ there is a ritual repertoire of victimhood with ritual practices that have central victimhood themes like mourning, burying, healing, coping with trauma, commemoration, doing justice, restoration, reconciliation, protest, starting a new life, etc.⁹⁸

The use of the term ‘coping’ is usually not so much a part of the ritual repertoire but rather its (intended) function. Coping is directly linked to the research context of trauma and crisis. There are two lines of relevant ritual context. The first concerns ritual coping in the context of spiritual or religious coping. In addition to the general role that religion and spirituality play, there is also (mostly psychological) research into repertoires such as meditation, prayer, pilgrimage, etc. I can refer here to the work by the Dutch religious psychologist duo, Marinus van Uden and Jos Pieper, as well as to other work from their research environment.⁹⁹ The second line is more collectively oriented and deals with concepts such as resilience and social capital through rituals.¹⁰⁰

7. THE USEFUL/USELESS PARADOX OF RITUAL

In a study on disaster ritual, there is constant tension, which is sometimes referred to as a paradox or even as a ‘trap’.¹⁰¹ It refers to the tension between ritual being seen as an effective and functional action and ritual being seen as a useless action without the intention of effect and

⁹⁷ M. KEMPNY: ‘Interpretative repertoire of victimhood’, in *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 20 (2011) 132-151.

⁹⁸ POST: ‘Rituals’ 58s.

⁹⁹ J. PIEPER & M. VAN UDEN: *Religion and coping in mental health care* (= International Series in the Psychology of Religion 14) (Amsterdam/New York 2005); M. VAN UDEN & J. PIEPER (eds.): *Ritualiteit tussen heil en heling* (Tilburg 2012); M. VAN UDEN, J. PIEPER & H. ZONDAG: *Knockin’ on heaven’s door. Religious and receptive coping in mental health* (= International Series in Mental Health and Religion) (Aachen 2014); P. DE RIJK: *Bidden in de GGZ. Ontwikkeling en evaluatie van een cursus ‘bidden’ als interventie in de geestelijke gezondheidszorg* (PhD Dissertation: Tilburg University 2010) (Delft 2010); S.J. KÖRVER: *Spirituele coping bij longpatiënten* (PhD Dissertation: Tilburg University 2013); L. VAN DER VALK: *Steun zoeken bij Allah. Religiositeit, bidden en religieuze coping van Nederlandse hoogopgeleide moslima’s van Marokkaanse afkomst* (PhD Dissertation: Tilburg University 2016) (Delft 2016).

¹⁰⁰ C. WEPENER, I. SWART, G. TER HAAR & M. BARNARD: *Bonding in worship. A ritual lens on social capital in African Independent Churches in South Africa* (= Liturgia condenda 30) (Leuven etc. 2019).

¹⁰¹ WEPENER, SWART, TER HAAR & BARNARD: *Bonding in worship* 27-46.

instrumentality. In various studies in the field of psychology, trauma studies, and sociology studies, of which Knottnerus is an extremely functionalist example, there is a strong emphasis on the functional and instrumental ‘use’ of rituals in the context of disasters. However, that perspective can provide only a one-sided view of disaster rituals. A sketch of the aforementioned paradox from the ritual theory perspective can help here.

On the one hand, there is the conviction that ritual has no destination or purpose. It is precisely that ‘destiny- and purpose-freeness’ that belongs to the very essence of ritual. Some ritual studies scholars radically follow that line – rituals not only have no purpose but also no meaning. Frits Staal is a well-known and eloquent representative of this school of ‘ritual nihilists’.¹⁰² Others do not go that far; they may assert that ritual has no use but still recognize that it has meaning – useless, perhaps, but not meaningless. The idea of the uselessness of ritual is usually accompanied by the denial of any meaning outside the ritual itself. Ritual acting is, therefore, non-referential but self-referential. The anthropologist Walter van Beek expressed this notion in his inaugural address.¹⁰³

Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) can serve as an expert witness here. In his classic work, *Homo Ludens* (1938), he argues for the uselessness of ritual.¹⁰⁴ I now mainly refer to his first chapter, where he describes the phenomenon of ‘play’ in close connection with ritual, which he presents as a cult or sacred act.¹⁰⁵ Huizinga shows how science, biology, psychology, and physiology are looking for explanations and functions. What are the ‘useful functions’ of playing? For Huizinga, what these approaches have in common is that they assume that play has a purpose, that it is there for the sake of something else. Huizinga, however, is interested in playing itself, in the meaning it has for the players themselves. Then, a

¹⁰² F. STAAL: ‘The meaninglessness of ritual’, in *Numen* 26 (1979) 2-22.

¹⁰³ W. VAN BEEK: *De rite is rond. Betekenis en boodschap van het ongewone* (= inaugurele rede Tilburg 2007).

¹⁰⁴ J. HUIZINGA: *Homo ludens. A study of the play-element in culture* (London/Boston/Henley 1949, reprint 1980); orig. *Homo ludens. Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur* (1938) in L. BRUMMEL [et al.] (eds.): J. Huizinga: *Verzamelde werken V: Cultuurgeschiedenis III* (Haarlem 1950) 26-246. See the digital edition via *Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren* (dbnl 2007): https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/huiz003homo01_01/. I refer to the English edition.

¹⁰⁵ HUIZINGA: *Homo ludens* Ch. I ‘Nature and significance of play as a cultural phenomenon’.

completely different perspective comes to the fore. Play escapes analysis and interpretation; it is ‘just for fun’ and is there precisely so that we can trace the ‘differentness’, the peculiarity and specialty of the play itself – and in line with that of cult and ritual. In Huizinga’s words, “[play] is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it”.¹⁰⁶

I can elaborate on this vision of ritual as a useless and unproductive act in many ways. It is precisely because of this uselessness that ritual is attractive. It is an oasis, a sanctuary for being different. Therefore, the Camino, the old pilgrimage way to Santiago de Compostela, is a success. A space in which people are released from the rat race of daily life. It also explains why ritual is under pressure. After all, in a society in which nearly everything is determined by calculation, efficiency, function, productivity, and instrumentality, useless and ‘just for fun’ acting is suspicious and a waste of time and energy. It also explains why we see attempts to give ritual a function and purpose. The palm branches are brought to the elderly and sick on Palm Sunday,¹⁰⁷ the Camino becomes a sponsored walk, ritual is used as therapy for trauma.

On the other hand, there is a different view of the nature and essence of ritual. In it, the effect and the function of ritual acting is seen as the foundation of every ritual. Here, we see a functional and instrumental determination of ritual. At the end, every ritual is focused on coping, dealing with problems, salvation and healing, eliminating evil. In this view on ritual, there is always that basic apotropaic and prophylactic function.

An expert witness for this view can be Martin Stringer, who is constantly searching for ‘situational belief’ in his work. For him, religion and ritual are ways in which people create intimate relationships with ‘the non-empirical other’, based on the need to pragmatically cope with everyday problems.¹⁰⁸ However, I can also refer to the dominant perspective of coping and resilience in the disaster ritual discourse that we have seen above.

¹⁰⁶ HUIZINGA: *Homo ludens* 13.

¹⁰⁷ P. POST: ‘Lopen met een missie: Mapping the field’, in P. POST & S. VAN DER BEEK (eds.): *Onderweg met een missie. Verkenning van de opkomende trend om te lopen, fietsen, pelgrimeren met een missie of een goed doel* (= Camino Cahier 1) (Utrecht 2017) 11-21. Cf. <http://www.caminoacademie.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Camino-cahier-1-Post.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ M. STRINGER: *Contemporary Western ethnography and the definition of religion* (London/New York 2008) 113s.

Hence, we have a paradox here. The question becomes – How ‘hard’ is this contradiction? Is there an unbridgeable gap, a real ‘trap’, or are there ways ‘to bridge the gap’? Do both views on ritual exclude one another? Or can we see them as perspectives, as complementary approaches? Can ritual be such a powerful coping instrument precisely because of its special useless character? And the other way around – Does uselessness shed light precisely because of the coping dimension as the ultimate surrender to ‘the non-empirical other’? The key would then lie in the fact that both perspectives represent different sides of the same coin – both perspectives belong together in ritual. For rituals and disasters, this means that we do not do any justice to ritual by considering it purely and simply as an instrument to be used in a trauma or resilience strategy or by separating it from the complex action repertoire during a tragedy or crisis.

8. THE COMPLEXITY OF DISASTER RITUALS ILLUSTRATED BY THE EBOLA EPIDEMIC

By speaking of disaster rituals, we can create the impression that we have a clearly defined repertoire. It should already be clear that this is certainly not the case. We came to an open approach to ‘disaster ritual’ that includes the ‘traditional’ recognizable disaster rituals but also the more diffuse practices that have a ritual dimension. We also pointed out all sorts of relevant related repertoires. However, there is more. A disaster or tragedy is connected to a complex set of ritual contexts. Not all of them can be seen as ritual acts that are directly linked to a disaster or tragedy. Still, such a broad ritual context, together with cultural, political, economic, medical, and other settings, does play a role and must be taken into account when we study disaster rituals. To illustrate this ritual complexity and contextuality, I briefly elaborate using the Ebola epidemic as an example.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ A. MANGUVO & B. MAFUVADZE: ‘The impact of traditional and religious practices on the spread of Ebola in West Africa. Time for a strategic shift’, in *The pan African medical Journal* 22, suppl. 1 (2015) via <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4709130/> [last accessed September 2019]; J.J. SHAH: ‘The dead bodies of West African Ebola epidemic. Understanding the importance of traditional burial practices’, in *Inquiries Journal* 7/11 (2015) 1-4 via <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1300/the-dead-bodies-of-the-west-african-ebola-epidemic-understanding-the-importance-of-traditional-burial-practices> [last accessed September 2019]; A. MAXMEM: ‘How the fight

Ebola is an extremely contagious, often fatal, viral disease that was discovered and named in 1976 during a second major outbreak (after an earlier one in Sudan) in the former Zaire, now Democratic Republic Congo (named after the Ebola river in this country). This outbreak was followed by regional outbreaks in Central and West Africa, with major outliers during the 2014-2016 (West Africa) and 2018-2019 (Northeastern Congo) periods. Contamination occurs through physical contact. Bats are probably an important source of the virus and the spread occurs through the consumption of all kinds of infected animals. As I edit this chapter (March 2021), the Kivu region in northeastern Congo is being hit by a twelfth outbreak and there are also new cases in Guinea.

Despite all local and regional accents, we can see a general picture of the African Ebola outbreaks. They often occur in regions with a lot of unrest. For example, more than one hundred armed groups operate in Kivu. They often occur in a border region that has a lot of trade and family traffic, as well as in regions that have political instability and a weak health care structure. The care (detection, prevention, coping) surrounding the Ebola epidemic outbreaks is in the hands of people from outside of the regions in which the outbreaks occur, which, in turn, gives rise to suspicion, distrust, and often hostility. All kinds of rumors are going around – there are conspiracy theories, medical centers are being attacked, doctors and nursing staff are being attacked or killed. Just like with the HIV/AIDS campaigns, vaccination attempts are frustrated by suggestions that they want to make people infertile. The biggest problem

against Ebola tested a culture's traditions', in *National Geographic*, 30 January 2015, via <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/01/150130-ebola-virus-outbreak-epidemic-sierra-leone-funerals/> [last accessed September 2019]; M.F. JALLOH [et al.]: 'National survey of Ebola-related knowledge, attitudes and practices before the outbreak peak in Sierra Leone, Aug. 2014', in *BMJ Global Health* (December 2017) 1-10, via <https://gh.bmj.com/content/bmjgh/2/4/e000285.full.pdf> [last accessed September 2019]; 'Cultural effects of the Ebola crisis,' in *Wikipedia*, via https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_effects_of_the_Ebola_crisis [last accessed September 2019]; cf. de protocols from the World Health Organization: *New WHO safe and dignified burial protocol – key to reducing Ebola transmission*, 7 November 2014, via <https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2014/ebola-burial-protocol/en/> [last accessed September 2019]; *How to conduct safe and dignified burial of a patient who had died from suspected or confirmed Ebola or Marburg virus disease*, October 2017, via https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/137379/WHO_EVD_GUIDANCE_Burials_14.2_eng.pdf?jsessionid=A44DB6E1EEFB087F50C3F5E3BB0A3E33?sequence=1 [last accessed September 2019]. Furthermore, I used information provided by Dr. Simon Simonse, Kenya (April 2018).

is to separate the dying and the dead from the community. People keep silent, hiding the sick and dead community members. It is clear that Ebola can be not only a health issue but an issue in which it is crucial to involve cultural and ritual aspects. Research now shows how enormously complex that cultural, religious, and ritual context is. There is a great deal of social, cultural, and religious diversity and stratification.

If we zoom in on the ritual context, four domains come into the picture during an outbreak, explained below.

1. First, there is the *cause* of the epidemic. Dealing with the causation relates to the ideas and practices concerning disease and death as well as calamity in general. Complex representations, explanations, and rituals play a role here. Natural and metaphysical statements and explanations go hand-in-hand. Witchcraft is mentioned, punishment of spirits and gods, displeased ancestors (“they are angry”), broken taboos or rules, transgressions of all kinds.
2. These explanatory representations then lead to all sorts of practices that are aimed at tackling and preventing further disasters as well as at *restoring order*. After an outbreak, there is often an increase in witchcraft allegations and poisonings and scapegoats are sought and found. Evil spirits are banned, curses and incantations are embedded into the standard repertoire, cursing the enemy, the disease, the evil spirits, the supposed disaster-makers (often outsiders). Sacrifice rituals play an important role here, just like all kinds of cleansing rituals. Parallel to what we have mentioned in our historical opening, anthropologists here speak of reparation rituals. It is important to note that these ritual practices are extremely layered. They may be connected to institutional religions, such as Christianity and Islam (in all sorts of variants), but, at the same time, there is also the role of indigenous knowledge and local tribal rites and there are all sorts of secret societies with their own ceremonies and ritual experts.
3. Apart from the more collective responses just described, more individualized *healing* practices are a third ritual domain. Here, we must also discern between indigenous healing practices and Western-based medical curing practices. Traditional medicine and spiritual healers play an important role. Here, medically necessary behavior clashes with ritual praxis that contribute to the contamination and spread of the deadly virus. Sharing of all kinds of drinks and herbs, laying on of hands, and bathing are at odds with the requested isolation of the sick and dying.

4. This applies even more to the fourth domain, that of *burial* and funeral practices. Most new infections come from the washing and touching of dead bodies. Such touching of the body has a great ritual value for the people – it shows respect and honor to the deceased and plays a role in transferring this power. In West Africa, it is also customary to lie on the dead body for these purposes. Burial rites are part of an extensive ritual process that, in turn, is connected to the prosperity of the community. A good harvest depends on good death rites.

These deeply anchored ritual practices make it difficult to adequately combat the Ebola epidemic, especially if we include the social, political, and cultural contexts. There is more at stake here than a simple ‘science versus culture’ conflict. The ‘discovery’ of this ritual complexity of contexts can lead to a massive vision of the immutability of rituals. Although it is often very difficult to observe, especially in crisis situations, rituals can be changed, skipped, or adapted – they can even be replaced by other rituals. Dynamics and transformations are key features of rituals. Traditional ritual experts can be in charge of adjusting rituals and, in both Christianity and Islam, there is a tradition of being careful with dead bodies.

I elaborated on the Ebola case to indicate the tangle of rituals around a disaster that is embedded in an extremely complex and layered context. It also demonstrates, once again, how difficult it is to speak of a specific ‘disaster ritual’. Many ritual practices constitute standard rituals in the event of illness, death, calamity, and setback or rituals for dealing with enemies and evil powers. However, there is more that directly relates to our book project. The complexity also involves changes in perspective. One could also study the ritual practices of nurses and doctors. Medical routines have rightly been described as ritual acts,¹¹⁰ and many foreign aid workers have a Christian background – thus bringing in their own rites and myths that play a role in this crisis situation.

Another often forgotten complicating aspect is the presence and *absence* of ritual.¹¹¹ In the Ebola situation, there is, as we have seen, a

¹¹⁰ W.R. NOONAN: ‘Western hospitalization for surgery as “rite of passage”’, in M.B. AUNE & V. DEMARINIS (eds.): *Religious and social ritual. Interdisciplinary explorations* (New York 1996) 293-313.

¹¹¹ POST & HOONDERT (eds.): *Absent ritual*.

lot of ritual that should be absent. But a more general ritual can never be taken for granted – not even disaster ritual. Not all disasters, tragedies and crises are commemorated. For example, I could not find out whether the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa is being commemorated in Guinea, Sierra Leone, or Liberia with monuments or commemorations. Often, nothing or hardly anything reminds us of a disaster. Foote's work, *Shadowed ground* (see Subsection 5.3.), provides many examples of the often contingent cycle of disaster rituals and memorials.¹¹² For example, there is little reminder of the disaster in the Neos Valley in Cameroon, where 1,746 people died in 1986 (the people in the valley suffocated but what exactly happened at the lake remains uncertain; the dominant theory sees a sudden emission of a large cloud of CO₂ due to a landslide, although volcanic eruptions and conspiracy theories are also proposed). Frank Westerman, who meticulously reconstructed and described the disaster, found only a pillar with a board in a cemetery to commemorate it, with the barely legible text: "In memory of all who died in the Neos disaster."¹¹³ By coincidence, Westerman came across a phenomenon that we often see after a disaster: contact between different events. In this case, there was contact between Neos and Oklahoma City, where, prior to 9/11, the deadliest attack in the United States took place in 1995 with 168 victims. On the fifth memorial ceremony, a memorial tree was planted in Oklahoma City for both tragedies.¹¹⁴

9. AMBIGUITIES AND AMBIVALENCES

In the case of disaster ritual, it is especially important to consider the ambivalences of ritual.¹¹⁵ It is important to see that ritual is not a static repertoire of actions but is characterized by a dynamic interplay of often paradoxical perspectives. This is especially relevant in the context of a

¹¹² FOOTE: *Shadowed ground*.

¹¹³ F. WESTERMAN: *Stikvallei* (Amsterdam 2013) 264.

¹¹⁴ WESTERMAN: *Stikvallei* 250s.

¹¹⁵ P. POST: 'Gezocht verband. Een verkenning van nieuw opkomende rituelen', in S. GÄRTNER [et al.] (eds.): *Bandeloos? Zoeken naar samenzijn in een individualistische cultuur* (Nijmegen 2005) 82-97; IDEM: 'Evenwicht en troost. Een plaatsbepaling van Heiloo in het actuele ritueel-liturgische milieu', in P. POST & K. SCHUURMANS (eds.): *Op bedevaart in Nederland. Betekenis en toekomst van de regionale bedevaart* (= Meander 8) (Kampen 2006) 109-127.

disaster or tragedy – an event with an ambiguous character, where hope and fear, salvation and despair, crying and silence, action and apathy often alternate. Without being exhaustive, I mention here some important ambiguities and ambivalences.

- Tradition and renewal: Ritual is linked to tradition, stands for invariance; however, ritual can also emerge and be newly created and invented; in some cases traditional ritual has to be suspended or replaced by new ritual.
- Hot and cold: Ritual is connected with emotion, with empathy; it gives ‘a good feeling’, is like a warm bath, which can result in excessive sentiment and kitsch; also, ritual is connected with critical reason, with sobriety, with distance, and thus gives support when emotions tend to dominate.
- Individual and collective: Ritual is concerned with the individual, it is about *this* dead person, *this* sick person, *this* next of kin; the person is addressed; at the same time, ritual is connected with community, with collectivity, and has a general, collective tone.
- Private and public: Much ritual repertoire belongs to the domestic domain, the small rites of one’s own house and garden, birthdays, the daily small rites of life; at the same time, ritual is part of the public domain, the festivals and commemorations, the spontaneous monuments after a disaster or accident, the silent marches on streets and squares.
- Large and small: Rituals are often immediately linked to ceremonies, feast and festival, and big events but, in addition to such grand rituals, there are a lot of small rituals – meals that are cherished at the weekend, a candle for a photo of a deceased loved one, a lucky stone in your bag.
- Ideal and reality: Every ritual performance wants to reach a certain standard, however, this ideal is not always achieved; reality is often different, less high-standard; the media play an important role in that process of idealization but not all rites are meant to be broadcast on TV.
- Success and failure:¹¹⁶ This ambivalence is directly related to the previous one – ritual is not always beautiful, good, adequate, and successful; ritual can also fail, can completely or partially go wrong; the causes for this can vary and include poor preparation, poor execution, bad atmosphere, inauthenticity, etc.

¹¹⁶ U. HÜSKEN (ed.): *When rituals go wrong. Mistakes, failure, and the dynamics of ritual* (= Numen Books: Studies in the History of Religions) (Leiden 2007).

- Symbolic and diabolic: Akin to success and failure but just a bit different is the ambivalence that related to ritual being both symbolic and diabolic; ritual can express hope, compassion, and perspective but can also express and legitimate injustice, hate, and discrimination.
- Present and absent: In a recent book on absent ritual, we stated in the introduction:

Absent ritual is always accompanied by ambivalence. It plays a role especially in situations in which there are all kinds of hindrances to ritual presence that occur in rituals associated with disasters, tragedies, atrocities, and more generally with practices of memorialization and victimhood. To a large degree, it is also relative in nature, i.e., absent ritual is closely related to all kinds of forms of actual ritual.¹¹⁷

- Useful and useless: Ritual helps people cope with problems and crises but is also regarded as non-instrumental, non-therapeutic – as acting just for fun without any preset function or effect (see elaboration in Section 7).

I leave it at this set of ambivalences. My argument is that ambivalences belong to the nature of ritual as well as to the current society and culture. It is not so much a matter of finding a balance and or of resolving these – but of living with them.

In addition to this general overview of ambiguity of rituals, I finally evoke ritual ambiguity in a direct relationship with disaster ritual. It returns as a characteristic and determining element of disaster ritual in many chapters. Here, I provide a short overview of some topical ambivalences of disaster ritual.

Always good and present?

First of all, there is the ambivalence that applies to all ritual actions but often plays a more specific role in tragedy or disaster. Is ritual always good? Does ritual always have to be there? In ritual studies and trauma studies, there is increasingly the insight that ritual is not always good and that it does not always have to be there. We have already mentioned the necessary absence of certain death rites in connection with the Ebola epidemic and have already referred to the explorations on absent ritual.¹¹⁸ Absence of ritual acting is not always bad. This ambiguity of presence and absence also affects what we have said about the useful/useless trap (Section 7).

¹¹⁷ POST & HOONDEERT: *Absent ritual*, 4.

¹¹⁸ POST & HOONDEERT: *Absent ritual*.

Public/private

A constant tension – especially in the case of a disaster ritual that has an often-strong public dimension – is one between the public character of ritual, on the one hand, and the private setting, on the other. We constantly see this ambivalence in rituals that follow a disaster or tragedy. Ideally (but again, what is ideal here?), public collective ceremonies go hand-in-hand with private rituals in a small circle. In addition to a collective memorial service, there is also a funeral or cremation service in a small circle of family and friends. However, sometimes relatives consciously refrain from participating in the collective celebrations. On the other hand, there are examples that see relatives assume that even an individual's funeral or cremation services are in the hands of public authorities.

Tradition/new forms

The combination – sometimes harmonious, sometimes confronting – between existing, traditional ritual forms, on the one hand, and new forms, on the other hand, is another well-known ambiguity in disaster rituals. When it comes to traditional rituals, one can think of institutional religious rituals in terms of form and location (churches). New ritual forms involve the input of current poetry, popular music, and often new locations – such as stadiums, or public domains, like parks and squares, or event locations.

Victims/perpetrators

In the case of attacks or tragedies with identified perpetrators, it remains controversial whether and how those perpetrators should and can have a place in the rituals. The aspect of the passing of time appears to be very relative here. In the case of World War II and Holocaust memorial rites, it still seems problematic to give Germans a role.

Ambiguous loss

Finally, I mention a very important and topical ambiguity, where the ambivalence of a ritual directly coincides with that of a tragedy. It concerns what is labeled as 'ambiguous loss' in the grief and loss literature. Following Pauline Boss, one can distinguish a complicated type of grief when loved ones

disappear.¹¹⁹ This type of loss first came into the picture in the 1970s in relation to the families of pilots who were missing in action (MIA) in Southeast Asia (Vietnam War). Shot, but dead? This form of loss without a solution or closure often returns with disasters and tragedies. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, there are people who are still missing – of whom no trace has been found. The Malaysian Boeing 777 MH370 is still missing, along with the 239 people it had on board (and, as always in this case, the wildest stories and theories are circulating regarding what had happened). Two types of ambiguous loss are now distinguished: leaving without saying goodbye – physical absence with psychological presence (war situations with missing persons, natural disasters with missing people, kidnappings, etc.) – and saying goodbye without leaving – psychological absence with physical presence (in the case of dementia, Alzheimer’s disease). In all these cases, ritual is often problematic. Usually, the traditional repertoires of death rites are not in place for such cases, there is no dead body and even death itself is uncertain. Such situations are often experienced as very ambivalent. One feels that rituals, such as memorial rites, can help as a form of closure but, at the same time, such rituals are often experienced as a lack of hope that the missing person may still be alive. Designing one’s own modest ritual in a small circle of family and friends seems to be an appropriate option here.¹²⁰

10. AND FROM ALL THIS: OUR WORKING DEFINITIONS, PARAMETERS, AND PERSPECTIVES

I now take stock based on the historiographical and conceptual explorations presented above and translate them into an outline of this disaster ritual handbook project.

10.1. Perspective: ritual practices

First and foremost, we (I now explicitly include the other editors of this handbook) adopt an important point of departure from Perry

¹¹⁹ P. BOSS: ‘Ambiguous loss theory: challenges for scholars and practitioners’, in *Family Relations* 56 (2007) 105-11; P. BOSS & J.R. YEATS: ‘Ambiguous loss. A complicated type of grief when loved ones disappear’, in *Cruse Bereavement Care* 33/2 (2014) 63-69.

¹²⁰ See the role of family rituals and traditions proposed by BOSS & YEATS: ‘Ambiguous loss’ 67. See also the case of the missing boat Warnow with three persons in 2013 described in H. STEKETEE: *De Warnow* (Amsterdam/Antwerpen 2019) 257-260; 299; memorial rituals: 274-288.

– namely, that the reflection and delineation of a concept is directly related to its perspective and purpose. In that respect, defining a concept is ‘usage based’. In our case, this is a ritual studies project. This perspective can also guide the description and definition of disaster. In practice, this can be done using ritual repertoires as a parameter. If, after a number of events, the same set of rituals – i.e., the same repertoire – can be seen, then this can be a reason to take those events together and form a cluster. This brings us to the use of a broad cluster indication of the phenomena for which we see a more or less shared ritual repertoire. We find exactly that perspective in our exploration of studies on disaster and ritual. Consequently, we see a convergence between a series of events, such as disasters, tragedies, attacks, and so on, and a ritual repertoire with a series of recurring elements, such as diffuse grassroots rituals (with lights, flowers, stuffed animals), collective public commemorations, public funerals and death rituals, commemoration culture with monuments and museums, etc.

10.2. A (working) description of disaster

After our explorations, we propose the following cluster terminology: “Disasters and crises, tragedies and catastrophes, atrocities and violence.” We can ‘dress up’ this cluster label as follows while we also review and adjust some central parameters:

- The *event and sudden* aspect is relative. A disaster, crisis, tragedy, etc. can also develop slowly and can be diffuse or part of a continuum. The central question is whether or not there is a limit here – How much specificity is needed? Genocides can extend over a longer period of time; for instance, the refugee crisis, the sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church, abuse of power by the police: they all have a continuum in time and place.
- The *ritual perspective* can be decisive. If all other events and cases are roughly similar in terms of ritual repertoires, then the abuse of power category also seems to have a separate status in terms of ritual.
- The distinction between *natural and man-made* also becomes increasingly relative and diffuse. A good example is the theme of climate change. Therefore, it does not play a distinctive or delimiting role in our designation and parade of categories, but it does play a role in mapping the field (see Subsection 10.3. below).

- An important point for debate and reflection is the relationship between *individual and collective* – and thus also *private and public* – dimensions of disaster and ritual. Here, earlier assumptions are also put into perspective. For example, we saw that if we start from an impact-oriented description of a disaster, then there could very well be an individual case, the murder of one individual, the suicide of a hero or celebrity, that has a large collective and public impact. From the perspective of ritual response, there are both individual and collective public rituals. In disaster research, we generally see all the attention given paid to collective and public rituals. However, it may be interesting to include individual psychological and medical trauma studies into disaster studies with a ritual focus.
- We have already discussed the *agent/event*-oriented and *impact*-oriented opposition (see Section 3). Both come into the picture as denominators, however, the impact-oriented one appears to be the most decisive, especially when we take ritual repertoire as a perspective.
- The ‘traditional’ dominant impact factor of *disruption of the social system* also requires nuance and relativity. After all, there is often a system-transcending impact. From our ritual perspective, the social impact dimension can also take a ritual form: a tragic, disastrous event evokes the ritual expression of all kinds of feelings, experiences, and emotions. Hence, the impact factor is a dominant qualifier for a disaster in a threefold manner:
 - the event or situation causes large disruption to a society or group;
 - it evokes collective public reaction with expression of mourning, compassion, indignation, protest, call for justice, recovery, reconciliation, and consolation; and
 - it evokes ways to give the event a place through narratives, symbols, rituals, and cultural practices that have a ritual dimension.
- We basically focus on *post-disaster* rituals, without excluding rituals before and during a disaster. We already referred to the concept of ‘anticipatory’ disaster rituals, introduced in Chapter 34 by Suzanne van der Beek, and the special position of ‘slow’ disasters.

10.3. A tentative classification of disastrous events

Every academic research project requires a phase of organization and classification of the material. When it comes to disasters and crises,

tragedies and catastrophes, the following typology or pragmatic classification is used:

- nature (hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, etc.) and epidemics/pandemics;
- accidents, attacks and shootings, and violence;
- forced migration crises (refugee crises);
- genocides; and
- ‘slow/diffuse disasters’, crises:
 - food crisis;
 - (large-scale) abuse of power;
 - climate change;
 - persistent (political) violence.

10.4. Classifications of disaster rituals

There are numerous classifications of rituals in circulation into which disaster rituals can be situated, sometimes as a separate category. A good example of the latter is the classification by Catherine Bell, which distinguishes six types or genres:¹²¹ rites of passage, calendrical rites, rites of exchange and communion, rites of affliction (“they attempt to rectify a state of affairs that has been disturbed or disordered; they heal, exorcise, protect, and purify”¹²²), feasting, fasting, festivals, and political rites. Gerard Lukken uses a basic three-way division: crisis rituals, cyclic rituals, and rites of passage.¹²³ Other distinctions relevant to disaster rituals are the previously mentioned rituals before, during, and after an event; individual and collective rites; and offline and online rituals (and all kinds of interferences of both).

I separately mention the division into ritual manifestations, which is tailored to crises and is, for example, topical in terms of the ordering of the ritual dynamics in times of COVID-19. I then make the following distinctions, described below.

There is the *crisis ritual* that is directly linked to *traditionally available ritual* repertoires. This can be a general ritual in which a crisis is given a place or a special crisis ritual, such as the silent march manifestations in the Netherlands or specific crisis rituals or vigils elsewhere. In addition,

¹²¹ BELL: *Ritual, perspectives and dimensions* 91-137.

¹²² BELL: *Ritual, perspectives and dimensions* 115.

¹²³ LUKKEN: *Rituals in abundance* 124-131.

there is *absent ritual*. This can be a ritual that is completely absent due to the crisis, cannot be there, or is partly absent – a defective and affected ritual. Then, partly related to absent ritual, there is also ritual that has been *evoked and provoked* by a crisis situation. This may be a *postponed* ritual, which is a much-occurring crisis ritual form, or a *vicarious or replaced* ritual (a rite that takes the place of a ritual repertoire that cannot be there), or a *transferred* ritual (e.g., a ritual that cannot take place indoors now takes place outdoors), or an *adapted* ritual (a ritual that adapts to a situation; certain actions are forced to be omitted or adapted). Finally, there is also the *new emerging ritual*.

10.5. A selection of themes as lenses

Finally, in the third part of this handbook, we use a series of themes as lenses in order to take a closer look at disaster ritual. In our view, these are urgent, relevant, and topical topics that show both the specific character of disaster ritual and its impact. We underline that the final selection was made using intuition and was guided by our explorations through the cases and the literature. We selected:

- state apologies;
- relics, traces and remnants;
- disaster theatre;
- media (re)presentation;
- e-rituals;
- mobile media;
- children and disaster rituals.

PART I
GENERAL PERSPECTIVES

DISASTER STUDIES: PERSPECTIVES BETWEEN NATURE AND RITUAL

GEORG FRERKS & DOROTHEA HILHORST

1. INTRODUCTION

Though people, governments, and individuals have since time immemorial been engaged in preventing and coping with disasters, the academic field of disaster studies and disaster management as a systematic and explicit endeavor is of relatively recent origin.¹ It started in the period after World War II and has since then been expanding in terms of size, academic development, and disciplinary and geographical focus.

This chapter will provide an overview of some major developments and issues in the field of disaster studies. It follows the journey of that field over the last half century. After a preliminary section on definitional issues, it will outline some major perspectives that can be distinguished in the field and that we consider significant. Though these have emerged in a somewhat chronological order, it has not been a linear development in the sense that they have replaced each other subsequently. The different perspectives can rather be recognized as different ‘traditions’ or ‘styles’ in the discipline of disaster studies. After a focus on the hazards of disasters, vulnerability, capacity, and resilience, we identify the current focus on disaster governance. In our concluding section we argue to put disaster back into context by paying attention to four aspects: the long-time disaster is in the making; the existence of disaster subcultures; the social constructed nature of disaster; and the everyday, ‘real’ practice of disaster response and governance.

As a preliminary remark we want to state that much of the literature in the field of disaster studies found its origin in real-life experiences with what was perhaps erroneously called ‘natural disaster’, though it was often

¹ This chapter is partly a compilation of the authors’ previous work on disasters and disaster management, and humanitarian aid. The chapter was written with support of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), as part of the VICI scheme project no. 453/14/013.

realized that these ‘natural disasters’ were often (co)created by human behavior.² Much of what follows was inspired by the literature and our own work on ‘natural disaster’, but several of the perspectives dealt with below can equally be used for other categories of disaster as well, including industrial accidents or disasters resulting from conflict and war.

2. THE NATURE AND SIZE OF DISASTERS

Disasters can be recognized more easily than they can be defined. In a 1997 review of definitions, Al-Madhari and Keller already enumerated twenty-seven different definitions of disaster.³ Their list could easily be expanded by dozens of others that have appeared since then. This variety of definitions emphasizes different aspects of disaster, taking as a point of departure technical, geographical, sociological, psychological, medical, economic, developmental, or administrative angles or combinations of those.⁴ The criteria to establish when a situation has reached disaster level also varies. Some argue that a situation is disastrous when the local capacity to deal with it falls short and external assistance is needed to cope with it. A more formal and institutional criterion requires that the authorities must have declared an emergency, while another takes the number of casualties or damage as a point of departure. It is hardly fruitful to look for the ‘only and true’ definition in view of the definitional diversity and contingent nature of disaster. As the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) articulated already a quarter of a century ago, “An emergency cannot be defined as an absolute set of conditions”.⁵

We propose to identify some key elements that are usually present in disaster definitions. We can therefore say that a disaster is:

- An extreme phenomenon;
- Of great intensity and varying endurance (some ‘sudden impact’, others ‘creeping’);

² Cf. Paul Post in the Introduction to this handbook, p. 45.

³ A.F. AL-MADHARI & A.Z. KELLER: ‘Review of disaster definitions’, in *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* 12/1 (March 1997) 17-21.

⁴ For some examples, see G. FRERKS, D. HILHORST & A. MOREYRA: *Natural disasters. A framework for analysis and action, Report for MSF-Holland* (Wageningen 1999).

⁵ INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES: *World Disasters Report 1996* (Geneva 1996) 39.

- Occurring at a certain location or sometimes more wide-spread, affecting whole regions or countries;
- Involving a complex interplay between physical and human systems;
- Causing loss of life and threats to public health as well as physical damage and disruption of livelihood systems and society at large;
- Outstripping local capacities and resources;
- Requiring outside assistance to cope with.

This list is sufficient as a first orientation, though a more detailed and nuanced discussion is possible about all of these elements.

Disasters affect millions of people every year. In many parts of the world, disaster has rendered daily life in a protracted or even (semi-) permanent crisis exacerbated by political and institutional fragility. Disasters affect livelihoods and agricultural production – already weakened by demographic pressures, climate change, ecological deterioration, economic decline, and conflict – and can contribute to factors that undermine societal stability and peace.

The number of people affected and the damage caused by a disaster do of course fluctuate over the years. The World Disasters Report based on the EM-DAT (Emergency Events Database) of Louvain University reports that in the period 2008-2017 3751 disasters were reported, affecting over two billion people and causing a damage of US\$ 1,658 billion.⁶ Over eighteen million people were displaced by disaster.⁷ The majority of these disasters are weather-related (especially floods) and hence may be sensitive to the effects of climate change. 40% of the total number of disasters occur in Asia and more generally in lower-middle income countries.⁸

Whereas disasters were in the past viewed as extraordinary events deviating from normality, rare ‘acts of god’ or ‘acts of nature’ that hit us from outside, their sheer number and impact have propelled a reconsideration of these notions. As elaborated below in this chapter, we argue that disasters should not be deemed exceptional and need to be seen as part of ‘normal, daily life’ for most of those affected by them. Similarly,

⁶ INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES: *World Disasters Report 2018. Leaving no one behind* (Geneva 2018) 168.

⁷ INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES: *World Disasters Report 2018* 182-183.

⁸ INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES: *World Disasters Report 2018* 177, 179.

we will argue that disasters are in effect not ‘natural’ phenomena, but as much produced by human activity and politics as triggered by natural causes.

After this first delimitation and description of our subject, we now embark on the journey of disaster studies through the last half century and first look into the origin of the discipline.

3. THE ORIGIN OF DISASTER STUDIES: THE NATURALIST-PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

Disaster studies as an academic discipline and practice emerged in the United States in response to real-world events and demands from the policy world. For some time, it had a rather applied and policy-driven focus, but nonetheless important academic efforts were made to systematize and develop knowledge in the field. The founding fathers of the discipline, Gilbert White and Enrico Quarantelli, were working at the University of Colorado, Boulder and the University of Delaware, where they established the Natural Hazards Centre and the Disaster Research Centre, respectively.

In the United States it took a long time before serious public engagement with disaster took effect. As Dyson states, “laissez-faire ideology wove easily into fatalistic strands of American theology that preached that disasters were ‘acts of God’ that no government could foresee or prevent. (...) Laissez-faire appeals to the provenance of the market held in check challenges to corporate power and building codes, even when greed and negligence were clearly the source of disaster”.⁹ Most federal legislation and efforts limited themselves to disaster relief. However, in the 1930s the Tennessee Valley Authority came into being with the partial aim to reduce flooding, while “the Flood Control Act of 1934 granted greater authority to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to design and craft flood-control projects”.¹⁰

Disaster management originally focused on the hazards or natural agents that lay at the root of the disasters and tried to mediate these by mainly technocratic, planning or infrastructural solutions and measures by public agencies such as the US Army Corps of Engineers and, since

⁹ M.E. DYSON: *Come hell or high water. Hurricane Katrina and the color of disaster* (New York 2007) 38.

¹⁰ DYSON: *Come hell or high water* 51.

1979, the often-criticized Federal Emergency Management Agency FEMA.¹¹ In those early years there was an emphasis on constructing levees and dams and zoning policies rather than seeking to implement behavioral change or addressing the root causes of vulnerability, as emerged as a disaster policy in the 1990s. In the conceptualization of disaster, the natural hazard or agent took a prime place and remedies were sought through technocratic and managerial measures that were implemented in a centralistic, top-down, and military-style manner, often with the involvement of the Department of Defense.

In the 1970s and 1980s the discipline and policy practice started to change and also spread outside the United States to various applied and academic centers around the world. It also experienced a shift in focus: from what was initially a more natural science and hazard orientation to including a social-science perspective with attention to the human context and the affected populations. Still later it increasingly adopted a more explicit anthropological and ethnographic focus as well as a more critical stance vis-à-vis governmental policy. Overall, disaster studies witnessed paradigmatic shifts in line with developments in the broader social sciences. The sections below will discuss some of these changes in larger detail.

4. THE VULNERABILITY PERSPECTIVE

The vulnerability perspective came into being in the 1980s as a reaction to the rather apolitical and technical disaster approaches developed in the previous decades largely in the United States. The emphasis on vulnerability was associated with a shift from seeing disaster as an event caused by an external natural agent to a more sociologically oriented interpretation of disaster as a complex, socially (as well as politically, environmentally and economically) constructed process. This view was promoted by, among others, Wisner et al. in their well-known disaster pressure and release model depicting the progression of vulnerability.¹² The pressure-and-release model shows the structural causes, dynamic processes and unsafe conditions that produce vulnerability. Natural hazards

¹¹ For an overview, see C.B. RUBIN (ed.): *Emergency management. The American experience 1900-2010* (Boca Raton 2012²).

¹² B. WISNER, P. BLAIKIE, T. CANNON & I. DAVIS: *At risk. Natural hazards, people's vulnerability and disasters* (London/New York 2004²) 51.

and triggers put pressure on these conditions in such a way such that the vulnerabilities are 'released'. The vulnerable are caught between structural conditions and incidental shocks, like a nut between the two legs of a nutcracker. Vulnerability is seen by Wisner et al. as

the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard (an extreme natural event or process). It involves a combination of factors that determine the degree to which someone's life, livelihood, property and other assets are put at risk by a discrete and identifiable event (or series or 'cascades' of such events) in nature and in society.¹³

The risk of being exposed to disaster had become recognized as a product of hazard and vulnerability, as expressed by Wisner et al. in the pseudo-formula $R = H \times V$.¹⁴ Vulnerability was seen in turn as actively created by factors such as bad governance, bad development practice and political and military destabilization. Vulnerability, therefore, was not a given, but an outcome, a product of a particular economic, social, and political context.

The great advantage of the idea of vulnerability is that it emphasizes a larger array of non-technical factors and more easily enabled policy intervention. Whereas it might have seemed difficult or even nearly impossible in many circumstances to reduce risk by influencing the underlying hazard, vulnerability as the resultant of socio-economic and political processes was more conducive to policy action. This was especially the case as vulnerability became increasingly associated with its opposite: namely, the element of capacity engendered in individuals, groups, and local communities to cope with crisis, which also provided a suitable point of entry for disaster reduction. To this aspect we shall pay further attention below in the section dealing with the agential perspective.

Examples of vulnerability as the resultant of socio-economic and political processes can be found in the classical work *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen.¹⁵ He argued that famines can be better explained with reference to

¹³ WISNER, BLAIKIE, CANNON & DAVIS: *At Risk* 11.

¹⁴ R=Risk, H=Hazard, V=Vulnerability

¹⁵ A. SEN: *Poverty and famines. An essay on entitlement and deprivation* (Oxford 1981).

government policy and economic data than by rain figures or food availability decline. Sen introduced the idea of food entitlements, combining an economic and political approach. Similarly, floods and landslides are the result of deforestation on hill slopes by farmers pushed upstream by commercial mono-cropping agriculture or the outright plunder of the rainforest by commercial interests or warlords. The disasters following hurricane Mitch (1998, Central America) have been attributed to marginal settlements being pushed into high-risk areas by uncontrolled urban sprawl and speculative land markets as well as the expansion of the agricultural frontier.¹⁶

Not surprisingly, David Alexander, in an overview article about the state of disaster studies on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the journal *Disasters* in 1997, asserted that the emergence of the notion of vulnerability was one of the most salient achievements in the field of disaster studies during the last decades.¹⁷ It convincingly did away with the notion of disaster as a natural phenomenon, as Alexander observed: “it is now widely recognised that ‘natural disaster’ is a convenience term that amounts to a misnomer. Neither disasters nor the conditions that give rise to them are undeniably natural”.¹⁸

The vulnerability approach also called into question earlier, ill-conceived ideas of ‘normality’ and ‘abnormality’ that pervaded much thinking about disaster. Disaster often used to be seen as an abnormality or an aberration from a linear path of progress rather than a chronic condition as much caused by development as impinging on it. As Oliver-Smith observes,

disasters in general are portrayed as non-routine, destabilizing, causing uncertainty, disorder and socio-cultural collapse. In such descriptions there is clearly an emphasis on distinguishing disasters from ordinary, everyday realities that are characterized explicitly and implicitly as possessing a higher degree of predictability. (...) Such an assumption dangerously ignores that most disasters are ultimately explainable in terms of the normal order.¹⁹

¹⁶ F. GRUNEWALD, V. DE GEOFFROY & S. LISTER: *NGO Responses to hurricane mitch. Evaluations for accountability and learning* (= HPN Network Paper 34) (2000).

¹⁷ D. ALEXANDER: ‘The study of natural disasters, 1977-1997. Some reflections on a changing field of knowledge’, in *Disasters* 21/4 (1997) 283-304.

¹⁸ ALEXANDER: ‘The study of natural disasters’ 289.

¹⁹ A. OLIVER-SMITH: ‘Peru’s five-hundred-year earthquake: Vulnerability in historical context’, in A. OLIVER-SMITH & S.M. Hoffman (eds.): *The angry earth. Disaster in anthropological perspective* (London 1999) 23.

Lavell, for example, showed that in the Lower Lempa River Valley Project in El Salvador ‘disaster risk’ became combined with ‘lifestyle’ or ‘everyday’ risk, stating that “the sum of their permanent living conditions signify that the poor or destitute live under permanent conditions of disaster”.²⁰ An important policy implication was the emphasis put on reducing everyday risk and vulnerability as a significant contribution to disaster risk reduction. “Vulnerability to disasters and lifestyle vulnerability are part of the same package and must be tackled together in the search to reduce overall human insecurity or risk.”²¹

As the UNDP’s Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery Disaster Risk Index reveals, disasters hit poor people disproportionately (BCPR 2004). The poor not only have less means to recover from disasters, a disaster often pushes them back into poverty, which makes them again more vulnerable to the next disaster.²² It can be concluded that the concept of vulnerability has put structural issues center stage in disaster analysis, thereby emphasizing how disaster is intertwined with everyday risks propelled by ongoing, ‘normal’ socio-economic and political societal processes. It calls into question both the natural character and exceptionalism of disaster.

While the vulnerability approach was widely adopted in the world of development and disaster in the 1990s, one criticism points out that it victimizes and disempowers people by over-emphasizing the weaknesses and victimcy of disaster-affected populations. It engenders a fatalistic and passive outlook and takes away the agency from people, thereby creating external dependency and passivity instead of empowering them. In effect, vulnerability is externally attributed to groups of people, who rarely label themselves as vulnerable.

5. THE AGENTIAL PERSPECTIVE – LOOKING AT CAPACITIES AND RESILIENCE

Already during the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) of 1990-2000 the prevailing disaster paradigms were critically discussed. The dominant disaster management model was deemed too technocratic and being characterized by top-down management.

²⁰ A. LAVELL: ‘The lower Lempa river valley, El Salvador. Risk reduction and development project’, in G. BANKOFF, G. FRERKS & D. HILHORST (eds.): *Mapping vulnerability. Disasters, development & people* (London 2004) 67-82, p. 72.

²¹ LAVELL: ‘The lower Lempa river valley’ 72.

²² M. HELMER & D. HILHORST: ‘Natural disasters and climate change’, in *Disasters* 30/1 (2006) 1-4.

The vulnerability approach, although it has the potential to activate and mobilize resistance, was nonetheless often seen as boxing affected communities into the role of victim.²³

More than a decade earlier Mary Anderson and Peter Woodrow had already stressed the capacities that disaster victims possess: “Disaster victims have important capacities that are not destroyed in a disaster. Outside aid to these victims must be provided in ways that recognize and support these capacities if it is to have a long-term effect. When relief assistance is given without recognition of these capacities, it can undermine and weaken them, leaving those whom it is intended to help even worse off than they were.”²⁴

Capacity refers to the actors’ skills, resources and strengths to help themselves and others. It was realized that more often than not in the wake of a disaster people are first helped by their immediate neighbors. The concept of capacity mediates the relative weight of people’s vulnerability and the associated idea that they are helplessly captured in suppressive systemic mechanisms. The emphasis on capacity takes into account people’s agency and recognizes their own practices to cope with disaster. Several tools have been developed in order to assess both people’s vulnerabilities and capacities. Terry Cannon, John Twigg, and Jennifer Rowell have made an inventory of over fifty instruments that deal with vulnerability and capacity aspects.²⁵

In the volume *Mapping Vulnerability, Disasters, Development & People*, the authors also drew attention to the agency of disaster survivors and their capacities.²⁶ To include this important element in the earlier mentioned pseudo-formula of Wisner et al., the volume proposed to read this as $R = H \times V / C$,²⁷ thereby including the element of capacity explicitly as part of the equation. The various authors showed how disasters

²³ BANKOFF, FRERKS & HILHORST: *Mapping vulnerability*.

²⁴ M. ANDERSON, P. WOODROW: *Rising from the ashes. Development strategies in times of disaster* (Boulder/San Francisco/Paris 1989) 136.

²⁵ T. CANNON, J. TWIGG & J. ROWELL: ‘Social vulnerability, sustainable livelihoods and disasters’, report to DFID Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance Department (CHAD) and Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office (2003). Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254398816_Social_Vulnerability_Sustainable_Livelihoods_and_Disasters [last accessed July 2021].

²⁶ BANKOFF, FRERKS & HILHORST: *Mapping vulnerability*.

²⁷ C = Capacity.

and disaster knowledge were historical and social constructions and the product of perceptions, social practices, and discourses.

From vulnerability and capacity to resilience

In recent years, resilience has rapidly become a mainstream notion in disaster studies. As with disaster itself, the definition of resilience has been subject to considerable debate. At the very least, resilience means the ability to survive and cope with a disaster with minimum impact and damage and to return to the original situation, reflecting the idea of equilibrium, as originally defined by the ecologist Crawford Holling.²⁸ This minimum definition was later expanded to include more social and institutional aspects and to give it a more dynamic and longer-term perspective. According to Susan Cutter et al., for example,

resilience refers to the ability of human systems to respond and to recover. It includes those inherent conditions that allow the system to absorb impacts and cope with the event, as well as post-event adaptive processes that facilitate the ability of the systems to recognize, change and learn in response to the event.²⁹

Fran Norris et al. define it as follows: “Resilience is

a process linking a set of adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation after a disturbance or adversity. Community resilience emerges from four primary sets of adaptive capacities – Economic Development, Social Capital, Information and Communication and Community Competence – that together provide a strategy for disaster readiness.³⁰

These definitions move beyond the systemic equilibrium thinking evidenced in Holling’s work. They also emphasize a number of common elements: namely, the capacity or ability to anticipate risk or disturbance, absorb or limit impact, and bounce back after a crisis. Additional

²⁸ C.S. HOLLING: 1986. ‘The resilience of terrestrial ecosystems. Local surprise and global change’, in W.C. CLARK & R.E. MUNN (eds.): *Sustainable development of the biosphere* (Cambridge 1986) 292-317, p. 296.

²⁹ S.L. CUTTER [et al.]: ‘A place-based model for understanding community resilience to natural disasters’, in *Global Environmental Change* 18/4 (2008) 598-606.

³⁰ F.H. NORRIS [et al.]: ‘Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategy for disaster readiness’, in the *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41/1-2 (2008) 127-150.

elements, however, include the adaptive community capacity, the notions of change, competence, and learning. It must also be stressed that those capacities and abilities are not some mysteriously in-built systemic property or even a capability ‘owned’ by individual persons or organizations, but are a collective, shared, or networked property based on and requiring specific forms of management and interaction. On the basis of these considerations, Georg Frerks et al. define resilience as “the shared capacity (of a group, community or society to anticipate, resist, absorb, and recover from an adverse or disturbing event or process through adaptive and innovative social processes of change, entrepreneurship, learning and increased competence”.³¹

In this connection, the strength of the resilience approach is that it is human-centered and community-focused, but simultaneously situated in a larger macro-setting of environmental, macro-economic, and policy processes and cognizant of global-local dynamics. It is also interdisciplinary and multi-layered, requiring new forms of stakeholders’ engagement and public-private partnerships.

Though resilience thinking could be considered a step forward by further elaborating the capacity approach in a societally more encompassing manner, it also received serious criticisms due to its covert political agenda. Frerks asserts in this connection that the resilience approach can be considered as part of the larger neoliberal project that is taking hold of contemporary society.³² In terms of (risk) governance it relates to a model that includes a liberalized economy and a retreating state. Frerks refers to several authors who have claimed that this neoliberal ordering of the world has led, on the one hand, to an interventionist attempt to govern and control parts of the globe, implying the erosion of civil rights and liberties, while on the other hand it is excluding and marginalizing those people deemed useless, who have been called the ‘insecured’ or ‘surplus life’³³ or ‘wasted lives’³⁴. Julian Reid suggests that “the resilient subject is a subject which must permanently struggle to

³¹ G. FRERKS, J. WARNER & B. WEIJS: ‘The politics of vulnerability and resilience’, in *Ambiente & Sociedade* 14/2 (2011) 105-122, p. 113.

³² G. FRERKS: ‘Help or hindrance? The contribution of the resilience approach to risk governance’, in U. FRA PALEO (ed.): *Risk governance. The articulation of hazard, politics and ecology* (Dordrecht/Heidelberg/New York/London 2015) 489-494.

³³ M. DUFFIELD: *Development, security and unending war. Governing the world of peoples* (Cambridge 2007).

³⁴ Z. BAUMAN: *Wasted lives. Modernity and its outcasts* (Cambridge 2003).

accommodate itself to the world”.³⁵ In doing so, resilience backgrounds the political, the imagining of alternatives, and foregrounds adaptivity, accepting “the imperative not to resist or secure themselves from the difficulties they are faced with”.³⁶ Jon Coaffee and Peter Rogers claim similarly that the notion of social resilience has been instrumentalized, leading to a new governance and policy structure exerting domination and causing inequality.³⁷ In this regard they refer to a ‘dark side’ to resilience planning. Frerks concludes that the emphasis on resilience is the product of a political discourse that seeks to shift the responsibility for mediating the impact of disasters from the state to the society or the individual and therefore may engender the same problems and feelings of disenchantment as the neoliberal project creates in other societal domains and the economy at large.³⁸

6. A FOCUS ON GOVERNANCE

While the notion of resilience has simultaneously been celebrated and criticized, there has also been an increasing focus on disaster governance. The role of the public sector and of public policies is also crucial in attempts to prevent, mitigate, and respond to disasters. Regardless of whatever international aid can be offered, the responsibility to help people in need resides under international law squarely with their own government. It is here that an analysis of the government institutions, the political culture, and the functioning of the public sector can provide insight into the history of a disaster and the disaster response. Joachim Ahrens and Patrick Rudolph describe the interdependence between institutional failure and susceptibility to disaster.³⁹ They assert that accountability, popular participation, predictability, and transparency of the administration are

³⁵ J. REID: ‘The disastrous and politically debased subject of resilience’, paper presented at the symposium on the biopolitics of development, “Life, welfare, and unruly populations”, 9-10 September 2010, 3. http://www.mcrg.ac.in/Development/draft_Symposium/Julian.pdf.

³⁶ REID: ‘The disastrous and politically debased subject of resilience’ 3.

³⁷ J. COAFFEE & P. ROGERS: ‘Rebordering the city for new security challenges. From counter terrorism to community resilience’, in *Space and Polity* 12/2 (2008) 101-118.

³⁸ FRERKS: ‘Help or hindrance?’ 493

³⁹ J. AHRENS & P.M. RUDOLPH: ‘The importance of governance in risk reduction and disaster management’, in the *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 14/4 (2006) 207-220.

key factors in the promotion of sustainable development and disaster reduction. However, in many societies facing disaster, governments are weak, failing, or even collapsing. Others are plagued by corruption, ‘spoils politics’, dictatorial rule, and predatory regimes, or are subject to ‘economies of violence’. Many of them operate through systems of patronage or clientelist politics, as, for example, has been documented for the post-tsunami aid in Sri Lanka.⁴⁰ Disasters like the Indian Ocean tsunami and Katrina were a wake-up call as to the failures and weaknesses of governments and institutions to prevent and mitigate disaster.

While critical disaster studies thus dissects the role of state and public policy, there has been an unmistakable convergence in international policy towards inclusive disaster governance. For decades, disaster governance was organized around an emergency style of top-down, state-centered policies and institutions. But the past three decades have seen a global development shifting disaster response from reactive to proactive, from singular to more holistic, with a focus on disaster risk reduction (DRR), and from a state-centered model to forms of co-governance that recognize the importance of non-state actor involvement in disaster governance and of community-based initiatives and resilience. Starting with the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action, and refined in the subsequent Sendai Framework for Action, the international community has converged on the principle of ‘inclusive DRR’, which denotes “the collaboration of a wide array of stakeholders operating across different scales”.⁴¹ In policies and meetings, the global DRR community has consistently repeated the expected advantages of inclusive DRR governance, stressing that it will lead to more inclusive and effective disaster governance.⁴²

DRR platforms have now become common in most disaster-prone countries. Since 1987, United Nations member states have been invited to establish ‘national committees’ – co-governance platforms that should

⁴⁰ G. FRERKS & B. KLEM: ‘Tsunami response in Sri Lanka, report on a field visit from 6-20 February 2005’ (Wageningen/The Hague 2005). See also G. FRERKS: ‘Principles ignored and lessons unlearned. A disaster studies perspective on the tsunami experience in Sri Lanka’, in D.B. MCGILVRAY & M.R. GAMBURD (eds.): *Tsunami recovery in Sri Lanka. Ethnic and regional dimensions* (London/New York 2010) 143-162.

⁴¹ J.C. GAILLARD & J. MERCER: ‘From knowledge to action: Bridging gaps in disaster risk reduction’, in *Progress in Human Geography* 37/1 (2012) 93-114, p. 95.

⁴² R. DJALANTE: ‘Adaptive governance and resilience: The role of multi-stakeholder platforms in Indonesia’, in *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* 12/9 (2012) 2923-2942.

consist of multiple actors involved in DRR, including representatives of governments, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the scientific community. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) has actively encouraged the establishment of national governance networks “to provide and mobilise knowledge, skills and resources required for mainstreaming DRR into development policies, planning and programmes”.⁴³ Data from UNISDR indicate that around ninety-three national platforms on DRR had developed worldwide as of 2016.⁴⁴

7. PUTTING DISASTER INTO CONTEXT

It is quite remarkable how discourses on disaster governance have radically altered in three decades and how widely shared the notion of co-governance by involving multiple actors and focusing on risk reduction rather than merely responding after disaster have become. It raises many questions, and in particular it brings out the need to look closer at this widely shared and seldom contested idea of disaster governance by putting disaster back into context.

Firstly, it remains important to recognize the long making of disaster. Deconstructing disaster along historical, social, gendered, or political dynamics leads to a deeper understanding of the nature and origin of disaster. Disasters can be seen as the historical consequence of political, economic and social processes, as Dorothea Hilhorst and Greg Bankoff remind us.

Asking why disasters happen is a political question, but understanding how they occur is a social and historical one. Above all, it is the present condition (the outcome of past factors) that transforms a hazard into a calamity and determines whether people have the resilience to withstand its effects or are rendered vulnerable to their consequences.⁴⁵

⁴³ UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: ‘Terminology’ (2007). Retrieved from <https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology#letter-d>.

⁴⁴ UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: ‘Words into action. National focal points for Disaster Risk Reduction, platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction, local platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction’ (Geneva 2017). Retrieved from <https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/53055>.

⁴⁵ D. HILHORST & G. BANKOFF: ‘Introduction. Mapping vulnerability’, in BANKOFF, FRERKS & HILHORST: *Mapping vulnerability* 1-9, p. 4.

Secondly, refocusing disaster studies in their context enables the identification of the role of cultural practices that over time emerge in response to recurring disasters, or what has been identified as ‘disaster subcultures’.⁴⁶ This concept was put forward in the 1960s and 1970s to shed light on the complex but intricate relationship between the human and natural world, yet it has continued to inspire authors such as Bankoff,⁴⁷ Jean-Christophe Gaillard et al.⁴⁸ or Andrés Marín et al.⁴⁹ to denote how communities have developed particular solutions and practices that constitute unique adaptations to deal with recurrent hazards and how these practices have left their marks on the political, social and cultural fabric of society.⁵⁰

Examples include attempts by farmers to mitigate against crop failure by drought or frost by planting at different altitudes and locations. In flood-prone areas in Vietnam and Indonesia, houses are built on stilts to protect property and stocks against the water. In Dutch villages regularly exposed to flooding, such as Borgharen and Ifteren in Limburg, a disaster subculture is also prevailing in the form of architectural design of houses as well as through mutual help, cultural artefacts and warning signs in the environment.⁵¹ As part of the disaster subcultures, attention has also been given to the role of ritual and of religion (or superstition) in preventing or averting disaster by offerings, prayers, etc. In addition,

⁴⁶ H.E. MOORE: *And the winds blew* (Austin 1964); D.E. WENGER & J.M. WELLER: *Some observations on the concept of disaster subculture* (= Disaster Research Center Working Paper 48) (Columbus 1972); D.E. WENGER & J.M. WELLER: *Disaster subcultures: The cultural residues of community disasters* (= University of Delaware Disaster Research Center Preliminary Paper 9) (Newark, DE 1973); W.A. ANDERSON: *Some observations on a disaster subculture: The organizational response of Cincinnati, Ohio, to the 1964 Flood* (= Disaster Research Center Research Report 6) (Columbus 1965); J.W. ANDERSON: ‘Cultural adaptation to threatened disaster’, in *Human Organization* 27/4 (1968) 298-307.

⁴⁷ G. BANKOFF: *Cultures of disaster. Society and natural hazards in the Philippines* (London/New York 2003).

⁴⁸ J. GAILLARD, E. CLAVE, O. VIBERT, J. DENAIN, Y. EFENDI, D. GRANCHER, C.C. LIAMZON, D. ROSNITA SARI & R. SETIAWAN: ‘Ethnic groups’ response to the 26 December 2004 earthquake and tsunami in Aceh, Indonesia’, in *Natural Hazards* 47 (2008) 17-38.

⁴⁹ A. MARÍN, S. GELCICH, G. ARAYA, G. OLEA, M. ESPÍNDOLA & J.C. CASTILLA: ‘The 2010 tsunami in Chile. Devastation and survival of coastal small-scale fishing communities’, in *Marine Policy* (2010) 1381-1384.

⁵⁰ BANKOFF: *Cultures of disaster*.

⁵¹ K. ENGEL, G. FRERKS, L. VELOTTI, J. WARNER & B. WEIJS: ‘Flood disaster subcultures in The Netherlands. The parishes of Borgharen and Ifteren’, in *Natural Hazards* 73 (2014) 859-882.

in collective forms of bereavement and commemorations, ritualized behavior is often prevalent. Monuments are erected to give such rituals a form of materiality. A variety of studies have shed light on such aspects, include the seminal works of Aaron Douglas and Mary Wildavsky,⁵² Douglas,⁵³ and Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman.⁵⁴

Thirdly, zooming in on the context reveals how views on disasters – as well as their impacts and responses – are socially constructed. Hilhorst argues that different groups of actors perceive, understand, and deal with disaster in different ways. She discerns several domains (science and disaster management, governance and local) of disaster response and asserts that these responses often contradict or negate each other.⁵⁵ Bankoff depicts natural disaster as a Western cultural discourse to characterize dangerous or problematic regions in the world, as was done earlier by the tropicality and developmental discourses.⁵⁶ Frerks et al. distinguish four disaster narratives around hazard, risk, vulnerability, and resilience with each having their own idea of what security is about and what the major security referent is.⁵⁷ Maureen Fordham adds to this the context of gender relations, to better recognize the gendered nature of vulnerability and the dominant masculine culture manifested in disaster management and humanitarian practice.⁵⁸ In this connection, Fordham signals the importance of ‘gender-fair’ approaches in disaster analysis and management. A flurry of later publications has stressed the need to adopt a gendered approach, as elaborately documented by, among others, Elaine Enarson⁵⁹ and Enarson and P.G. Dhar Chakrabarti.⁶⁰

⁵² M. DOUGLAS & A. WILDAVSKI: *Risk and culture. An essay on the selection of technological and environmental dangers* (Berkeley 1983).

⁵³ M. DOUGLAS: *Risk and blame. Essays in cultural theory* (London/New York 1992)

⁵⁴ OLIVER-SMITH & HOFFMAN: *The angry earth*.

⁵⁵ D. HILHORST: ‘Complexity and diversity. Unlocking social domains of disaster response’, in BANKOFF, FRERKS & HILHORST: *Mapping vulnerability* 52-66, p. 57.

⁵⁶ G. BANKOFF: ‘The historical geography of disaster. “Vulnerability” and “local knowledge” in Western discourse’, in BANKOFF, FRERKS & HILHORST: *Mapping vulnerability* 25-36, p. 33-34.

⁵⁷ FRERKS, WARNER & WEIJS: ‘The politics of vulnerability and resilience’ 106.

⁵⁸ M. FORDHAM: ‘Gendering vulnerability analysis. Towards a more nuanced approach’, in BANKOFF, FRERKS & HILHORST: *Mapping vulnerability* 174-182.

⁵⁹ E. ENARSON: *Women confronting natural disaster. From vulnerability to resilience* (Boulder 2012).

⁶⁰ E. ENARSON & P.G. DHAR CHAKRABARTI: *Women, gender and disaster. Global Issues and Initiatives* (New Delhi 2009).

Finally, studying disaster in context can reveal what can be labeled as the ‘real’ disaster governance, or the ways in which different groups of actors perceive, understand, and act upon disaster in different ways, and how this is socially negotiated in the everyday practices of disaster response.⁶¹ Rather than assuming that disaster response is governed according to the models internationally agreed upon, we advocate studying disaster response as an interplay between national authorities, civil society, international actors, and affected communities.⁶² Empirically, we need to look beyond the design of governance to questions of how this works out in practice – what some authors refer to as ‘real’ governance.⁶³ This will bring back in the power dimensions that Ahrens and Rudolph identified as crucial in any disaster response.⁶⁴ It will also provide an empirical underpinning to how actors deal with disaster, rather than simply assuming that disaster brings out the best in people and will trigger collaboration or, alternatively its opposite, that people panic and behave irrationally, are always true.

⁶¹ HILHORST: ‘Complexity and diversity’.

⁶² D. HILHORST & B. JANSEN: ‘Humanitarian space as arena. A perspective on the everyday politics of aid’, in *Development and Change* 41/6 (2010) 1117–1139.

⁶³ K. TITECA & T. DE HERDT: ‘Real governance beyond the failed state. Negotiating education in the Democratic Republic of Congo’, in *African Affairs* 110/439 (2011) 213–231.

⁶⁴ AHRENS & RUDOLPH: ‘The importance of governance’.

EVENT, CONTINGENCY AND UNEXPECTEDNESS IN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

SANEM YAZICIOĞLU

1. THE NEED FOR A GROUNDLESS BEGINNING

One can stand without hesitation behind the claim that *today's ontology is an ontology of contingency*.¹ A prominent feature of contemporary meta-physics is its tendency to reject predetermined explanatory models of understanding and knowing alike. This trajectory, usually articulated as 'groundlessness' or 'lack of ground' (*Grundlosigkeit*), opposes deterministic approaches to human knowledge. Expressed thus, the ground refers to the space where all explanatory models find their foundation, a realm that holds the beginnings of the causal explanations of all existence, opening a venue for them to be traced back to their origins. This ideal structure of the Aristotelian frame of knowledge has been immensely influential in its meaning as ground and foundation, since knowing is 'knowing through reason' and necessitates an explanation of the first cause of coming into being. Following this trajectory, knowledge itself tends to be equated with answers to 'why' questions. At the end of the nineteenth century, a radically different aspect to this classical epistemological model was adduced, in a move to limit 'why' questions by showing that the disciplines comprising the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) are fundamentally different from formal and empirical sciences, which renders them irreducible to explanatory models of positivist scientific disciplines.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, an extensive theory and a radical suggestion for distinguishing the methods of human and empirical sciences was introduced by the philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology. For him, the impossibility of emulating the experimental sciences arose from a basic yet primordial character of human life, within which experiences, and not

¹ G.-J. VAN DER HEIDEN: *Ontology after ontotheology. Plurality, event, and contingency in contemporary philosophy* (Pittsburg 2014) 7.

theorizing activities, come first. These experiences shape all our perceptions and understanding without exception. This, in turn, necessitates that inquiry be grounded in a more fundamental discipline than any of the sciences. According to Husserl, phenomenology is the only philosophical method that supplies a rigorous account of knowledge suitable for the human sciences. Its inquiry must start without predetermined ground or any presuppositions imposed by a pre-existing theory. In other words, the foundational premises of 'human sciences' cannot be determined prior to the inquiry, but must instead be envisioned in light of its findings. Meanwhile, experienced contents are temporally constituted and are always at the fringe of reconstruction due to constant temporal and spatial change.

Husserl's work became one of the most influential currents in twentieth-century philosophy, inspiring numerous theories that explain human existence in its surrounding world. Husserl's students Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt developed their own theories in reference to the core supplied by Husserl, which discloses the meaning of temporal and spatial change in relation to human beings. Among other students of Husserl, Heidegger has a distinguished place for his monumental critique of preceding metaphysics, which had historically presupposed a ground of knowledge; Heidegger would replace it with what he called a 'fundamental ontology'. This contribution also led to the introduction of several new terms, including the term 'event', and of ontological categories such as 'contingency', current in contemporary philosophy. Arendt's interpretations follow lines similar to those of Husserl's and Heidegger's inquiries, examining the meaning of human plurality and human capacities as a field of potentialities.

On the other hand, contingency contradicts one of the most basic human expectation to feel oneself sheltered and secure. Particularly in a time of crisis, during natural or human caused disasters, the disruptions of the daily order threaten this basic expectation. In these times, the unpredictability of the future and the distorted order of common life not only disturb the relations between one's surrounding world, habits and acts, but also necessitate the reconstruction of them. Rituals are a prominent part of reconstructing one's world and habits by giving them a repeatable order.² The repeatable sequence of acts confirms the human

² P. POST: 'Ritual Studies', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (Oxford/New York 2015).

capacity of putting things in a desired manner and restores the trust in oneself as well as in one's fellow people. During or after a disaster the response to it given by a ritual is essentially different from rationalizing and controlling it. Disaster rituals are a cultural transposition of symbolic forms into new individual or collective acts, which open a time and space for reconciliation with what has happened. In that sense it can be seen as a model in the social sciences to examine how to deal with a crisis. In their philosophical accounts, Husserl, Heidegger and Arendt suggest that contingency and unexpectedness are an inevitable part of our world and our lives; they are not simply undesirable sides, but rather they evoke the possibility to form new cultural segments in each society.

The following sections will explore the similarities of their inquiries, with the aim of showing the salience of their jointly developed perspective to contemporary social theories. To that end, the first section will discuss Husserl's famous Vienna Lecture, which outlined the core arguments of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. The ongoing source of this crisis is closely connected with what Husserl called the 'misguided rationalism' of the sciences. The second section will focus on the meaning of event and contingency in Heidegger's thought. In the third section, it will be shown that what Heidegger called 'event' and Arendt's term 'unpredictability' are in alignment in relation to contingency embedded in human acts and deeds. In the concluding section, there will be a brief analysis concerning the question of whether encounter and understanding might be rendered impossible by contingency, or whether, instead, they present a field of open possibilities, thereby enlarging the field of understanding.

This chapter was finalized during a most unexpected global crisis caused by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in an unusual convergence of theory and observable reality, perhaps as it should always be. The coming days will, without question, be filled with extraordinary change and with experiences that can only be made meaningful under the ontological category of contingency.

2. HUSSERL AND THE *CRISIS*: THE CRITIQUE OF NECESSITY AND DETERMINISM IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

The core of Husserl's idea of crisis is generated by the denial of the difference between the empirical and human sciences, and the conviction that the methodology of these two different realms could be used

concomitantly. Until the modern period, the history of philosophy and sciences had been intertwined, and philosophy itself was understood to be the general theory of knowledge – *septem artes liberales*. The development of modern scientific theories and their findings in the nineteenth century caused a tremendous reversal in the hierarchy of philosophy and sciences. This reversal was attained by impressive developments in the sciences and their methods, developments which led to their being perceived as the genuine field of knowledge. This reversal opened an avenue for a new conception which persists till this day: that proving the trustworthiness and the utility of any field of knowledge must depend on its capability for using factually driven and mathematically proven scientific data. The question that Husserl poses continues the line of questioning furthered by Kant, Nietzsche and Dilthey, who asked similar questions regarding the limit and possibility of knowledge in human sciences and who also indicated the impossibility of an analogy between natural laws and human freedom. For Husserl, using such an analogy to understand and, even worse, to give order to human capacities was not only destined to fail, but would also drive European culture into a crisis.³

Crisis, in that sense, means a state in which we find ourselves when we enforce or try to determine a field beyond its limits and possibilities. In his *Vienna Lectures*, Husserl says this act of enforcement is the cause of crisis of European sciences and, as he describes it, “crisis has its roots in a *misguided rationality*”.⁴ What Husserl brings to our attention with the term *misguided rationality* is not an accusation of rationalism as such, but rather its misinterpretation from the period of the Enlightenment to his time. According to Husserl, in developing into hypertrophied form, rationality as found in Enlightenment theories not only presents a reductionist view of human capacities in general, but also introduces an anthropocentric world-view as the source of knowledge. Yet, this narrow and reduced aspect contradicts the very idea of philosophy, which is, for him, “an infinite task”⁵ and an irreducible totality of different philosophical systems. Hence, the first task of a philosopher is mastering the true and

³ G.-J. VAN DER HEIDEN & S. YAZICIOĞLU: ‘Preface’ to E. HUSSERL: *De crisis van de Europese wetenschappen en de transcendentale fenomenologie*, transl. W. VISSER (Amsterdam 2018) 13-32.

⁴ E. HUSSERL: ‘Appendix I: The Vienna Lecture’, in *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*, transl. D. CARR (Evanston 1970) 290. The emphasis is mine.

⁵ HUSSERL: *The crisis* 290.

full sense of philosophy, namely, “the totality of its horizons of infinity”.⁶ Neither rationalism nor the claim of ‘objectivity’ is sufficient to cover this totality, and for that reason Husserl describes the reductionist aspects that can be found in various types of naturalism simply as ‘naiveté’.⁷

The main claims of Husserl’s analyses are twofold; first of all, the totality of nature presents itself in endless diversity, both with respect to its objects, which are always in a state of temporal and spatial change, and regarding the variety of their measures as mathematical objects, namely, their magnitudes. Second, the equation between nature and world becomes an impossible relation between the two, as the latter is “transformed into a mathematical world” and thus becomes the “guiding star of the sciences”.⁸ For Husserl, it is this that is ‘misguided’, since ‘world’ means the surrounding world (*Umwelt*), and the life of the individual and of the community shows a character fundamentally different from that of mathematical objects. The reason this difference is essential is that, unlike atemporal mathematical objects, the totality of the world is temporal. Moreover, the continuity and succession of worldly appearances are neither in a linear succession, like mathematical objects, nor simple enough to be explained in terms of causality. Consequently, to equate human sciences with natural sciences or to model one after the other is to fall prey to a one-sided, naïve objectivism, and it follows that reducing human embodiment to a thing in nature is impossible; as Husserl puts it, “its supposed spatiotemporal being within nature, is an absurdity”.⁹

The accomplishments and triumph of the mathematical natural sciences have obscured the root of this objectivism and the indispensably relative element in it – the scientist. For Husserl, scientists “do not notice that they necessarily presuppose themselves in advance as communalized men in their surrounding world and their historical time, even by the very fact that they seek to attain truth-in-itself, as truth valid for anyone at all”.¹⁰ In this line of argumentation, Husserl proposes a fundamental reversal to naturalistic objectivism, claiming that human ‘spirit’ is not alongside nature, but rather that “nature is itself drawn into the spiritual sphere”.¹¹ This larger frame becomes groundbreaking for

⁶ HUSSERL: *The crisis* 291.

⁷ HUSSERL: *The crisis* 292.

⁸ HUSSERL: *The crisis* 293.

⁹ HUSSERL: *The crisis* 294.

¹⁰ HUSSERL: *The crisis* 296.

¹¹ HUSSERL: *The crisis* 297.

contemporary philosophy, since this reversal no longer permits seeing persons as isolated things in a pregiven world, encouraging the recognition of their “mutual exteriority of ego-persons, their being alongside one another” and “their mutual interpenetration”.¹² According to Husserl, only in this relational whole can the question of being, norms and the question of ‘existence’ (*Existenz*) find their accurate place. Thus the crisis cannot only be understood in terms of rationalism, but via its entanglement in ‘naturalism’ and ‘objectivism’.¹³

Husserl’s project is a radical critique of the modern scientific hegemony of human sciences, demonstrating that neither the realm of nature, nor the natural laws and causality that are modeled, nor the ideal of objectivity are applicable to the human sciences. The human sciences have to include the indispensable and concomitant relations between subject and object, together with their intertwined temporal and spatial changes. Such interpenetration requires experiencing things and people in their mutual capacities and it operates most effectively through reflection. We can experience objects and subjects, things in general, only through their coexistence and in their form of relatedness: for example, a ‘perception’ of an object is always a perception *of* something, or a ‘hope’ is always hoping *for* something. As these instances show, our intentional directedness is never empty; it is always seeing, hoping, perceiving something from a certain point of view, one’s singular aspect. Yet, this aspect is also never static: in each move and each consideration of something, e.g., a physical object, is a thing that can be perceived differently. It is also always possible that a pregiven direction of attention can change the content of perceptions. Moreover, our perception of things changes due to our past experiences and expectations. For instance, an interaction with a work of art can exemplify the complexity of ongoing changes; the same picture or a novel could mean completely different things with a change of attention’s focus, opening up infinite new relations in each instance of directedness. Yet in each reflection the ‘new’ aspect can be ‘caught’ and ‘thematized’. For Husserl, it is the reliably persistent content that is the key to rigorous human sciences. The indexical train of constitutions is what remains in consciousness and what is ready to be altered in a new experience.

¹² HUSSERL: *The crisis* 298.

¹³ HUSSERL: *The crisis* 299.

In the changing temporal and spatial frame of experiences and our way of relating to them, what becomes evident to Husserl is the impossibility of claiming a stable and unchanging ground for beings and for the way in which we experience them as appearances in the course of events that we are involved in. Heidegger continued this critique of ‘ground’ in his fundamental ontology *Being and Time*, a work that he devoted to Husserl. In later periods, he would also develop the concept of ‘event’, as found in his *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*.

3. HEIDEGGER AND THE CONTINGENCY OF EVENT

The meaning and consequences of spatial and temporal change in human existence and its ontological ground are Heidegger’s most influential contributions to contemporary philosophy. He exerts incomparable influence by introducing and developing the concept of ‘event’ in his later writings, including *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger characterizes human existence (*Dasein*) as a being among others, and to emphasize this structure he refers to *Dasein* as *Da- Sein* – its state of being ‘there’.¹⁴ This interplay between being ‘here’ and ‘there’ entails that beings are always in relation to each other, with the consequent insufficiency of anthropocentrism circumscribed by the perspective of a subject who sees things from the limited perspective of ‘here’. With this leitmotif, Heidegger analyzes the existence of *Dasein* in the open horizon of fulfilling itself in its relational halo, in its togetherness with other beings. This task announces itself in *Dasein*’s openness to its surrounding world, its changing relations and its not yet known directedness toward its future. This means the world of spatiotemporal change and of people; generally, entities generate relations irreducible to a predictable course or to a predetermined frame. ‘Openness’ refers to the infinity of possible relations that are ‘there’ and the potentialities that will come along with them in the ‘future’. In its very structure, *Dasein*’s character of being there (*Da-Sein*) among other entities distinguishes itself by its capacity to thematize what has happened from its singular aspect, which is always the result of its way of interpreting and understanding those relations.

¹⁴ M. HEIDEGGER: *Being and time*, transl. J. MACQUARRIE & E. ROBINSON (New York 1962).

In this structure of open possibilities, no inquiry can have the static point of departure that the term 'ground' would suggest, nor can it reach a foreseeable end. Either in presuming a totality of entities or in assuming their teleological order, the categories of earlier metaphysics are insufficient for understanding the changing relations among entities, for the reason that the decisive character of entities lies in each encounter with them and in the disclosure of their 'difference' (*Unter-Schied*) in inexhaustible new ways.¹⁵ One can take these relational wholes as the 'ground', yet the only way to make such an assumption is to accept that this 'ground' is neither a stable nor a determinable whole. Heidegger achieves a destruction of classical metaphysical assumptions colored by theological arguments (ontotheology) of the beginning and end, introducing an immensely widened picture of beings in their ontological possibilities that he calls a *fundamental ontology*.¹⁶ In later periods, Heidegger extends the meaning of 'difference' so that it does not only include the change of spatiality and temporality of entities and the events that they belong to, but refers to the totality which they form together. In order to evoke the latter meaning, he uses the archaic term '*Sein*' for 'Being'.¹⁷

What 'difference' means is the presence of unconcealed parts and the inexhaustible relations that an entity discloses in its event. Event, then, is a reference to the totality of not yet understood or encountered parts of these relations, and in that sense, it shares the feature of ground as described by Heidegger, to whom it is not only a ground but always also an abyss. *Sein* – all possible beings and the totality that they infer, for Heidegger, should be understood out of this very impossibility of ground, due to its constant changes and its inherent abyss. The ground, then, also presents its absence. If there cannot be an ultimate and necessary 'final ground', then the only necessity this claim suggests is the necessity of contingency. As Van der Heiden puts it,

Despite the different conceptions of the theological motive in ontotheology, as well as of the concepts of plurality and event that offer an alternative to ontotheology, one might say that in contrast to the *necessary, universal, and unifying ground*, which is the culmination point of the principle

¹⁵ HEIDEGGER: *Being and time* 126.

¹⁶ HEIDEGGER: *Being and time* §83.

¹⁷ M. HEIDEGGER: *Contributions to philosophy (of the event)*, transl. R. ROJCEWICZ & D. VALLEGA-NEU (Bloomington 2012) §267, p. 468-470.

of sufficient reason, the suspension of this principle is concerned with creating the concept of a *contingent, singular, and pluralizing event*.¹⁸

In this wider concept of event, what is described is not simply what occurs or happens, but rather what shows itself. In this showing, an event cannot be explained or understood in its full sense; it is an encounter with a disclosure of possibilities and the new potentialities that it brings, it is an appropriation.¹⁹ Each event is a disclosure that resists necessity and causal explanation, since it only opens itself in reflection to its past, present and future from a certain aspect; the moment of its occurrence, both temporally and spatially, is always given, but only partially. Despite their different interpretations, the successors of Husserl and Heidegger in the continental philosophical tradition, almost without exception, include this enriching quest for understanding by adding the inexhaustibility of understanding and interpreting. In the analytic tradition, this aspect has also inspired many theories of the scientific method that criticize imposing the method on scientific inquiry in natural sciences and seek to enhance it by recognizing that each quest requires its own singular venue.²⁰ Nevertheless, the enriching call for understanding an event in its widest possible applications is open to being distorted ideologically as a negativity by an emphasis on its ‘lack of clarity’ with the accompanying misinterpretation that ‘anything goes’. These meanings are currently and misleadingly formulated to describe the times that we live in as the stage of a ‘post-truth’ society. Yet, the cover of the ontological interpretation of the contingency of the event goes beyond these limited aspects and it does not only describe the way in which things are, but also how human plurality constructs itself, as can be seen in Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition*.

4. ARENDT AND THE BOUNDLESSNESS AND THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF HUMAN PLURALITY

In Arendt’s political theory, the meaning of human plurality comes from the equality and distinctness of each member. In that sense, *The Human Condition* develops the line that plurality is a result of the human

¹⁸ VAN DER HEIDEN: *Ontology after ontotheology* 262.

¹⁹ HEIDEGGER: *Contributions* §267, p. 470-471.

²⁰ Among many others, Kuhn’s and Feyerabend’s works on scientific method share similar concerns.

capacity to exercise one's own distinctiveness through one's speech and acts.²¹ The leading argument in this emphasis lies in pointing out the uniqueness of the members and the irreducible diversity of human plurality. For Arendt, it is essential to protect and exercise this distinction, since otherwise it would become impossible to distinguish human beings from any other living species and their behavioral patterns of survival. Without such a distinction, this plurality would be reduced to the masses characterized by behavioral similarity, busy with thoughtless repetition and tending to be easily manipulated and controlled. Consequently, as the masses gain the habits of repetitive and predictable patterns of living, they become more and more open to being determinable by statistical data and probabilistic predictions. The only way in which human beings have a chance to become less vulnerable to such determinism and to be more than a part of the mathematical-statistical equations of political economy, is if they remember their capacity to change any predetermined equations: Arendt calls this the capacity *to begin something new*.²²

Beginning, for her, is a capacity that everything that exists already shares on the ontological level: coming into existence is the beginning of something or somebody new and therefore it is always 'unpredictable'. In that sense, both the biological birth and what Arendt calls our 'second birth' as a person among others, share the same ontological character of being unpredictable:

It may be stimulated by the presence of the others whose company we may wish to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative.²³

Arendt's interpretation of the necessary ground follows Heidegger's critique: the other's presence, both in birth and in speech and action, can be a necessary condition, but it is never a sufficient condition (ground) to determine who the newcomer will be, what this birth will set in motion, or the consequences of the newcomer's words and deeds in human plurality. What has been begun can bring whatever may have never happened before, and therefore the infinite probability of the processes are inherent in all beginnings: "the new always happens against

²¹ H. ARENDT: *The human condition* (Chicago 1998) 175-176.

²² ARENDT: *The human condition* 177.

²³ ARENDT: *The human condition* 177.

the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability.”²⁴ Using one’s initiative by speech and action, then, is not a simple occurrence, but rather it is a beginning that shares the qualities of an event, which sets in motion unforeseeable consequences. At this point, one could think of all the political figures who take the lead to change the course of history of their countries.

By ‘speech’, Arendt does not indicate words that could be substituted by sign language or any pragmatic use of language, but instead refers to speech accompanied by an act that shows one’s unique capacities for thinking and judging, essential to initiative. An initiative can be so influential that the form in which it discloses itself, either as speech or as an act, can change the whole course of a process. In this regard, initiative belongs to the same category as event: it is not a momentary happening to a certain end, but instead a contingent process, which can therefore be interpreted to the effect that *initiative is itself an event*. This interpretation can be supported by her analyses of the social realm in general: the “notorious uncertainty” is not only the basic character of “all political matters, but all affairs that go between men directly”.²⁵ These explanations make remarkably clear that human relationships create an immensely complex set of venues, what Arendt calls the “web of relationships”.²⁶

Arendt uses the web of relationships to describe the invisible bond between human beings, and it presents the interconnectedness of action and speech. The course of action and speech in the web cannot be determined or limited, and for that reason it can only be described as ‘boundless’. The web is where the actor moves “in relation to other acting beings” and the consequences of this interaction are ‘boundless’.²⁷

This boundlessness is characteristic not of political action alone, in the narrower sense of the word, as though the boundlessness of human interrelatedness were only the result of the boundless multitude of people involved, which could be escaped by resigning oneself to action within a limited, graspable framework of circumstances; the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation.²⁸

²⁴ ARENDT: *The human condition* 178.

²⁵ ARENDT: *The human condition* 182.

²⁶ ARENDT: *The human condition* 184.

²⁷ ARENDT: *The human condition* 190.

²⁸ ARENDT: *The human condition* 190.

For Arendt, *boundlessness* does not simply describe the action and reaction mechanism in human plurality, but, rather, it characterizes action as a *process*. Yet, this process cannot be seen in the linear model of a beginning and an end; it can be a ‘reaction’ or a ‘response’ or “it may proceed out of nowhere” – yet, even if one wished to frame it as a reaction, “every reaction becomes a chain reaction and every process is the cause of new process.”²⁹ In all circumstances, there is the start of a new process that affects others, and it is this that Arendt calls a beginning. For example, revolutions are one of the most remarkable examples of such reactions, as Arendt notes: “Before they were engaged in what then turned out to be a revolution, none of the actors had the slightest premonition of what the plot of the new drama was going to be.”³⁰

The ‘process character’ of action entails some decisive spatiotemporal features. This process is neither linear nor reversible, and therefore, when it occurs, it is beyond any control, including reversibility, since it opens up a realm in which “the consequences are boundless because of the multitude of people involved.”³¹ She says that this characteristic of plurality is well-known in political history and is the justification of various forms of limitations. These limitations inhere in the norms and in the laws of each body politic, for the very purpose of dealing with the inherent unpredictability of all action.³² The unpredictability of the outcomes of action is favorably regarded by Arendt, who claims that the most unexpected situations can disclose qualities of the actors, unknown even to themselves until their encounter with such a situation. Precisely for this reason, political action distinguishes itself from other human capacities, in which there is space for predictability, such as the production processes of labor and work. For the political realm, however, what is at stake is a process that constantly produces itself in an indeterminable expansion. Once again, with respect to this quality, the meaning of ‘event’ for Heidegger and what Arendt means by unpredictability of action to contingency are remarkably linked. Especially having witnessed collectively experienced disasters, mass murders and deported communities during the Holocaust, Arendt sees the pure determination in politics as the ultimate danger to the exercise of human capacities.

²⁹ ARENDT: *The human condition* 190.

³⁰ H. ARENDT: *On revolution* (London 1963) 28-29.

³¹ ARENDT: *The human condition* 190.

³² ARENDT: *The human condition* 190.

‘Unpredictability’, then, refers to two major features of speech and act. First, they belong to human plurality and exist only in the form of interaction. As a consequence of the temporality of this interaction, it is neither possible to determine what exactly comes prior to, or what will follow, once a process has been initiated. Second, due to this unpredictability, the interactions in human plurality cannot be determined, but one can witness simultaneous and spontaneous interaction. In all circumstances, these unpredictable processes always belong to the human web and are pregnant with potentiality, which finds its expression in event. Because it includes potentialities, the unpredictability of social interactions does not only refer to a field of blurred opacity that makes it challenging to foresee what lies beyond; it is equally a realm that promises the ‘new’.

5. DEALING WITH THE ‘NEW’ WITHOUT ‘PREDICTIONS’

As these analyses have shown, the difficulty in the human sciences is their intrinsic requirement to interpret and understand the scope of spatial and temporal changes that human interactions bring along. Since these changes constantly shape and alter the conditions we live in, only a dynamic theory can convey the constant change in human life and thereby deal with human reality. In this regard, it can be observed that the emphasis on event and the constantly changing and web-like character of the social realm in contemporary political theories follows Heidegger’s analysis of event and Arendt’s parallel reflections on unpredictability. These venues of thought inspire the contemporary post-foundationalist political theories, in which we can encounter some further claims. For instance, Laclau suggests that what belongs to the social cannot be reduced to static analyses, the social being an impossible category, since the moment we refer to social structure. In another approach, Mouffe denies any teleological ground of beginning and end in human interaction and elaborates her denial of ground and the aim of consensus in her agonistic political theory.³³

Theories that emphasize contingency and unpredictability encourage us to find the meaning of the new. To establish a new frame of thinking and living is a hard, if not impossible, task within the externally imposed,

³³ O. MARCHART: *Post foundational political thought. Political difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh 2007) 147-148.

repetitive daily courses of our contemporary lives. This condition is reminiscent of Heidegger's famous term, 'everydayness', through which he refers to a state of repetition accompanied by a dormancy of mind – a state run by forgetfulness of what we can do apart from repeating.³⁴ This point in Heidegger's existential analyses is particularly deserving of attention, since only when human beings can elude this numbing repetition can they encounter themselves and others. As long as the daily repetitions remains unchallenged, dormancy remains the mood of life. Arendt's emphasis on the new is decisive here, for it presents an interruption. In light of its Latin origin, Arendt interprets initiative as an insertion, which opens a gap and rebinds it in a new constellation. In Arendtian sense, the new that comes with an act or with speech is parallel to what Heidegger calls 'event' and creates the essence of thinking: "all that matters for thinking is meditation on the 'event'".³⁵

It seems beyond doubt that natural disasters, plagues and revolutions are the occurrences that interrupt repetitive patterns of living. In each case, the experience of what has happened influences and changes the pattern of living irreversibly. Following Arendt's articulation, if one person can change all the collective initiatives, a collective initiative can effect change in constellations of yet greater magnitude. This emphasis on the power of plurality is equally valid when applied to the scale of a disaster or to the happiness of the majority; it has the capacity to change the social structure in commensurate degree. In these changes, rationality cannot be traced to a single source, and what remains is the collective experience that will shape and reconstruct common sense as for example disaster rituals clearly exhibit.

As mentioned at the beginning, this chapter was finished during one of the largest pandemics ever experienced by humankind. Although the guidance is currently based upon scientific findings, it is remarkable that precautions are taken differently in different societies, despite the sameness of statistical data. The experiences of what has been witnessed and lived, and the conclusions that will shape social practices, will be different as well. The statistical data that are constantly distributed through social media become useful and effective only inasmuch as they can translate into common sense and common precautions – yet these are impossible to determine. Beyond the catastrophic consequences of this modern

³⁴ HEIDEGGER: *Being and time* 67, §9, §51.

³⁵ HEIDEGGER: *Contributions* §7, p. 26-27.

‘plague’, what looms as today’s unknowns are the kinds of experience and life practices that might develop in its wake. The event character of what is happening now expands its temporal frame and perspective from now into the future, and it is impossible to predict the societal changes to which it will lead. As an ontological category, an *event* creates a massive halo of new experiences in their contingency. In this opaque picture, the only way in which the social sciences can encounter the unpredictability of contingency is by adopting a dynamic theory of interpretation and understanding to take the place of reductionist determinism.

A VICTIMOLOGY OF CORONA: THE DISASTER OF OUR TIMES

ANTONY PEMBERTON

1. INTRODUCTION

I was late in writing and submitting this chapter.¹ This means that I am drafting it halfway through March 2020, while the coronavirus is in the early days of sweeping across the globe. In the Netherlands, as in other parts of Europe, citizens are increasingly confined to their own homes.² Social life has screeched to a halt, and the daily news bulletins are increasingly filled with rising numbers of casualties and fatalities.

Undoubtedly the tale of the initial emergence and features of Sars-Cov-2, the virus that causes Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is well-known to all readers of this chapter.³ A brief summary will suffice to sketch the backdrop to this chapter. It made the transition – ‘zoonotic spillover’ – probably from bats to humans at the *Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market* in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. So far it is less lethal than earlier coronaviruses such as SARS and MERS, with 80% of those infected only suffering mild flu symptoms, 15% suffering more severe forms of lung-related infections and 5% needing critical, intensive care. In contrast, SARS killed approximately 10% of those infected and MERS even 34%. The virus can cause pneumonia-like symptoms. Those who have fallen ill suffer coughs, fever and breathing difficulties. In severe cases there can be organ failure. So far the fatality rate – within the latter group – of the disease varies between countries, depending on the extent to which the spread and intensity of the outbreak of the disease has been controlled or

¹ I would like to thank Irma Cleven and Eva Mulder for comments on the draft of this chapter.

² I subsequently made a number of revisions to the chapter in June 2020.

³ Z. WU & J.M. MCGOOGAN: ‘Characteristics of and important lessons from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak in China. Summary of a report of 72,314 cases from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention’, in *Journal of the American Medical Association* 323/13 (2020) 1239-1242.

managed and the extent to which health care systems have been overwhelmed by the sudden influx of patients. As many people infected by the disease will only display very mild symptoms, it is likely that the incidence of severe and critical infections and fatalities are overestimates. Current evidence also reveals that fatalities due to COVID-19 correlate with age and underlying health conditions. Where the fatality rate of those infected is low compared to earlier coronavirus outbreaks, Sars-Cov-2 is much more contagious. Even those displaying minor symptoms or no symptoms at all can transmit the disease. Coughing or sneezing respiratory droplets can infect others within a range of one and a half meters, and the virus seems to have the capacity to survive outside of a host body, particularly on smooth metallic surfaces.

These latter characteristics make the global societal impact of Sars-Cov-2 of a different magnitude than earlier SARS and MERS scares. SARS led to 774 documented fatalities and MERS to 849 fatalities. SARS is fully contained, and although this is not the case for MERS, any documented human-to-human transmission has occurred in circumstances of close contact with severely ill persons, with no evidence of transmission from asymptomatic cases. Sars-Cov-2 instead has spread across the world, causing thousands of deaths already, with many more to come.⁴ Left unchecked, the virus would infect a majority of the populations, overwhelming health care systems. Governments therefore have increasingly resorted to forms of shutdown and even lockdown of social life, combining public health outbreak response tactics – isolation, quarantine, social distancing and community containment. Schools, shops, bars and restaurants have closed down, and people are increasingly constrained in their freedom of movement, in many jurisdictions enforced by states of exception and martial law, working from home, limiting social contacts to a minimum, while any venture outside into public spaces necessitates keeping a distance from others.

As the magnitude of the impact of Sars-Cov-2 on the death toll and our societies in general has yet to fully emerge, it might appear premature to devote this chapter to a victimology of the coronavirus disaster. However, it also seems senseless to write about anything else: such is the pervasive grip of the virus on our inhabitants, communities and societies. Even without any medical expertise worth speaking of on my part and the absence of a crystal ball, there is no doubt in my mind that this disaster will reorganize, reshape and reconceive human life in the twenty-first century. It will

⁴ In June 2020 there were already 400,000 deaths across the world.

undoubtedly go down in history as the disaster of our times. That is safe to say even without taking into account the all-too-real chance that the unfolding spread of the disaster will be followed by additional political and social turmoil, which is yet impossible to foresee. Suddenly works of dystopian fiction, such as the *Handmaid's tale*, *V for Vendetta* or *The Leftovers*, could offer realistic or at least revealing scenarios of what might await us.

The issue that this chapter intends to examine concerns the heart of the victimological endeavour. It draws upon recent work attempting to consider what is the core of the victimological experience.⁵ The fact that victimization is intimately entwined with suffering, and that this is with what victimology should concern itself, blinded this domain of inquiry to the characteristics of the victimological experience that cut deeper to the answer to the question 'what is victimisation?'. As my colleagues and I have repeatedly argued in recent publications, this concerns the nature of victimization as an *ontological assault*.

In the second section of this chapter I will revisit the origin of this term in the ethics of medicine. It was coined by the medical-ethicist Edmund Pellegrino to describe the experience of sudden life-threatening illness, where it refers to the radical shift in the way a person experiences his or her own body.⁶ Where initially an implicit experience of unity and continuity existed, life-threatening illness can suddenly catapult the patient into experiencing a lack of unity and even opposition towards his or her own body. The ontological assault is best understood in terms of Matthew Ratcliffe's notion of existential feelings,⁷ which is heavily indebted to Heidegger's concept of *Stimmung*,⁸ usually translated as 'mood' or 'attunement'.⁹ I am always somewhat hesitant in directly invoking Heidegger's work, as I lack a sufficient background in philosophy to

⁵ A. PEMBERTON: 'Annual lecture. Time for a rethink. Victims and restorative justice', in *International Journal of Restorative Justice* 2/1 (2019) 11-33; A. PEMBERTON & R.M. LETSCHERT: 'The victimology of atrocity crimes', in B. HOLA, M. WEERDESTIJN [et al.] (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Atrocity Crimes* (Oxford 2020).

⁶ E. PELLEGRINO: 'Toward a reconstruction of medical morality. The primacy of the act of profession and the fact of illness', in *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 4 (1979) 32-56.

⁷ M. RATCLIFFE: *Feelings of being. Phenomenology, psychiatry and the sense of reality* (Oxford 2008).

⁸ M. HEIDEGGER: *Being and time*, transl. J. MACQUARRIE & E. ROBINSON (New York 1927/1962).

⁹ M. RATCLIFFE: 'Why mood matters', in M. WRATHALL (ed.): *The Cambridge companion to Being and Time* (Cambridge 2013) 157-176; K. AHO: *Contexts of suffering. A Heideggerian approach to psychopathology* (Lanham, MD 2019).

fully grasp key nuances. The main reason that I nevertheless do so in this section is that this term seems to translate more easily to the level of collectives. Where Ratcliffe mostly adopts existential feelings to refer to a similar concept as *Stimmung* at the level of individual affective experience, *collective mood* seems to be an apt description of similar phenomenon at the societal level. Each of these key terms already offers insights into our current predicament, and I will discuss some initial observations.

In the third section of the paper I restate the manner in which the ontological assault can be understood as a victimological concept. It could appear that the nature of COVID-19 as a life-threatening illness itself makes the step towards victimology redundant. However, drawing on Susan Brison's phenomenological account of her own sexual assault and attempted murder,¹⁰ my colleagues and I have argued that the particular features of the ontological assault in victimization lie in the social/relational features of the self.¹¹ I will marshal these features to illuminate matters at stake in evaluating the disaster at a societal level. In this, the particular features of the ontological assault in victimization, the impact on the overlapping and intertwined *embodied*, *narrative* and *autonomous* selves of victims are relevant vectors, and I will discuss the particular way in which they can be seen to tie in to our current predicament in the midst of the coronavirus disaster. In doing so I consider aspects of moralization of our embodiment,¹² the particular impact of experiences of victimization on our life narratives, including the experience of *narrative foreclosure*¹³ and the subsequent importance of *re-storying*¹⁴ as well as the relevance of the concept of *radical loneliness* and subsequent reconnection.¹⁵

¹⁰ S.J. BRISON: *Aftermath. Violence and the remaking of the self* (Princeton 2002).

¹¹ PEMBERTON: 'Annual lecture'; PEMBERTON & LETSCHERT: 'The victimology of atrocity crimes'.

¹² R.A. SHWEDER, N.C. MUCH, M. MAHAPATRA & L. PARK: 'The "Big Three" of morality (autonomy, community, divinity) and the "Big Three" explanations of suffering', in A. BRANDT & P. ROZIN (eds.): *Morality and health* (New York 1997) 119-169.

¹³ M. FREEMAN: 'When the story's over. Narrative foreclosure and the possibility of self-renewal', in M. ANDREWS, S.D. SCLATER, C. SQUIRE & A. TREACHER (eds.): *Lines of narrative. Psychosocial perspectives* (London 2000) 81-93.

¹⁴ PEMBERTON: 'Annual lecture'.

¹⁵ A. PEMBERTON, P.G.M. AARTEN & E. MULDER: 'Beyond retribution, restoration and procedural justice. The big two of communion and agency in victims' perspectives on justice', in *Psychology, Crime & Law* 23/7 (2017) 682-698.

In the fourth section I will seek to translate the experience of the ontological assault from the individual to the societal level. Most succinctly, this can be understood to involve rephrasing the question it poses from ‘who am I’ to ‘who are we’, from individual existential feelings to collective mood. In broad strokes this discussion follows the threefold distinction from the individual level, although the phenomena I address overlap in many ways. In particular I will consider the importance of existential experience of *trust*,¹⁶ draw upon work on the phenomenology of victimization by genocide to suggest a notion of *collective temporal foreclosure*¹⁷ as well as concepts in societal *re-storying*, including a shift in hegemonic narratives¹⁸ and the extent to which the coronavirus disaster is likely to become a new cultural trope or *chosen trauma*¹⁹ and the manner in which these phenomena can impact societal abilities and inabilities of reinventing new goals and purposes.

On each count, much of the concrete application to the coronavirus disaster can be understood as speculative and indeed hopefully erroneous: I very much hope to be proven wrong on many counts.²⁰ However my intention is that the chapter at least offers concepts and levels of analysis with which our current predicament can be helpfully understood. Therein also lies its more general application to the victimology of disasters: as a starting point, rather than as a definitive statement of reflection and understanding of how we can go about grasping the impact of such phenomena on victimized inhabitants, communities and societies.

2. THE ONTOLOGICAL ASSAULT, EXISTENTIAL FEELINGS AND COLLECTIVE MOOD

Pellegrino’s project concerned the *telos* of medicine.²¹ He was unsatisfied with the answer that this is the curing of disease. Instead he emphasized *the fact of illness*, which he juxtaposed against the experiences of

¹⁶ J.M. BERNSTEIN: *Torture and dignity. An essay on moral injury* (Chicago 2015).

¹⁷ PEMBERTON & LETSCHERT: ‘The victimology of atrocity crimes’.

¹⁸ F. POLLETTA: *It was like a fever. Storytelling in protest and politics* (Chicago 2006).

¹⁹ V. VOLKAN: *Bloodlines. From ethnic pride to ethnic terrorism* (Boulder, CO 1997).

²⁰ Although, to my chagrin, the experience three months later seems to be largely confirming my initial thoughts.

²¹ PELLEGRINO: ‘Toward a reconstruction of medical morality. F.D. DAVIS: ‘Phronesis, clinical reasoning and Pellegrino’s philosophy of medicine’, in *Theoretical Medicine* 18 (1997) 173-195.

health, where we find “ourselves identified with our bodies, facing the world and acting on it in essential unity.” Particularly in sudden onset and life-threatening illness, he argued this identity of self and body to be ruptured, leading to an experience of *disintegration* and *disunity*.

Here he describes the ‘ontological assault’, where our bodies become juxtaposed with our selves and our relationship to the world. Where our bodies are normally integral to the realization of our intentions in the world, in illness instead they become an obstacle to these intentions. For Pellegrino this means that the *telos* of medicine is not the *curing of disease*, i.e., remedying the biological condition that gives rise to the illness, but the *healing of illness*, i.e., restoring a sense of identity of self and body. This does not mean that treating the underlying malady is not crucially important, but instead proposes to convey there is more to illness than the biological condition, and there is more to healing illness than combatting the cause of the disease.

Two facets of the way he understands illness are key. First, where the ends of curing disease can be specified externally, healing illness needs to consider the understanding of the person experiencing the illness as a primary consideration. In this understanding a second facet is important. The term ontological assault has a specifically double meaning: it concerns first the threatening of our ontology, our being, but second it is ontologically revealing in precisely what it threatens. The cat is out of the bag, so to speak, concerning the frailty of the human body and the extent to which the body can be understood to be harmonious with our projects and plans in the world. Addressing this newfound, but unfortunate, reality is key to healing illness and thereby, according to Pellegrino, to the *telos* of medicine.

Current reports about the fatal cases of COVID-19 suggest that the virus, when fatal, kills too swiftly for the patient in question (to have) to become aware of the *fact of illness*.²² Compounded by the other factors this is perhaps more likely to be true of those for whom COVID-19 amounts to a brush with death. Severe cases appear to last six weeks, with periods in which the survival of the patient is touch and go, while subsequent recovery appears to be a long and arduous process. Surviving the disease is not synonymous with overcoming the illness. The current experience also points to the ‘invisible enemy’ – to quote Donald Trump – potentially

²² WU & MCGOOGAN: ‘Characteristics of and important lessons from the coronavirus’.

lurking within our bodies and those of our social contacts. Our hands are suddenly not (only) the primary tools with which we manipulate our surroundings, but sources of danger if we touch our faces without sufficiently cleansing them. Placing our bodies in the close vicinity of others is not a welcome form of social interaction, friendship and intimacy, but to be avoided in light of the potential of contagion. Rather than them being elements of our key projects in life, including work, warehousing our bodies as much as possible appears to be a prudent course of action.

Understanding these shifts in our basic experiences can be understood in terms of philosopher of psychopathology Matthew Ratcliffe's concept *existential feelings*. This refers to a class of affective experience that concerns ways of finding oneself in the world, which shape all experience, thought and activity and concern "the intimate association between feeling, how one finds oneself in the world and one's grasp of reality".²³ Ratcliffe's concept concerns feelings that are not so much reactions to events and experiences in the world, but form the often implicit and taken-for-granted backdrop of one's ability to experience the world at all. As Ratcliffe emphasizes, when existential feelings remain stable we are most often oblivious to them.²⁴ But when they change – as is the case in the 'ontological assault' – we can experience this change and/or the absence of the way the world felt before, even though its initial taken-for-grantedness makes it difficult to pinpoint the nature of change and express it verbally.

Much of Ratcliffe's phenomenological excavation of his subject relies on the experience of those suffering from psychopathology, including depression, schizophrenia and hallucinations.²⁵ An issue that he discusses in his introduction is that of the *uncanny*, "an all-enveloping sense of weirdness or mysteriousness",²⁶ that can take on, but does not have to, large degrees of anxiety and helplessness in different psychological disorders. Ratcliffe cuts to the heart of the experience of the uncanny, which centres on a particular experience of unfamiliarity. We might come across something and declare it to be unfamiliar, meaning that we do not recognize it and believe we have not yet encountered it. However, the unfamiliarity at play in the uncanny is not an *absence of the feeling*

²³ M. RATCLIFFE: 'The phenomenology of existential feeling', in J. FINGERHUT & S. MARIENBURG (eds.): *Feelings of being alive* (Boston/Berlin 2012) 23-54.

²⁴ RATCLIFFE: 'The phenomenology of existential feeling' 23-54.

²⁵ M. RATCLIFFE: *Real hallucinations. Psychiatric illness, intentionality and the interpersonal world* (Cambridge, MA 2017).

²⁶ RATCLIFFE: *Feelings of being* 54.

of familiarity, but a *feeling of unfamiliarity*. In experiencing something is unfamiliar in this way, there is an awareness that something is not quite right- we feel that something is missing.²⁷

It has been a recurring experience recently, walking to the supermarkets, through my neighbourhood, on the streets that normally feel like extensions of my home. Even though I am quite aware of the reason for objective changes in their appearance, the closed shops, the relative emptiness, the lack of the usual hustle and bustle in the centre of Utrecht, the experience of uncanniness is pervasive. Where I see children playing, couples walking, cyclists making their way in traffic, instead of experiencing them as normal, and indeed often hardly consciously registering them at all, something seems to be off, and they appear remnants of a vanished world that existed in a very recent past and/or as illustrations of changing modes of existence. For instance, I cannot escape the feeling that the strolling couple is now outside to escape the monotony of being confined within the space of their own home, holding hands because the partner is the only one who may still be trusted in the new personal safe sphere of two meters circumference.

Something similar can be said of the experience of our own homes. The feeling I had a week ago, that spending time working at home would be a welcome, sabbatical-like experience, has quickly been dispelled. Life under shut- or lockdown and quarantine, being confined to one's own home, instead is more like home arrest or even incarceration. Being at home thereby receives a new and decidedly more unwelcome and sinister meaning. Rather than a place of refuge and privacy, the home seems to be becoming a place of constriction in space and confinement. My daily bike ride is no longer primarily a joyful combination of exercise, contemplation and music listening, but is starting to feel reminiscent of airtime in the yard of a prison. Contact with some of the most important people in my life is rapidly becoming impossible. A half an hour of public transportation, which would have given no reason to pause at all last week, has now become a simultaneously dangerous and irresponsible endeavour.

Clues to what this will mean if the shutdown of our societies endures for months or even years can be found in the experience of boredom, which is commonplace in incarceration.²⁸ By this I mean the existential

²⁷ RATCLIFFE: *Feelings of being*, 54.

²⁸ T.T. BENGTSSON: 'Boredom and action. Experiences from youth confinement', in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 41/5 (2012) 526-563.

experience of boredom, or profound boredom, *Langeweile*, as was analysed by Heidegger in his *Fundamental concepts of metaphysics*.²⁹ This profound boredom is not directed at a particular object or situation, and therefore is not to be confused with a tedious task or a feeling of boredom with an activity or a person. Instead, profound boredom concerns a lack of significance and meaning in the world as such, “what is boring is here diffused throughout the particular situation as a whole”.³⁰ Being physically cut off for extensive periods of times from whom we fundamentally care about or love stimulates such a lack of meaning (see also Frankfurt 2004),³¹ while the extent to which the coronavirus disaster has eclipsed all other aspects of social life, has dwarfed or diminished the meaningfulness of our own significant projects. The fight *against* and the containment *of* the disease is what matters; pursuing unrelated ends appears frivolous.

Heidegger referred to profound boredom in terms of his understanding of *Stimmung*, commonly translated as mood or attunement.³² In *Being and Time*, he explains, “a mood assails us. It comes neither from ‘outside’ nor from ‘inside,’ but arises out of being-in-the-world. (...) Having a mood is not related to the psychological (...) and is not itself an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way and puts its mark on things and persons”.³³ For Heidegger, moods are not to be understood as discrete sensations or feelings that take place inside of us; instead a mood “comes neither from ‘outside’ nor from ‘inside’ but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being”. Mood overlaps and is in many ways synonymous to Ratcliffe’s existential feelings,³⁴ and as Heidegger’s writing on mood is a good deal more dense and less systematic, I normally stick to Ratcliffe’s terminology. However, an issue that appears more immediately from the German term *Stimmung* (indeed from the Dutch *stemming* as well) is the extent to which mood also concerns collective experiences. As Heidegger explicitly states, *Stimmung* “is not some being that appears in the soul as an experience, but the way of our being there with one another”. Being with one another is to be

²⁹ M. HEIDEGGER: *Fundamental concepts of metaphysics. World, finitude, solitude* (trans. W. MCNEILL & N. WALKER) (Bloomington, IN 1929/1995); AHO: *Contexts of suffering*.

³⁰ HEIDEGGER: *Fundamental concepts of metaphysics* 128.

³¹ H. FRANKFURT: *The reasons of love* (Princeton 2004).

³² M. RATCLIFFE: ‘Why mood matters’ 157-176; AHO: *Contexts of suffering*.

³³ HEIDEGGER: *Being and time*, 137.

³⁴ RATCLIFFE: *Feelings of being*; RATCLIFFE: ‘Why mood matters’ 157-176.

understood in terms of an atmospheric character of social contact – or indeed in our case the increasing lack thereof – while moods could be regarded as (atmospheric) qualities of situations in which we find ourselves. They “permeate and tinge the whole field of experience” and are thus “atmospheric in nature”.

Commentators are already noting a collective experience of uncertainty.³⁵ Of course we are uncertain about discrete issues: the course and the extent of the contagion, the actions of our governments to combat the spread of the disease, the extent of economic devastation or the length of time that the shutdown of our societies will be required. But as will emerge below I would like to address the possibility of a collective mood of uncertainty taking over our societies: not uncertainty about particular issues, but uncertainty as such, a pervasive atmosphere of uncertainty. It is an uncertainty as to our *being-in-the-world* or “our tacit familiarity and involvement with the meaningful setting of our lives”.³⁶

3. VICTIMIZATION AS AN ONTOLOGICAL ASSAULT

The adaption of the concept ontological assault to the domain of victimology is inspired by the work of Susan Brison,³⁷ a victim of rape and attempted murder.³⁸ Brison found that her experience endangered her sense of self in three ways. The first is the *embodied self*, which most closely resembles Pellegrino’s use of the term in his medical ethics. In an analysis of Brison’s experience, J.M. Bernstein argued that it drives a wedge between the two relationships we have with our bodies. According to Bernstein we *are* our bodies and we *have* our bodies. The latter refers to our control over our own body, while the former refers to the fact that our embodiment is the main way in which we exist physically *in* and interact *with* the world. Victimization drives a wedge between these two: we still are our body, but no longer feel to be in control of it. The rapist took over the control of Brison’s body, while in the aftermath her body appeared as alien and even as an enemy. The experience of rape and physical violence

³⁵ B. HEIJNE: ‘Hoe lang kunnen we met onzekerheid leven?’, in *NRC Handelsblad*, 17 March 2020.

³⁶ AHO: *Contexts of suffering* 16.

³⁷ S.J. BRISON: *Aftermath. Violence and the remaking of the self* (Princeton 2002).

³⁸ A. PEMBERTON, E. MULDER & P.G.M. AARTEN: ‘Stories of injustice. Towards a narrative victimology’, in *European Journal of Criminology* 16/4 (2019) 391-412; PEMBERTON: ‘Annual lecture’.

serves to forcibly remind us of the reality of our embodiment, while rendering us extremely vulnerable by diminishing or destroying our sense of control over our own body. It also emphasizes the social quality of this unity, which as Bernstein summarizes “is a moment by moment, social achievement, something I do or fail to do in accordance with more or less stringent social values and norms”.³⁹

As noted above, the experience with COVID-19 can put us at odds with our bodies. That concerns contracting the illness itself and the prevalent anxiety of doing so. The way that our bodies inhabit space is increasingly a matter of concern, what they touch and where and in whose vicinity they are can pose potentially lethal threats. But it also has the effect of moralizing aspects of our embodiment, which until very recently did not merit consideration in such terms at all. In February 2020, who would have thought shaking someone’s hand or standing less than two meters away of another person might involve a significant risk with that person’s health and of one’s own? Or, for that matter, that participating in public life with a slight cold or a raised temperature would be of anyone else’s concern?⁴⁰

It is important here to understand the qualitative shift that such a moralization of embodiment involves. Richard Schweder and colleagues’ distinction between different moral codes and their associated emotions offers valuable insights here.⁴¹ Popularized by Haidt,⁴² this concerns the moral codes of autonomy, community and divinity, and the corresponding moral emotions of anger, contempt and disgust (the ‘CAD-triad’ hypothesis).⁴³ Public moral codes of Western liberal democracies largely

³⁹ BERNSTEIN: *Torture and dignity*.

⁴⁰ In this regard the experiences with COVID-19 resemble with considerable additional force the shift in experience following the initial outbreak of HIV in the 1980’s. Where aspects of embodiment in consensual sex with varying partners merely concerned the potential joy and fulfillment of doing so, the emergence of Auto-Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) meant that each instance involved exposing a partner and oneself to sickness and eventually death. Where the change in understanding of the sexual act as a consequence of AIDS took months and perhaps years to occur, COVID-19 is necessitating such a change in a matter of days, while the accompanying behavioral prescriptions cut a good deal deeper into our embodied social life.

⁴¹ SHWEDER [et al.]: ‘The “Big Three” of morality’.

⁴² J. HAIDT: *The righteous mind. How good people are divided by politics and religion* (New York 2012).

⁴³ P. ROZIN [et al.]: ‘The CAD triad hypothesis. A mapping between three moral emotions (contempt, anger, disgust) and three moral codes (community, autonomy, divinity)’, in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76/4 (1999) 574-586.

concern autonomy, in which “an action is wrong because it directly hurts another person, or infringes upon his/her rights or freedoms as an individual”.⁴⁴ Moralization of our embodiment instead invokes the moral code of divinity, which includes aspects of purity and cleanliness, and invokes the moral emotion of disgust, rather than anger.

This qualitative shift reshapes the boundaries distinguishing misfortune from injustice, as Judith Shklar discussed in *The Faces of Injustice*. The first key issue here is

which of our travails are due to injustice and which are misfortunes. When can we blame others and when is our pain a matter of natural necessity or just bad luck? (...) The very distinction between injustice and misfortune can sometimes be mischievous (...) On the border between misfortune and injustice we must deal with the victim as best we can, without asking on which side her case falls.⁴⁵

As noted before, a rapid shift is underway in the manner in which (the risk) of contracting COVID-19 is understood. Many victims, their loved ones and society more generally are likely to see the current predicament in terms of wrongdoing. I should hasten to add that this wrongdoing is not solely outward directed, as the moralization of embodiment also entails the inevitability of self-blame. Why did I go out? Why wasn't I more careful washing my hands? Why was I not more vigilant at keeping a distance from others?

The second key issue is that drawing any line between misfortune and injustice is not so much a matter of rational deliberation, but one of social context and in particular political choice. As I will discuss further below, one of the knock-on dangers of the current crisis concerns the moralization and thereby weaponization of the disease. Since the emergence of the disease, leaders with a track record of irresponsible political speech have signalled a willingness to point to China and the Chinese government as the culprit of the crisis.⁴⁶ That was already true when

⁴⁴ ROZIN [et al.]: ‘The CAD Triad Hypothesis’ 574-586.

⁴⁵ J. SHKLAR: *The Faces of injustice* (New Haven 1990) 54-55.

⁴⁶ N. COHEN: ‘Bluff, bombast and blame is all that Donald Trump can offer in this crisis’, in *The Guardian*, 21 March 2020. This is complicated by the fact that such a claim would not be completely without merit, given the fact that it is not news that Chinese food markets provide excellent conditions for the emergence of new and lethal diseases (see already DAVIS, 2007) as well as the attempts of the Chinese government to initially cover-up the disease; DAVIS: ‘Phronesis, clinical reasoning and Pellegrino’s philosophy of medicine’ 173-195.

Wuhan was still suffering the lion's share of cases, and the extent of the spread of the disease in the West was still a matter of discussion. But the question will surely resound with more force if the current trend continues of the disease being under control in China, while raging through different European and American countries.⁴⁷

Returning to Brison. The taken-for-grantedness that threatened in her description of her embodied self also concerns more abstract ways in which we are in the world. A second issue is the impact on her self as narrative. Our identity is importantly storied: we construct our own life stories, while our life stories help us understand ourselves as continuous beings from the past into the present into the future, and as connected to our close and distant social surroundings.⁴⁸ Severe forms of victimization endanger this narrative identity: they cause a 'rupture' in people's life stories, as they existentially struggle to make sense of the relationship between the person they were before the victimisation, during and afterwards with the person they are now and the implications of this for the future.⁴⁹ Such a rupture is also visible in the storied sense of connection to our social surroundings.

Brison pointed to the experience of having outlived herself: the story with which she associated herself had ended, but she somehow lingers on in a narrative limbo, what Freeman called 'narrative foreclosure'.⁵⁰ In this the disappearance of the past and the foreshortening of the future, the narrowing of our normal sense of being past, present and future all at once, result in a sense of being a momentary self. As Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi summarized, "Like animals, we were confined to the present moment".⁵¹ Ratcliffe argues that this shift in the existential feeling of temporality is key to understanding the impact of

⁴⁷ I suppose I do not need to underline the veracity of this view, three months later with China reporting no new fatalities, while the United States has already surpassed 100,000 fatalities.

⁴⁸ P. RICOEUR: 'Life. A story in narrator', in M. DOESER & J. KRAY (eds.): *Facts and values* (Dordrecht 1986) 34-68.

⁴⁹ M.L. CROSSLEY: 'Narrative psychology, trauma and the study of self/identity', in *Theory & Psychology* 10/4 (2000) 527-546; PEMBERTON, MULDER & AARTEN: 'Stories of injustice' 391-412.

⁵⁰ M. FREEMAN: 'When the story's over. Narrative foreclosure and the possibility of self-renewal', in M. ANDREWS, S.D. SCLATER, C. SQUIRE & A. TREACHER (eds.): *Lines of narrative. Psychosocial perspectives* (London 2000) 81-93.

⁵¹ P. LEVI: *If this is a man* (London 1988).

victimisation.⁵² The difficulty or even inability to experience oneself as temporal is the backdrop against which narrative foreclosure occurs. Without such a style of anticipation projecting, planning and pressing forward into the future become all but impossible. If you can't feel yourself existing into the future, you cannot plan or project ahead either. But the ability to do so crucially distinguishes human existence, from things and – perhaps more debatably – animals, as they instead occur as a succession of “nows”, simply being present at discrete moments in time.

Elements of such narrative foreclosure are already visible in the current stage of the coronavirus crisis. The scale of the unfolding disaster has increasingly focused our full attention on the present, also severing the experienced links with the recent past. This is most clearly true for those directly impacted by the disease. The narratives, which made up much of the identity of those suffering severe respiratory failures, have been replaced by the all-out struggle to survive. Their families are having to face down the all-too-real possibility of grieving their demise, simultaneously making much of the stuff of their narratives in a recent past seem insignificant by comparison and disconnected from current experience. Indeed, even the process of dying and mourning has become dislocated from past experience, due to the imposition of quarantine on those succumbing to the disease and the restrictions on attendance to their funeral.

But this is also more generally true of life in the shadow of COVID-19. The past weeks saw a mass cancellation of meetings, appointments, events and social gatherings. But it also cast uncertainty about the plans following the current horizon of these measures. It has become difficult and perhaps even foolhardy to see and plan ahead beyond a horizon of a few days, also because of the difficulty in predicting the course of measures. It also speaks to the almost dreamlike sense in which the reality of past weeks appears. In January 2020 the coronavirus crisis still seemed to be a distant news story, affecting the population of Wuhan, and a relatively small number of travellers. Even as late as 27 February, when the first case of COVID-19 in the Netherlands appeared, it still seemed like the coronavirus crisis, like so many news stories involved

⁵² M. RATCLIFFE, M. RUDELL & B. SMITH: ‘What is a “sense of foreshortened future?” A phenomenological study of trauma, trust, and time’, in *Frontiers in Psychology* 5/1016 (2014); RATCLIFFE: *Real hallucinations*; AHO: *Contexts of suffering*.

other people, not ourselves. Visiting my students in Leuven on 9 March and enjoying a beer in one of the many pubs there seemed completely normal, but unthinkable today.

The importance of the impact the self as narrative has led my colleagues and I to conceptualize coming to terms with victimization as *re-storying*, rather than as restoration: a remade narrative that includes the victimization and its aftermath, rather than an expectation that this experience can be undone, returning to the ways things were before it.⁵³ This is not to exaggerate the impact of victimization; instead it is intended to underscore that the experience of the ontological assault and its aftermath will become part of this remade self-narrative. This does not have to spell tragedy. As the literature on posttraumatic growth reveals,⁵⁴ it can also be a tale of strength, resilience and altruism, and there is no shortage of examples of such feats, large and small across our countries. Re-storying secondly also emphasizes that aspects of our experience, unrelated to the victimization, including relationships, life-goals and values, might gain new or different meanings in the process of remaking a life narrative. Failing marriages might receive a new breath of life, while limitations in other relationships might appear, and key pursuits and projects can and will be rekindled, reordered or discarded.

The latter point can also be seen in the light of the damage to Brison's 'autonomous self'. The damage to her narrative self and her embodied self left her with profound deficiencies in her experienced ability to pursue her own final ends, the goals and the relationships that provide the backstop to her life. The act can destroy the sources of our final ends, for instance the persons we love and/or our physical/mental and emotional capacities to maintain a connection to them. In this section Brison also makes the profound point that her victimization confirmed the relational nature of her experience of autonomy. "Enhancing the autonomy in the aftermath of my assault reinforced my view as autonomy as fundamentally dependent on others." In much Westernized social science literature selves are not understood this way: instead a large body of work implicitly describes a 'Lone Ranger' theory of humans, in which the healthy individual is viewed

⁵³ PEMBERTON, MULDER & AARTEN: 'Stories of injustice'; Pemberton: 'Annual lecture'.

⁵⁴ R.G. TEDESCHI & L.G. CALHOUN: 'Posttraumatic growth. Conceptual foundations and empirical evidence', in *Psychological Inquiry* 15/1 (2004) 1-18.

as one who is “self-contained, independent and self-reliant.”⁵⁵ Not only is this generally mistaken: we are not beings who are selves first and then subsequently interact with a world outside, but are better understood as ‘being-in-the-world’, an existence that as Brison summarizes is “created and sustained by others”.⁵⁶

In addition, Brison’s account offers the insight that becoming such a shut off, self-contained, individualized, non-relational self is a consequence of victimization that the victims in the aftermath desperately need to remedy. It is a self that is “radically alone”, namely a self that finds itself unable to do what it did before, automatically without reflection, namely exist immersed in a physical, temporal and social world. Here the ontological assault in victimization comes into its own. Where Pellegrino intended it to convey the unity with one’s own body in life-threatening illness, in victimization it concerns the damage to/diminution of/destruction of the taken-for-granted manner in which we exist embodied in and connected with a meaningful world.

The characteristics of living through the coronavirus disaster magnify the importance of grasping this existential feeling of radical loneliness. Those suddenly losing a loved one are likely to experience the loss of final ends, bound up in caring for and the relationship with the deceased. The sense that being on the brink of death individualizes in similar vein can be experienced by those hospitalized by the disease. Three other features are worth mentioning. First there is the actual experience of loneliness as a consequence of social distancing measures. Social contact has been minimized for whole populations, and it is yet unclear for how long. It is particularly true for parts of the population most vulnerable to succumbing to the disease: the elderly and the sick.⁵⁷ There is a cruel irony in the twin facts that safeguarding their health requires them to be effectively socially isolated, while social isolation itself was a key scourge

⁵⁵ I took the Lone Ranger description from Bernard Rimé (2009), who also perceptively noted the difference between the social science of adults and of children and adolescents in this regard.; B. RIMÉ: ‘Emotion elicits the social emotion. Theory and empirical review’, in *Emotion Review* 1/1 (2009) 60-85.

⁵⁶ Again this is a key issue in Heidegger’s *Being and time*, to which Brison herself does not refer. See, however, L. FREEMAN: ‘Reconsidering relational autonomy. A feminist approach to selfhood and the other in the thinking of Martin Heidegger’, in *Inquiry* 54/4 (2011) 361-383.

⁵⁷ J.T. CACCIOPIO & W. PATRICK: *Loneliness. Human nature and the need for social connection* (New York 2009).

before the onset of the disaster. Second, the shifting understanding (of the dangers) of our embodiment can be understood in its impact on loneliness. A parallel to the HIV/AIDS epidemic is illuminating. Existential loneliness⁵⁸ has been observed in those suffering from AIDS, due to the restrictions on being intimate as well as the impossibilities of conceiving children. It begs the question what will happen if social distancing measures are required to endure for months and even years. Lockdowns and curfews in wartime are not likely to involve similar prohibitions on friendly forms of contact and intimacy. Third, the aforementioned all-enveloping quality of COVID-19 diminishes the extent to which the goals that structure many of our main pursuits can maintain their previously experienced import. Most of us do not occupy the recently minted positions of vital importance in society: this can imbue our endeavours with a sense of futility. That such a re-evaluation of work in our societies is perhaps overdue – see also David Graeber’s (2018) recent *Bullshit Jobs* – is undoubtedly true, but does not diminish the challenge of this realization.⁵⁹

Viewing the experience of the ontological assault in victimization in terms of this radical loneliness has led my colleagues and myself to argue for the importance of *re-connection* in coming to terms with victimization.⁶⁰ This is visible in the manner in which victims seek out others in similar situations, for instance in peer support, as the need for re-connection collides with the experience that something fundamental and taken-for-granted has been taken away. It contributes to the experience that only those in a similar position to the victim will be able to come close to fully understanding the victim’s story. It can also be seen in the manner in which victims perceive reactions to their ordeal, with an important, but oft neglected, facet of victim participation in justice processes concerning the need to connect to societal institutions and values.⁶¹ But the issue particular to the scale and societal impact of the coronavirus disaster, which I will address in the following section, concerns the question ‘reconnection to what?’.

⁵⁸ A.M. MAYERS & M. SVARTBERG: ‘Existential loneliness. A review of the concept, its psychosocial precipitants and psychotherapeutic implications for HIV-infected women’, in *Journal of Medical Psychology* 74/4 (2011) 539-553.

⁵⁹ D. GRAEBER: *Bullshit jobs* (London 2018).

⁶⁰ PEMBERTON, MULDER & AARTEN: ‘Stories of injustice’ 391-412.

⁶¹ PEMBERTON: ‘Annual lecture’ 11-33.

4. THE COLLECTIVE MOOD OF A SOCIETAL ONTOLOGICAL ASSAULT

Bernstein's analysis of the underlying consequences of the damage to the embodied self suggests the fundamental role of *trust*.⁶² I quote him at some length:

Trust is the ethical foundation of everyday life. Trust is trust in others before whom we are unconditionally vulnerable that they will not take advantage of our vulnerability. Given the exorbitance of this requirement – the forbearance of trust as the acknowledgment proper to our existential helplessness before one another – trust turns out to be most effective or most fully actual when it remains unnoticed: trust ideally occurs as the invisibility of trust. Hence, the ethical foundation of everyday life is a set of attitudes, presuppositions, and practices which we typically fail to emphatically notice until they become absent.⁶³

Not only does this highlight the centrality of trust to being-in-the-world, it also emphasizes that realization of this fact in itself diminishes it: see also the 'double entendre' of the ontological assault as an attack on being, that is revealing of features of being in exactly what it attacks. This is central to the enduring nature of experiences of victimization, long after the event has taken place: physical scars and memories might play a role, but it is the experience of being exposed to a reality (of the self) that is central.⁶⁴

The previous discussion of embodiment, and the manner in which it is becoming moralized, emphasizes our vulnerability in the manner in which Bernstein describes. Indeed, if anything it qualitatively magnifies the importance of our "existential helplessness before one another". The current situation suggests the risk of severe bodily harm and even death by merely standing too close to others, and the trust they will "not take advantage of our vulnerability" extends to their self-monitoring of symptoms, personal hygiene and vigilance of maintaining a safe distance from us. Of course, I cannot claim that this is a completely new facet of social, particularly urban, life: being a bit of germaphobe myself has often led

⁶² J.M. BERNSTEIN: 'Trust. On the real but almost always unnoticed, ever-changing foundation of ethical life', in *Metaphilosophy* 42/4 (2011) 395-416; BERNSTEIN: *Torture and dignity*.

⁶³ BERNSTEIN: 'Trust' 395.

⁶⁴ A. PEMBERTON: 'The shame of injustice. The ethics of victimology and what it means for restorative justice', in *International Journal of Restorative Justice* 2/3 (2019) 451-469.

me to steer clear of the more snot-ridden of my daughters playmates, for instance. But the ubiquity of the reminders of these possibilities means that the trust involved in being out in social life is anything but invisible. The moralization of these features of embodiment strengthens the extent to which we might experience each other's failure to abide by these norms as recklessness or even intentional wrongdoing, rather than a misfortunate fact of life: the re-emergence of moral code of divinity in structuring social life in Western democracies. And it finally extends to all others we encounter. Our degree of exposure to another is normally a function of our proximity to them, ranging from high levels in our partners and children to lower levels in strangers. But in the current situation even the most familiar of friends and relations poses similar risks to a complete stranger. The dissonance between our feelings of love and friendship to those close to us, and the necessity of keeping them at a distance because of the danger to our safety, makes the role of trust explicit, and thereby damages it.

The issue has already been raised whether this will shift our understanding of other humans in the directions of potential bearers of health risks, rather than of fellow citizens, but it is too early to tell. However, recent examples of societies in which the collective mood of basic trust has been endemically flouted abound: think of Stasi-era GDR, the Khmer Rouge or Chile under Pinochet. Without fully pursuing this point here, such an endemic, societal breakdown of trust can persist long after the regime in question has been overthrown, the way back from being 'a nation of enemies' can take generations.⁶⁵

The difficulty in such a return is clearly visible in current day Cambodia. The relative magnitude of the hardship inflicted on the Cambodian people by the Khmer Rouge remains in a league of its own: in the course of four years, 1.5 to 2 million inhabitants perished, suffering displacements, forced marriages, starvation and torture along the way.⁶⁶ Betrayal, even by one's offspring, was endemic. A key issue here is revealed by the Sotheara Chimm's research.⁶⁷ A clinical psychologist

⁶⁵ P. CONSTABLE & A. VALENZUELA: *A nation of enemies. Chile under Pinochet* (New York 1993).

⁶⁶ B. KIERNAN: *The Pol Pot regime. Race, power, and genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79* (New Haven 2008).

⁶⁷ S. CHIMM: 'Baksbat (broken courage). The development and validation of the inventory to measure Baksbat, a Cambodian trauma-based cultural syndrome', in *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 36/4 (2012) 640-659.

working with the traumatized population in Cambodia, he revealed the limits of the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to capture their experiences. Elements of the etiology of PTSD were visible in the Cambodians Chimm encountered, including the sense of foreshortened future mentioned above. However, Chimm found that the Cambodian ‘auto-genocide’ has left an imprint on the population, which expands this notion to a more collective mood that he tellingly calls *baksbat* or ‘broken courage’. Rather *than* or in addition *to* a sense of individual foreshortened future, it is the future of the Khmer people as such that is felt to be in doubt. *Baksbat* is a cultural syndrome, rather than an individual psychological malady, centred on a pervasive lack of purpose concerning the endeavours of the Cambodian people.

Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge might seem a far cry from our current predicament. There is surely much space between that inhumane historical epoch and the rapid emergence of a contagious and lethal disease and I do not want to overextend the similarities. However, I would like to suggest both a shift in our collective experience of trust and of our temporality as a collective as candidates for the impact of the coronavirus disaster at the societal level. The rhetorical question, “Who today is concretely making plans for the future?”, also applies to our societies. At this point we are still in the process of postponing large-scale societal events to a future in which COVID-19 may be sufficiently under control, but the current uncertainty as to when and if this will be the case, and the speed with which societal changes are occurring, can make us susceptible to large-scale changes in our cultural meta-narratives: *re-storying* at the societal level.

In this *re-storying* I would like to flag two concepts. First is the notion of *hegemonic narratives*.⁶⁸ This hegemony applies to the content of the story, but also to the kind of story that is appropriate, the question of who is entitled to tell stories, the settings in which stories are appropriate and the way stories are perceived. Hegemonic narratives preempt other narratives, and their apparent self-evidence is an important factor in this preemption. A current candidate for such a hegemonic narrative is that everything should be done to combat the spread of the disease: including far-reaching and exceptional restrictions on social life and freedom of movement, shutting of borders, confinement of the elderly and the sick. This narrative comes equipped with a dramatic shift in our understand-

⁶⁸ POLLETTA: *It was like a fever*.

ing of each other and the moral codes involved in social life. The state of emergency in which we find ourselves, the speed with which changes are occurring and the seemingly all-enveloping threat of the disease increases the possibility that such a shift in hegemonic narrative will acquire self-evidence, relegating possible counter-narratives, seeking to preserve freedoms under pressure from this all-out ‘war’ against the disease, to pre-COVID-19 luxuries.

Second, there is the role that large-scale narratives of victimisation play in our shared cultural identity. Psychiatrist and historian Vamik Volkan developed the view that such narratives of victimisation, what he calls *chosen traumas*, are a key element of large-scale group identity, even more powerfully so than shared stories of triumph, *chosen glories*.⁶⁹ The notion that they are *chosen* concerns the fact that the historical narratives in use at any given time co-vary with political circumstances. The reason that victimization narratives can do this is because of their moral quality. Unresolved injustice at the group level supplies reasons to act in the present as well as means to bind individuals into the sense of being a member of a group. The point here is that the experience of living through the coronavirus crisis is a likely candidate to be such a *chosen trauma* in the already very near future. In the societal *re-storying*, the interpretation and political spin that is placed upon our history of the present might cast a long shadow over the manner in which societies reinterpret themselves and their imaginable futures. Many of the tales that Volkan describes in his book *Bloodlines* serve as a reminder that chosen traumas are easily hijacked by political forces that seek to exploit ethnic and cultural cleavages: the dog-whistle rebranding of the ‘coronavirus’ to the ‘Chinese virus’ is but one current example (see again Cohen).⁷⁰

Both the notion of hegemonic narratives and chosen traumas point to possible answers to the question ‘reconnection to what?’ at the societal level, concepts that can provide clues to where the collective mood of uncertainty might lead us. More optimistic answers to this predicament are also possible, also depending on one’s perspective of what amounts to optimism. Marxist philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2020) for instance heralded the current crisis as a chance to finally settle the debate between the individualizing forces of international capitalism and global solidarity

⁶⁹ VOLKAN: *Bloodlines*.

⁷⁰ COHEN: ‘Bluff, bombast and blame’.

of people in favour of the latter, finally ushering in an era of communism.⁷¹ I might not share his enthusiasm for the communist project, but I also cannot deny that (international) solidarity has emerged as the bright side to some of the lowest points in human history: Western Europe after the Second World War is an example in point.⁷²

However, I am less sanguine that too much optimism is warranted. As an instance of ‘prepare for the worst and hope for the best’, I will return to the works of dystopian fiction in conclusion of this chapter. The aforementioned moralization of embodiment is associated with a particularly conservative, political outlook on life⁷³, while the coronavirus crisis strikes at a time where our democracies are already beleaguered, with ethnically and culturally divisive political factions increasingly taking centre stage in the political landscape.⁷⁴ Maybe it goes too far to worry that we will be cast into full-scale ‘philosophical despair’⁷⁵ – the despair about life itself, that life itself does not matter – that is a recurrent theme in *The Leftovers*, but the fact that a sudden onset of (ecologically) caused diseases was the harbinger of the totalitarian despotic regimes in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *V for Vendetta* should give us some worrying food for thought. The former speaks to the possibility of rekindled moral codes based upon purity and cleanliness, while the news stories that Donald Trump sought to buy exclusive access to a possible vaccine is eerily reminiscent of the activities of the *Norsefire* government in the film adaptation of the latter story.⁷⁶ If the coronavirus crisis is indeed the disaster of our times, having sole access to its cure will make its possessor the unavoidable answer.

⁷¹ S. ŽIŽEK: ‘Monitor and punish? Yes, please!’, in *The Philosophical Salon* (2020).

⁷² And indeed, by the time of redrafting, we are in the midst of the unlikely emergence of Black Lives Matter as a global societal cause.

⁷³ HEIDT: *The righteous mind*.

⁷⁴ S. LEVITSKY & D. ZIBLATT: *How democracies die* (New York 2018).

⁷⁵ M. GARRETT: ‘The problem of despair’, in G. GRAHAM & G.L. STEPHAN (eds.): *Philosophical psychopathology* (1994) 73-89.

⁷⁶ See, for instance, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/not-for-sale-anger-in-germany-at-report-trump-seeking-exclusive-coronavirus-vaccine-deal> [last accessed 22 March 2020].

GRIEF, TRAUMA AND MEANING MAKING AFTER DISASTER

JOANNA WOJTKOWIAK

1. INTRODUCTION

Disaster is a sudden and potentially traumatic event that affects a group or community. How do people respond psychologically after disaster? Symbols and ritual are one way to express emotions in the aftermath of disaster. Grief and loss can be channelled and discharged through ritual and ritual-like activities. This chapter focuses on psychological and existential processes after disaster. What does it mean to experience disaster? And, what do we know about grief and loss and the role of ritual? Some authors describe the healing quality of ritual after distressful events: rituals are even argued to transform traumatic experiences.¹ Ronald Grimes states that when you are “cured, you are fixed; healed, you are reconnected”.² Ritual helps in reconstructing meaning after disaster by giving attention to the grief experience and channelling emotions into symbolic form. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1993) writes, “in ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world.”³ One cannot change the horrific fate that disaster causes, but ritual gives space to act symbolically and collectively. Therefore, ritual creates an imagined reality where people are able ‘to do something’ about the grief and loss.

The goal of this chapter is twofold: first, to map the field on grief and trauma psychology in relation to disaster research in order to address questions such as ‘who is affected by disaster and how do people mourn

¹ R.L. GRIMES: *Deeply into the bone. Re-inventing rites of passage* (Berkeley 2002); H. SCOTT & C.J. WEPENER: ‘Healing as transformation and restoration. A ritual-liturgical exploration’, in *HTS Teologiese Studie/Theological Studies* 73/4 (2017) 4064-4072; Z. TURSUNOVA: ‘The role of rituals in healing trauma and reconciliation in post-accord peacebuilding’, in *Journal of Human Security* 4/3 (2008) 54-71.

² GRIMES: *Deeply into the bone* 343.

³ C. GEERTZ: *The interpretation of cultures. Selected essays* (New York 1973) 112.

after disaster?’ The focus will be on psychological concepts in disaster research, such as grief and trauma. Second, I will approach grief reactions from a meaning-making perspective. Questions will be posed such as ‘do rituals help in restoring community resilience after disaster? And how do people make meaning after disaster?’ This chapter brings together theoretical insights from grief and trauma psychology, as well as empirical data from research on disaster, trauma and ritual.

The first section will discuss the impact of disaster: who are affected by disaster and what kinds of responses are visible? Second, the concepts of grief and trauma will be discussed in more detail in order to understand people’s responses to disaster. Then, I will turn to reactions to disaster from the perspectives of meaning making and resilience in order to offer additional insights into ritual dynamics and functions after disaster. In the final part, I will elaborate on the question of whether and how ritual can contribute to collective healing and the building of resilience after disaster.

2. THE IMPACT OF DISASTER

In psychological literature, the impact of disaster is distinguished into four phases: (1) the impact phase, (2) the emotional ‘honeymoon’ phase, (3) the disillusion phase and (4) the reintegration phase.⁴ I will discuss each phase in order to give an overview of possible psychological responses after disaster. The first phase, the impact phase, refers to the first 24-36 hours and is focused on survival and reactions of disbelief. Professionals, such as police, firemen, psychologists and pastoral care workers, are called for in order to give physical and emotional shelter. Research on the right-wing terrorist attack in Norway in 2011 reports reactions of “uncertainty and despair in the Norwegian people” as first responses to the attack.⁵ Fear and anger were less commonly reported during that first phase. This phase distinguishes itself through chaos and mixed emotions.

⁴ B.P.R. GERSONS, R.R.R. HUIJSMAN-RUBINGH & M. OLFF: ‘De psychosociale zorg na de vuurwerkramp in Enschede. Lessen van de Bijlmer-vliegcramp’, in *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde* 148 (2004) 1426-1430.

⁵ I.M. HØEG: ‘Silent actions – emotion and mass mourning rituals after the terrorist attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011’, in *Mortality* 20/3 (2015) 197-214, p. 198.

The second phase refers to the first weeks after the disaster and is characterized by strong emotions.⁶ During this phase we also see the emergence of many rituals and ritual-like activities. Social cohesion and solidarity are expressed and formed in ritual: political leaders walk side by side in silent marches, and groups who normally do not interact much or even dislike each other are now sharing a ritual space. Memorials are organized by national, religious or local groups and institutions. Ritual action channels these strong emotions as emotions are evoked through rituals and at the same time kept at ‘aesthetic distance’.⁷ Aesthetic distance means that the symbolic use of language and action gives room for personal expression and associations, but also creates a symbolic, aesthetic reality where one can imagine a better world. Rituals are also considered a way of dealing with or banning evil,⁸ which becomes clear after, for instance, terrorist attacks. The protest or ritual responses carry messages against hate and terror and people show that they are united and respond with love. In a study on the aftermath of the Norwegian terrorist attack, it was reported that 70% of the Norwegian people felt united with one another.⁹ An empirical study of memorial messages after that same attack revealed the importance of connectedness and a sense of belonging that is depicted in these memorial messages after terrorist violence.¹⁰ Cora Alexa Døving analysed three thousand randomly selected memorial messages from the Norwegian National Archives’ digitized records and showed four main themes: first, messages addressing and depicting the nation. The messages state that Norway has

⁶ GERSONS, HUIJSMAN-RUBINGH & OLFF: ‘De psychosociale zorg na de vuurwerkramp in Enschede’.

⁷ G.C. CHUPCHIK: ‘The evolution of psychical distance as aesthetic concept’, in *Culture & Psychology* 8/2 (2002) 155-187; T.J. SCHEFF: ‘The distancing of emotion in ritual’, in *Current Anthropology* 18/3 (1977) 483-490; J. WOJTKOWIAK: ‘Towards a psychology of ritual. A theoretical framework for ritual transformation’, in *Culture & Psychology* 24/4 (2018) 460-476.

⁸ G. LUKKEN: *Rituelen in overvloed. Een kritische bezinning op de plaats en gestalte van het christelijk ritueel in onze cultuur* (Baarn 1999).

⁹ S. THORESEN, H.F. AAKVAAG, T. WENTZEL-LARSEN, G. DYB, & O.K. HJEMDAL: ‘The day Norway cried. Proximity and distress in Norwegian citizens following the 22nd July 2011 terrorist attacks in Oslo and on Utøya Island’, in *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 3 (2012).

¹⁰ C.A. DØVING: ‘Homeland ritualised: an analysis of written messages placed at temporary memorials after the terrorist attacks on 22 July 2011 in Norway’, in *Morality* 23/3 (2018) 231-246.

been attacked and the nation responds with love, solidarity and pride, revealing a transformation of the message of hate in the terrorist attack. Second are messages to the dead, where people write words of condolence, such as “you will never be forgotten”; the victims are also depicted as heroes. Third are political messages, such as “we will fight for freedom”, and messages that address political leaders. Fourth are messages from culturally diverse Norwegians, such as Muslim communities, who express their solidarity and sense of belonging with the Norwegian nation. This study of verbal responses at a memorial after the Utøya attack reflects society’s need for unity, community and transformation of evil action into love after such a horrific event. The analysis of the messages shows the apotropaic dimension of ritual: banning the evil from the community by depicting symbolic messages of love and unity.¹¹

After about three weeks, those who are not directly affected by the disaster often return to their everyday life, and those who are affected feel a sense of ‘standing alone’ and having to deal with their fate, as well as practical, financial and emotional consequences of the disaster.¹² This third phase is also called disillusion, because of the biting contrast with the previous phase: the *communitas*¹³ ends here, and those having to deal with the impact of the disaster face the harsh reality of, for instance, bureaucratic issues, such as taking care of deceased loved-ones’ financial, material and jurisdictional affairs.

The fourth and final phase is referred to as the reintegration phase, when those directly involved can return to a more or less normal life and functioning.¹⁴ We learn from classical rite of passage theory that

¹¹ The three ‘social gifts’ of ritual described by Tom Driver (1999) become visible in these rituals: creating social order after uncertainty and chaos, transforming messages of evil and hate into love and solidarity and creating a strong, cohesive community, at least for the time being. Here the classical concepts of *liminality* and *communitas* by Turner (1960) and Van Gennep (1960) also become visible. *Liminality* is defined in ritual studies as an ‘in-between’ state: a phase of social and emotional chaos.

¹² GERSONS, HUIJSMAN-RUBINGH & OLFF: ‘De psychosociale zorg na de vuurwerkramp in Enschede’.

¹³ *Communitas* refers to a strong, cohesive, temporal community that emerges after a social change. Ordinary social structures make room for a temporal *communitas*, which can be very cohesive during the ritual action, such as during a memorial, silent march or other ritual demonstrations. See V. TURNER: *The ritual process. Structure and anti-structure* (Piscataway 2008 [1969]).

¹⁴ GERSONS, HUIJSMAN-RUBINGH & OLFF: ‘De psychosociale zorg na de vuurwerkramp in Enschede’.

reintegration after a life-changing event, such as death, means transforming psychologically and socially from one social status to another, such as from wife to widow.¹⁵ The person returns to everyday life, but their identity and social status has changed. Rituals accompany and stimulate that process but are not a guarantee for a ‘successful’ transformation. The timing and quality of the reintegration phase depends on the specific disaster, the amount of the impact and how a social group has dealt with it. Reintegration can be difficult, such as when the bodies of deceased have not or cannot be returned home. This can stagnate the social transformation from ‘living’ to ‘dead’, as well as the grieving process.¹⁶ The bereaved might not want to have a funeral. In some cases, such as the death of a child or another extreme loss, there might never be an actual reintegration phase or only partially. We know from empirical research on meaning making after death and grief that some aspects of the grief experience might be integrated and made sense of, while others remain unsolved.¹⁷

These different stages of disaster impact give us a first insight into grief and loss experiences after disaster. Ritual is a collective response to the disaster and an important part of the grieving process, as will be further discussed in the next section.¹⁸ In the following section, the concepts of grief and trauma will be elaborated in more detail.

3. EXPERIENCING DISASTER: INSIGHTS FROM GRIEF AND TRAUMA PSYCHOLOGY

How do people experience disaster? Who is the most vulnerable after disaster? In the literature, potential vulnerabilities in relation to disaster have been categorized in terms of physical proximity, psychosocial

¹⁵ B.D. ROMANOFF & M. TERENCE: ‘Rituals and the grieving process’, in *Death Studies* 22/8 (1998) 697-711; A. VAN GENNEP: *The rites of passage* (Chicago 1960 [1909]). WOJTKOWIAK: ‘Towards a psychology of ritual’.

¹⁶ In grief psychology, there are different terms used to describe different grief reactions, such as ‘delayed’, ‘anticipated’ or ‘disenfranchised’ grief. All of these terms suggest that grieving is not an isolated process within the individual but is influenced by contextual factors as well.

¹⁷ J. WOJTKOWIAK, N. VANHERF & C. SCHUHMAN: ‘Grief in a biography of losses. Meaning making in hard drug user’s grief narratives on drug related death’, in *Death Studies* 43/2 (2018) 122-132.

¹⁸ ROMANOFF & TERENCE: ‘Rituals and the grieving process’; WOJTKOWIAK, VANHERF & SCHUHMAN: ‘Grief in a biography of losses’.

involvement and potential re-traumatization.¹⁹ People are thus affected by disaster when they are (1) physically close, (2) psychologically and socially involved through family and friends and/or (3) triggered by previous traumatic memories. Predicting who is most vulnerable remains, however, difficult. Researchers argue that physical proximity alone does not predict trauma and psychopathology.²⁰ Besides, the term 'victim' already has connotations of vulnerability. Some would rather speak of 'affected'²¹ or 'survivor' when referring to people being impacted by the disaster. Another question regards the impact on family members and close friends who do not live geographically nearby: does this make people more or less vulnerable? On the one hand, being physically close increases the direct impact, but being far away can increase feelings of uncertainty and not knowing what is happening to loved ones, such as one's children. The physical distance might therefore become a source of greater stress and anxiety.

In order to understand reactions to disaster in more depth, we need to pay attention to the concept of grief. Experiencing disaster, physically, psychologically or socially, can lead to grief reactions. Grief, first, refers to a psychological and behavioural reaction to loss.²² In the case of disaster, this might include the loss of loved ones, material loss through the

¹⁹ L.D. FURMAN, P.W. BENSON, B. MOSS, E. VETIK & E. CANADA 'Reflections on collective trauma, faith, and service delivery to victims of terrorism and natural disaster. Insights from six national studies', in *Social Work & Christianity* 43/1 (2016) 74-94. Physical proximity refers to (1) victims directly impacted by disaster, (2) witnesses, (3) people in close proximity (e.g., nearby communities) and (4) people outside of the disaster area (e.g., non-New Yorkers during 9/11) (see D. FURMAN [et al.] 2016, 79-80). Psycho-social vulnerabilities are (1) people in relationship with the disaster victim, (2) acquaintances and (3) people who identify with the victims, for instance people who share certain socio-demographic characteristics. Possible re-traumatization, such as (1) people who have experienced a similar disaster in the past, (2) people who have experienced a major loss in the last year, (3) people who are in the midst of a personal or existential crisis and (4) people who are sensitive to their environment, such as parents with children.

²⁰ FURMAN [et al.]: 'Reflections on collective trauma, faith, and service delivery to victims of terrorism and natural disaster'.

²¹ 'Affected' is translated here from the Dutch term '*getroffene*'; see IMPACT, LANDELJK KENNIS- EN ADVIESCENTRUM PSYCHOSOCIALE ZORG EN VEILIGHEID BIJ SCHOKKENDE GEBEURTENISSEN PARTNER IN ARQ PSYCHOTRAUMA EXPERTGROEP: *Multidisciplinaire richtlijn psychosociale hulp bij rampen en crises* (Diemen 2014).

²² N. JAKOBY: 'Grief as a Social Emotion. Theoretical Perspectives', in *Death Studies* 36/8 (2012) 679-711.

destruction or emotional or moral loss in, for instance, terrorist attacks where destructive cultural ideologies are staged through murder or mass violence. In grief psychology, there has been a shift from the former idea of the ‘grief-work-hypothesis’, a classic Freudian notion that refers to the need to work through the loss and let go of the deceased in order to prevent psychopathology,²³ towards grieving being increasingly considered a way to symbolically integrate the deceased into one’s current life-narrative.²⁴ Another shift in grief psychology lead us from the classical stages or task models that speak of certain phases of grief (such as by Kübler-Ross and Worden)²⁵ towards an understanding of grieving as simultaneously consisting of two different movements: attention towards the loss and attention towards restoration.²⁶ The dual-process model of grief describes grieving as a way of oscillating between these two movements: being preoccupied with the grief and loss and investing in restoration. Grief does not happen within a specific pattern, but depends strongly on the death cause and context.

In recent literature, grief is also increasingly studied from a *social* and *meaning* perspective, which underlines that grief is not an isolated intra-individual process, taking place within the mind of a singular person; instead, grief is more a fluid process that emerges between people and context.²⁷ Grief thus is related to cultural values, customs and behavioural patterns, such as ritual. Rituals are cultural strategies of collective meaning making in grief and loss experiences. Rituals, on the one hand, prescribe certain behaviour and therefore either stimulate or discourage grieving

²³ S. FREUD: ‘Rouw en melancholie’, in T. GRAFTDIJK & W. ORANJE (eds.): *Freud* (Amsterdam 1975 [1917]).

²⁴ B. MALLON: ‘Chapter 1. Attachment and loss, death and dying. Theoretical foundations for bereavement counseling’, in B. MALLON: *Dying, death and grief: Working with adult bereavement* (Thousand Oaks 2008).

²⁵ E. KÜBLER-ROSS: *On death and dying* (New York 1969); W. WORDEN: *Grief counseling and grief therapy. A handbook for the mental health practitioner* (New York 2002³).

²⁶ M. STROEBE & H. SCHUT: ‘The dual process model of coping with bereavement. Rationale and description’, in *Death Studies* 23/3 (1999) 197-224.

²⁷ JAKOBY: ‘Grief as a social emotion’; R.A. NEIMEYER, D. KLASS & M.R. DENNIS: ‘A social constructionist account of grief. Loss and the narration of meaning’, in *Death Studies* 38/6 (2014) 485-498; R.A. NEIMEYER & D.C. SANDS: ‘Meaning reconstruction in bereavement. From principles to practise’, in R.A. NEIMEYER, D.L. HARRIS, H.R. WINOKUER & G.F. THORNTON (eds.): *Grief and bereavement in contemporary society. Bridging research and practice* (New York 2011) 9-22.

reactions. On the other hand, new ritualizations establish new customs and channel grief reactions and therefore also create grief culture as well. A social-cultural and meaning perspective on grief teaches us to take ritual serious in studying grief. Rituals are simultaneously universal human reactions to death and loss and reveal great cultural variety.

What is more, grief reactions after disaster are characterized “by a set of unique stressors or circumstances that alone or in combination can prolong and/or complicate the course of bereavement”.²⁸ Disaster is, in most cases, sudden and can lead to multiple losses. The unexpectedness and violence of the loss is similar to other grief experiences, such as murder or accident, but the impact is collective. In case of human-induced disaster, especially after mass violence, feelings of blame, guilt and potential psychopathologies are more common than in disaster caused by nature or technology.²⁹ Each disaster, therefore, brings unique stressors that need to be considered in understanding grief reactions.

Trauma after disaster

Disaster can also be an “potentially traumatic event that is collectively experienced, has an acute onset and is time-delimited”.³⁰ Trauma after disaster becomes visible in long term mental problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression (MDD) and prolonged grief disorder (PGD).³¹ Crystal Park et al. write that “traumatic events reveal the dark aspects of existence, the presence of evil in the world, the random unjust distribution of events, the vulnerability of human beings, our fundamental lack of control over our fate, and the reality of our ultimate demise”.³² Here lies a clear link with ritual: rituals after disasters

²⁸ P. KRISTENSEN & M.H. PEREIRA FRANCO: ‘Bereavement and disasters. Research and clinical intervention’, in NEIMEYER, HARRIS, WINOKUER & THORNTON (eds.): *Grief and bereavement in contemporary society* 189.

²⁹ B. BEAGLEHOLE, R.T. MULDER, C.M. FRAMPTON, J.M. BODEN, G. NEWTON-HOWES & C.J. BELL: ‘Psychological distress and psychiatric disorder after natural disasters: systematic review and meta-analysis’, in *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 213/6 (2018) 716-722.

³⁰ BEAGLEHOLE [et al.]: ‘Psychological distress and psychiatric disorder after natural disasters’ 1.

³¹ KRISTENSEN & PEREIRA FRANCO: ‘Bereavement and disasters’.

³² C.L. PARK, J.M. CURRIER, J.I. HARRIS & J.M. SLATTERY: *Trauma, meaning and spirituality. Translating research into clinical practice* (American Psychological Association 2017) 39.

are reaction to the ‘presence of evil’, and they try to heal and restore as good as possible what has been lost in the disaster. In the psychological literature, trauma is mostly defined on the basis of the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) published by the American Psychiatric Association³³ in terms of an exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence, involving direct exposure, witnessing (in person or indirectly). Exposure can also be indirect, such as learning that a very close relative or close friend was exposed to trauma or is experiencing repeated trauma; indirect exposure to aversive severe details of the event(s) can also lead to trauma. The severe exposure to trauma experienced by others can happen in the course of professional duties or in first responders. This exposure must be direct and does not include exposures through electronic media, television, movies and pictures.³⁴

Trauma thus neither involves watching disaster on TV, nor the death of a family member or friend by natural causes (such as disease or old age). Nevertheless, watching disaster on TV can be potentially re-traumatizing for trauma survivors. This psychiatric view on trauma is a starting point to understand the complex emotional reactions after disaster; however, it also leaves room for debate. The terms used in the definition, such as death, injury and child neglect, might not be the only possible stressors for trauma, but there might be other losses that are threats to psychological integrity. Recently, there has been more attention in the literature to moral injury, a concept referring to a person suffering from feelings of guilt and shame that can be related to one’s actions in the past.³⁵ While moral injury is not a pathological reaction to trauma, it is serious and can take years before people find peace with their own past. Moral injury is not a clinical diagnosis but refers to an “injury in one’s soul”, such as a soldier who killed civilians during duty or battle.

Trauma is thus an important concept to consider, but how common are traumatic reactions after disaster? The numbers in studies vary significantly: while some studies show no significant changes in PTSD between the exposed and non-exposed population, other studies report

³³ For a more detailed discussion of the development of the DSM definition of PTSD, see <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5371751/>.

³⁴ PARK, CURRIER, HARRIS & SLATTERY: *Trauma, meaning and spirituality* 9.

³⁵ J.M. CURRIER, J.M. HOLLAND & J. MALLOT: ‘Moral injury, meaning making, and mental health in returning veterans’, in *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 71/3 (2015) 229-240.

numbers as high as 74%.³⁶ These differences are partially explained by methodological issues, such as the lack of longitudinal research and sufficient control groups. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis of forty-one studies on psychopathological effects after natural disaster shows, however, a significant increase in psychological distress, psychiatric disorder, post-traumatic stress and depression between pre-/post-testing between exposed and control groups after disaster.³⁷ We can conclude that psychological effects, although perhaps different in how these are defined and operationalized, are significant and deserve attention in disaster research.

4. MEANING MAKING AND RESILIENCE AFTER DISASTER

Next to grief and trauma, meaning and resilience are important to address in disaster research. First, grief in psychological literature is increasingly studied from a meaning perspective. Second, disaster shatters not only the material and physical world, but also one's moral assumptions.³⁸ From a psychological perspective, meaning is minimally defined as "shared representations of possible relationships among things, events, and relationships. Thus, meaning *connects* things."³⁹ Experiencing disaster is a disruption to a person's meaning: disaster is unforeseen, negative and traumatizing and leads to multiple losses and grief reactions. Park has conceptualized the term 'meaning making' after a disruptive event such as disaster as a process after a disruption of one's global meaning system, which means that people deliberately or unconsciously try to restore meaning through different strategies.⁴⁰ People can for instance try to adjust their global meaning system or worldview or they can try to change the situation that is leading to the meaning disruption.

³⁶ BEAGLEHOLE [et al.]: 'Psychological distress and psychiatric disorder after natural disasters'.

³⁷ BEAGLEHOLE [et al.]: 'Psychological distress and psychiatric disorder after natural disasters'.

³⁸ D. EDMONDSON, S.R. CHAUDOIR, M.A. MILLS, C.L. PARK, J. HOLUB & J.M. BARTKOWIAK: 'From shattered assumptions to weakened worldviews. Trauma symptoms signal anxiety buffer disruption', in *Journal of Loss and Trauma: International Perspectives on Stress & Coping* 16/4 (2011) 358-385.

³⁹ R.F. BAUMEISTER: *Meanings of life* (New York 1991) 15.

⁴⁰ C.L. PARK: 'Making sense of the meaning literature: An integrative review of meaning making and its effects on adjustment to stressful life events', in *Psychological Bulletin* 136 (2010) 257-301.

In some life situations, it is possible to change the situation, such as leaving a toxic relationship, but the irreversible impact of disaster makes this impossible. Consequently, people are ‘forced’ to find meaning in a psychological, existential and symbolic way. Rituals are therefore of great importance, as they are a way to symbolically reconstruct meaning after disaster. However, rituals do not simply ‘present’ meaning or give meaning to life after a grief experience. Instead, rituals encourage people to express their emotions through symbolic actions and images. Ritual enables people to act within a symbolic space, while in reality they cannot change the situation.

A focus on meaning making in relation to disaster and trauma also means that in trauma and grief reactions, the person is grieving the loss of the deceased loved ones and a loss of (a part of) the self, a loss of one’s worldview and assumptive world.⁴¹ The way we see the world and ourselves, our values, hopes, dreams, goals and beliefs, which is part of our worldview or global meaning system,⁴² can be shattered by disaster and trauma. It can therefore lead to a sense of meaninglessness and eventually to a search for a reconstructing one’s sense of identity. Including a meaning making perspective in trauma research helps us to understand the impact of disaster from a more holistic perspective. Next to psychological effects, such as increased levels of anxiety, depression and stress, there can also be existential effects, such as moral questioning, a changed worldview and a search for the question ‘who am I?’ or ‘who are we as a community?’. Ritual addresses these kinds of existential and moral questions through reflection and symbolic and visual language and communication. Furthermore, ritual action increases people’s sense of control.⁴³

Recently, there has also been more attention towards research on resilience and factors identified to guard against developing psychological disorders after trauma.⁴⁴ Resilience is defined as “a phenomenon or process reflecting relatively *positive adaptation despite experiences of significant*

⁴¹ EDMONDSON [et al.]: ‘From shattered assumptions to weakened worldviews’.

⁴² PARK: ‘Making sense of the meaning literature’; PARK, CURRIER, HARRIS & SLATTERY: *Trauma, meaning and spirituality*.

⁴³ N.M. HOBSON, J. SCHROEDER, L.J. RISEN, D. XYGALATAS & M. INZLICHT: ‘The psychology of rituals. An integrative review and process-based framework’, in *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 22/3 (2018).

⁴⁴ C.L. PARK & A.L. AI: ‘Meaning making and growth. New directions for research on survivors of trauma’, in *Journal of loss and trauma* 11/5 (2016) 389-407.

adversity or trauma".⁴⁵ Resilience refers to resourcefulness in terms of internal, psychological and social factors that prevent psychological trauma. Resilience is a "longitudinal trajectory of continued favourable functioning, even after an event increased one's risk of poor outcomes".⁴⁶ While considered a longitudinal quality, resilience, however, is not static, but an active process. Being resilient in one life domain (such as dealing with chronic pain) does not necessarily mean that one is resilient in other life domains as well. Mental health professionals and spiritual counsellors can help in providing care in order to contribute to the development of resilience before trauma and also in order to intervene after a trauma.

This new interest in resilience research in relation to trauma has also been linked to meaning making and spirituality.⁴⁷ The link between resilience, meaning, spirituality and trauma is explicitly explored in different studies.⁴⁸ Empirical research reveals that after the 9/11 terrorist attacks the more spiritual meaning people reported, the less depressed and anxious they were.⁴⁹ In conclusion, unravelling reactions to disaster means to go beyond the 'classical' psychological notions of the individual griever, as meaning making and worldview assumptions are also of importance in the grieving process. What is more, in rituals we see the focus on cultural values and symbols that carry certain moral and political messages. Finally, disaster impacts communities, and therefore grief and trauma also need to be studied from a communal perspective.

5. CONCLUSION

When studying grief and loss reactions after disaster, it is important to remember that while disaster strikes a certain geographical location, this is not the only predictor of vulnerability. The way people respond to disaster depends on the relation between the person and the disaster as well as the type of disaster (such as natural or human induced disaster). As Webb writes, "rather than being objective and obvious, disasters

⁴⁵ S.S. LUTHAR: 'The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work', in *Child Development* 71/3 (2000) 543-562, p. 543.

⁴⁶ PARK, CURRIER, HARRIS & SLATTERY: *Trauma, meaning and spirituality* 186.

⁴⁷ PARK, CURRIER, HARRIS & SLATTERY: *Trauma, meaning and spirituality* 186.

⁴⁸ PARK, CURRIER, HARRIS & SLATTERY: *Trauma, meaning and spirituality* 186.

⁴⁹ A.L. AI, A.T.T. TICE, C.M. LEMIEUZ & B. HUANG: 'Modeling the post-9/11 meaning-laden paradox. From deep connection and deep struggle to posttraumatic stress and growth', in *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 33/2 (2011).

are subject to interpretation, framed and packaged in certain ways, and sometimes hotly contested and debated (...) culture is part and parcel of the process through which certain historical occurrences, extreme events, or harmful episodes are defined as disasters”.⁵⁰ Therefore, the type of disaster, as well as physical, emotional, social and cultural factors influence how people will grieve after disaster.

From discussing grief, trauma and meaning making after disaster, we can conclude that ritual is not only a way to actively put grief into symbolic action, but the grief process is also influenced by ritual action. The actual loss cannot be changed, but ritual gives space to express a symbolic and imaged world. Especially in disaster research, we need to focus on grief from a communal and socio-cultural perspective, as disaster strikes groups of people, not only individuals. Rituals are communal, collective reactions to disaster. Through reconnection with one's community, the griever might also reconnect with herself and rearrange one's worldview assumptions. However, we need to be careful not to overestimate the positive power of ritual. The ritual community is only temporal. After the first period of solidarity and ritual initiatives, a phase of disillusionment will follow. While the rest of the population moves on to their regular lives, those directly involved might be struggling with their losses for years after the disaster. In order to acquire insights into the long-term effects of ritual activity after disaster, more empirical research is needed to study (long-term) outcomes of ritual activity after disaster.

⁵⁰ G.R. WEBB: 'The cultural turn in disaster research. Understanding resilience and vulnerability through the lens of culture', in H. RODRIGUEZ, H. DONNER & J.E. TRAINOR (eds.): *Handbook of disaster research* (New York 2018) 109-121, p. 5.

DEATH STUDIES AND DISASTERS: RITUALIZING AND NUMBERING NUMBING REALITIES

DOUGLAS DAVIES

1. INTRODUCTION

While ‘Death Studies and disasters’ make an obvious pairing of academic interests covering some of life’s most emotive negations, this chapter’s closer inspection indicates just why this is so by aligning the intellectual diversity associated with the idea of an academic ‘discipline’ with self-motivating experiences of mortality. Case studies focus on a spectrum of disasters, including the COVID-19 period and the UK National Health Service, the Holocaust, and Soviet Gulags, ending with the phenomenon of numbering the dead, proposed as its own form of disaster-linked ritual practice.

2. DISCIPLINARY DYNAMICS

Pinpointing ‘Death Studies’ as an academic approach to disasters demands some initial consideration of the very notion of a scholarly ‘discipline’, and will serve as a justification for a focused use of materials published in *Mortality*, a journal defining itself as ‘promoting the interdisciplinary study of death and dying’. The concept of an academic discipline has evolved over time and is now widely embedded in universities and their discrete ‘subject’ areas, specific degrees, and aligned syllabi of school education with its pre-determined pathways for prospective students.¹ Academic subjects take their disciplinary form within a ‘Departmental’ model, reinforced by academic journals, publishers’ catalogues, conferences, networks of academic authority including professional associations, learned societies, and academies. Though many of

¹ A.J. ENGEL: *From clergyman to don. The rise of the academic profession in nineteenth-century Oxford* (New York 1983) 257-280. A. RUSSELL: *The clerical profession* (London 1984) 9-27.

these, over recent decades, have advocated the benefits – if not the necessity – of inter- and cross-disciplinary ventures, these are more heralded than practised, not least because of vested interests that lie beyond the scope of this chapter. However, interested individuals, often informally at the outset, have focused their interest on death pursued through conferences, journals, and even relatively elite interest groups. Still, just now, Death Studies is poised more at this network-level of development rather than at the established Higher Education Departmental level, evidenced in the fact that Death Studies academics are usually employed in Departments of established disciplines, having death as one of their more personal scholarly ventures.

2.1. Consilience in *Mortality*

Consilience, as the aggregation of many forms of knowledge, depends on the curiosity-driven diversity of individuals coming to share interests and generating knowledge that arrives at more than the sum of its parts. Such is the case with Death Studies. It is obvious that many medical-clinical and grief-counselling domains and the service-provision of funeral directors, cemetery, and crematorium managers, all engage with death along their focused, and sometimes insular, professional lines of thought and practice. Where Death Studies begins to come into its own, however, is where individuals across these academic, professional, and service oriented domains become interested in each other's work, often under the catalytic influence of social-scientific and arts-humanities academics who have been at the vanguard of Death Studies. Moreover, it is not uncommon for lay members of the bereaved public to sense a draw to these who talk about death, whether at conferences or in internet settings.

One such focused expression of relatively diverse interests can be found in *Mortality*, a UK-based publication, though much the same could be said for the more US-based *Death Studies*: each publishes papers on many topics and holds an international brief. Here, I must declare an interest as someone who has been, and remains, associated with *Mortality* after many years. What emerges around this journal and its partnering 'Death, Dying, and Disposal' biennial Conference, both under the aegis of The Association for the Study of Death and Society (ASDS), is a clustering of interest groups that constitute one clear networked base of Death Studies.

2.2. Death's centripetal presence

In all of the above, death attracts people, some replete with discrete disciplinary or professional competences, some eager to develop previous studies in this mortality-facing direction, and many from the bereaved public at large. Something of the unifying dynamics of these interests can be appreciated through the notion of 'deutero-truth', a term needing some explanation since it will not be widely familiar. Derived from Gregory Bateson's 'deutero-learning', 'deutero-truth' was incisively developed by Roy Rappaport in his almost encyclopaedic treatment of *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*.² It describes a kind of implicit process of "generalizing from particular learning situations, of developing informal theories about what may be expected under particular categories of circumstances, and how best to cope with them".³ In our case, this could be applied both to Death Studies and to disasters. Such 'deutero-truths' are aligned with emotional experiences and contexts that help drive explicit verbal designations, allowing people to align themselves in shared commitments to things that cannot be specifically 'defined'.

3. SOCIAL AND PERSONAL DISASTER: MORAL-MEANING AND CAUSATION

These background features are useful as we now turn our attention to both personal and social dimensions of disasters, and to the issue of causation that permeates many of them. Why and how did death occur? Was it but some random event and simple misfortune or was it intentional, perhaps even malevolent? At its most basic, social scientific study needs to record people's reactions: how they felt and might explain events, with these indigenous rationales often categorized as the 'emic' element of ethnography. Further social analysis needs to take this into account in what is often depicted as the 'etic' level of analysis deploying established disciplinary theories.

One significant aspect of emic accounts returns us to matters of causation of events, to enduring sociological presuppositions over a human drive for meaning that passes beyond accounts of, for example, geological shifts that cause tsunamis or earthquakes, to more emotional demands that drive arguments of divine intention and punishment, or to some intentional

² R. RAPPAPORT: *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity* (Cambridge 1999).

³ RAPPAPORT: *Ritual and religion* 305.

malevolence. Increasing research in cognitive science highlights the human tendency to think of agency and intentional activity lying in many kinds of environment.⁴ Here I can but touch upon this complex domain of interpretation in a select group of cases that exemplify what is best depicted as the moral dynamics of each, where – following traditional Durkheimian perspectives on society as a moral community – ‘moral’ refers to a quality of social interaction. Here, we cite one famous anthropological ethnography of a traditional African community, followed by a series of disasters affecting modern societies, each located at differing points on a notional graph set between social and personal axes of misfortune.

Anthropology students often still cut their theoretical teeth on Evans-Pritchard’s classic ethnography of the Azande, involving a complex sense of classifying and coping with misfortune and death.⁵ This is rooted in notions of some malevolent agency associated with a notion of witchcraft, and the use of magic and oracles to identify the source of affliction, followed by ritual forms of cope with it. Take the type-case of a man’s death caused by a grain store collapsing on him as he sat under it. Although it may be fully acknowledged that, in pragmatic-structural terms, the store fell because termites had eaten and weakened the log supports, why did it happen just when that person was there? Here the social-moral question follows on from the empirical reasons. The emic perspective was that someone had willed it, whether consciously or, even more to the point, unconsciously – due to a kind of witchcraft substance contained in the witch’s body. In other words, some agency was to blame for it, and here ‘blame’ becomes a crucial factor as it operates in a person-oriented, interpersonal, social-moral world. While the event can be explained by rotten pillars they cannot be blamed for it. This subtle yet significant distinction underlies many contexts of disasters where the environment, natural and social, is undergirded by agency as the following cases demonstrate.

3.1. Agencies of blame or responsibility

On a broad faith-based front, most Christian theologians will align and interpret blame in terms of ‘the problem of evil’, or Theodicy, considering how an essentially loving God can allow what humans see as

⁴ P. BOYER: *Religion explained. The evolutionary origins of religious thought* (New York 2001).

⁵ E.E. EVANS-PRITCHARD: *Witchcraft and oracles among the Azande* (Oxford 1937).

unintelligible suffering. Some Islamic approaches align disaster with fate and the will of the deity, under which humans should resign themselves. Yet, again, Indian-originating interpretations often take recourse to the notion of *karma*, by which a person's moral rectitude in one existence influences their status and events in following lives. Each of these worldviews identifies disaster with some responsible agency, even though it may be inscrutable to human understanding. Some might want to consider these ideas in terms of destiny factors, perhaps even seeing the very notion of destiny as acceptable to some traditional worldviews but unintelligible to modern, and postmodern, worldviews. Such issues lie beyond this chapter but what does concern us is how we might take emotional aspects of disasters a step further, and my way of doing that is through the notion of moral-somatic relationships.

3.2. Moral-somatic relationships and identifying agency in events

This concept of moral-somatic relationships, first presented at a meeting of the Scandinavian Sociological Association in 2004 and elaborated in subsequent contexts, develops the range of psychosomatic links between thought and feeling to include the surrounding social field of human behaviour and events.⁶ Society, understood as a moral-community, is the setting that feeds the complex interplay between a person's cognitive perceptions of the environment and their emotional-affective sensory awareness. The not insignificant psychological discovery of 'mirror neurones',⁷ potentially adds further depth in that seeing some depiction of human behaviour elicits a sense of it within oneself. The potential of this for empathy and disasters is not without significance. If it is the case, for example, that seeing someone play tennis induces a personal parallel awareness of playing it oneself, then what of filmed accounts of an onrushing tsunami or other disaster, let alone of immediate viewing of such a scene? It may well be that the financial benefits accruing to charities caring for disaster victims also partially benefit from this personal sensitivity in terms of voluntary donations that might even be considered their own form of ritualized response to tragedy. In all of this

⁶ D.J. DAVIES: *Emotion, identity and religion. Hope, reciprocity, and otherness* (Oxford 2011) 186-211.

⁷ G. RIZZOLATTI & L. CRAIGHERO: 'The mirror-neuron system', in *Annual Review of Neuroscience* 27/1 (2004) 169-192.

we entertain the complexity of human awareness and response as we differentiate between large-scale disasters and the very small-scale events that may appear 'tragic' to a small number of people.

4. DEATH STUDIES UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF DISASTERS

Disasters are, then, perhaps best distinguished from other contexts of death by their community-based multiplicity of deaths, just as rituals are often typified as repeated forms of collective behaviour.⁸ Still, of course, pain and grief emerge from the biological organism of the human body of 'one' person who will, almost always, also possess some social status, and be subject to the moral-somatic dynamics driving the relationship between 'individual and society'. Just how we understand 'the individual' is, here, of enormous significance, especially if we differentiate between 'the individual' as a relatively self-contained entity and what is sometimes designated as complex or 'dividual personhood' constituted through the many relationships that help make us who we are.⁹ This distinction may prompt a paradox for any analysis of disaster contexts and, in particular, invites detailed analysis of whether or not the striving for survival can draw a person's energies into 'itself' – making radical individualists of 'victims', as was argued in the much debated and negatively criticised study of Colin Turnbull set in a context of severe draught in Northern Uganda in the mid-1960s.¹⁰ The paradoxical nature of this issue pivots around the collective and dividual, nature of identity evident in the collaborative labour of relief workers. The following brief cases seek to illustrate this sweep of identity with the diverse and multi-disciplinary matrix of Death Studies showing how disasters lie open to interpretations that cluster either towards the social or the personal axes of interpretation.

The social axis attracts cases in which hundreds or thousands of individuals are injured or killed, often alongside the destruction of property and of the natural environment as with major tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, and famines. Such events are easily identified as catastrophes, and

⁸ D.J. DAVIES: *Anthropology and theology* (Oxford 2002) 111-143. RAPPAPORT: *Ritual and religion* 23-58.

⁹ D.J. DAVIES: *Death, ritual and belief. The rhetoric of funerary rites* (London 2017³) 22, 75-78.

¹⁰ T.O. BEIDELMAN: 'Review of Colin M. Turnbull, *The Mountain People*', in *Africa* 43/2 (1973) 170-71. Turnbull published his book in 1972.

scholars with sociological, political, social policy, and planning interests focus on them as collective phenomena. The personal axis, by contrast, concerns the death of a single or only a few family members, whose needs attract the professional interest of more psychological-psychiatric, counselling and pastoral professionals. Much also depends on context and timing, so that, for example, the death of infants, children, or young adults with spouse and child dependents is easily described as a ‘tragedy’ for the family, but not a ‘disaster’ for society at large. Having said that, accidents and illness take many forms and find distribution between the social-individual axes of misfortune.

4.1. COVID-19 crisis

This is where the COVID-19 crisis of 2020-2021, as well as previous pandemic events come into play, contexts in which individual loss is framed and partially transformed by extensive community loss. This is not to say that grief at the loss of any one person is less, but that it is affected by the prevailing social dimension as, for example, in contexts of warfare. In terms of this chapter, that broad horizon is also significant because of some widespread ritual-symbolic responses that help set a scene for grief and its wide public recognition of loss. In other words, the personal loss of one family is, to some degree, recognised and shared by others. However, the degree to which this attenuates personal grief is, of course, debatable and merits further research, but it certainly qualifies the expression – ‘no one understands my personal loss’ – often voiced in ‘safe’ societies where death follows more usual paths of sickness and decline. If there is any truth in the common dictum that a ‘trouble shared is a trouble halved’ then it applies to aspects of bereavement in a disaster context.

While deep analyses of COVID-19 crises lie in the future, and will demand framing by the distinctive cultural features of each society, let me simply pinpoint several features relating to the UK in 2020-2021 that constitute either an identifiable ritual form or some more rite-like characteristics. One major ritual event was that of a televised address to the nation by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, on Sunday 5 April 2020. This marked a distinctive break with normal protocol, since normally she only speaks like this on Christmas Day, but now spoke to thank medical workers and acknowledging individual and family isolation. Of special significance was her use of words in a rite-like, indeed, in an almost liturgical formulation, when she ended by saying, “we’ll meet our

friends again, we'll meet our families again, we'll all meet again". These poignant words resonated with a famous song of the Second World War – "We'll Meet Again" ("We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when, but I know we'll meet again some sunny day"). Not long after, on 10 July 2020, the very old yet still famed singer of that song, Vera Lynn (1917-2020) died, with her funeral providing a complementary form of public ritual. People lined the street of her town, and even sang part of that song, while the church bells rang. Her coffin was covered with the Union Jack flag and her Honours' insignia: she was not only a Dame of the Order of the British Empire, but also a Companion of Honour – amongst the highest of UK Honours – and a Member of The Order of St John of Jerusalem, a notable charitable Order. Members of the military accompanied the hearse, and the Royal Air Force provided a fly-past. It is, I think, important to align the Queen's Speech of 5 April and Vera Lynn's funeral of 10 July, precisely because the words of that one song had for years assumed a forceful expression of a distinctive British continuing memory of the Second World War, of endurance, and of ultimate victory. In what one might almost see as cultural instinct, or at least deep connection, these words linked the ninety-four-year-old monarch, and a deeply valued figurehead for the majority of Britons, with her age-mate Dame Vera. While her death was, in one sense, entirely incidental and, as that of a very old woman, carried absolutely no 'tragic' or disastrous feature, it was extensively taken up by the media – itself now a vital mode of cultural communication during the social 'lockdown' – and broadcast as a ritual event of hopeful optimism.

4.2. NHS national medium of values and identity

If, at this time, the television, radio, press, and social media became intensified in their significance as channels of communication for a society under duress, the one other dramatically significant institution was the UK National Health Service (NHS). Itself furnishing much material for all media. I have argued elsewhere for the primacy of the British NHS as a vehicle of and for core cultural values of care and of fostering life from the cradle to the grave, and as running alongside the institutions of the Monarchy and Military as pillars of the 'Establishment' undergirding British society.¹¹ The emotional embeddedness of the NHS in British culture can, in retrospect, be

¹¹ D.J. DAVIES: *Mors Britannica. Lifestyle and death-style in Britain today* (Oxford 2015).

seen as a form of cultural pre-adaptation for both political and popular response to the COVID-19 crisis. It allowed politicians to both request and demand that the people help to ‘save the NHS’ by observing the ‘lockdown’ prohibition of free movement. It also helps interpret the public innovation of households standing on their doorsteps to ‘applaud the NHS’ at 8 p.m. on Thursday evenings, making this period of potential disaster one in which, for the first time, the NHS received ritual-like performance from millions of Britons, albeit for a relatively short period of weeks. It is this that reinforces the proposition that the NHS had already assumed the role of carrying core-cultural values in Britain. Moreover, the content of that value was now explicit, it was ‘life’ itself, notably curated by a Welfare State through the NHS. This was no bare ‘ideas’ but an idea pervaded by popular emotion to form a ‘value’ that even helps create part of a Briton’s sense of identity.¹² This commitment to the preservation of life came to explicit ritual-focus at a time when the national State Church – The Church of England – was closed for public events and worship.¹³ The ritual figures of Monarch and war celebrity created a ritual assonance over a four month period, while the generic institution of the NHS, might be said to have come of age through a public ritualization, itself prompted by an ordinary citizen and intensified by public media outlets. Only once before had the NHS been formally ‘celebrated’, at the opening pageant of the London Olympic Games 2012, when 1,800 dancers and volunteers, with 320 hospital beds wheeled into the arena, expressed the significance of this national institution that cares for people, practically from the cradle to the grave.

A great deal more could be said about the nature of this ritualized acknowledgement since its rationale and practice reflects a combination of pre-existing behaviours including applause, public noise making, and ‘street-celebration’, but that awaits another day. Suffice it to say, for example, that while this repeated evening performance cannot be equated with the public expressions of grief surrounding the death of Princess Diana in 1997, already an historical event as far as anyone under twenty-four years of age is concerned, it does reflect some aspects of what I once introduced as the ‘theory of offending death’, a concept applicable for interpreting disasters including the Princess’s death,¹⁴ the murderous activity of Anders

¹² DAVIES: *Death, ritual and belief* 5-8.

¹³ DAVIES: *Mors Britannica* 98-103.

¹⁴ D.J. DAVIES: ‘Health, morality and sacrifice. The sociology of disasters’, in R. FENN (ed.): *Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* (Oxford 2001) 404-417.

Breivik around Oslo in 2011 killing more than seventy individuals, as well as the Aberfan Disaster of South Wales in 1966 when 116 children and 28 adults were engulfed by industrial waste of the coal industry.¹⁵ That theory spoke of massed popular response follows the death of people deemed to be innocent victims and where public authorities seemed to be culpable in some way. While, in this context, the thousands of deaths of the very old, often isolated in care homes, can be seen to some extent as innocent victims, albeit of a virus and not culpable authorities, the ritualized response is not one of blame but of praise – praise for the medical professions and the framing institution of the NHS. Britain has, for centuries, a culture history of popular expressions of both grief and celebration that provide a behavioural resource for new events.¹⁶

Much of what has just been said touches on the sheer complexity of ritual behaviour but there are two final elements that I wish to combine here, one concerning vaccination and the other a distinctive site of vaccination in the UK. At the time of writing – January 2021 – the media are full of accounts and pictures of people receiving vaccination, following the UK government's scheme from the oldest and most vulnerable to the virus to lesser groups. Moreover, there is something of an air of celebration over this most extensive act of medicalization, most especially among older groups. It is as though the very act vaccination has itself assumed a ritual status. This is accentuated through numerous sporting and other major public venues adopted as vaccination centres. The one I single out here concerns some Church of England Cathedrals opened for this very event in the week of 17 January 2021. I cite two newspapers and their documentation of this. *The Mail on Sunday*, a very popular paper, devoted two centre-spread pages to photographs of the nave and cloisters of the very historic Salisbury Cathedral, with the over-eighty year olds queueing in the cloisters to receiving vaccination within the ancient church, all under the headline 'Well, the whole nation has been praying for a miracle'.¹⁷ The local NHS trust is reported as choosing the building as 'the biggest in Salisbury'. To speak of this as a kind of sacred

¹⁵ D.J. DAVIES: 'Valuing emotion in tragedy', in A. DAY & M. LOVEHEIM (eds.): *Modernities, memory and mutations. Grace Davie and the study of religion* (Ashgate 2015) 113-130.

¹⁶ J. WOLFFE: *Great deaths. Grieving, religion, and nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Oxford 2000).

¹⁷ A. TAHER: 'Well, the whole nation HAS been praying for a miracle', in *The Mail on Sunday*, 17 January 2021, 12-13.

space is enhanced by the fact that the Cathedral organists arranged to play gentle organ music while the whole venture proceeded, even accepting some requests for music, including Handel's *Largo*, and Bach's *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring*. Similarly, to date, Bradford Cathedral in the North of England matched Salisbury in the South, by opening for vaccinations. Another Sunday paper, *The Observer*, a more highbrow and left-leaning paper, carried only a half-page spread photograph of a masked and aproned nurse preparing a syringe and standing in front of ornate carvings, with the small-print heading 'The answer to our prayers'.¹⁸ I include this cathedral phenomenon, having earlier mentioned the formal closure of churches during the crisis period, not only to pinpoint their cultural resourcefulness, but also to hint at the overlap of NHS and familiar ecclesiastical and much loved heritage buildings at times of cultural crisis. Health and 'salvation' carry interesting historical-theological etymologies and offer an interesting research project for future months. From these sacred spaces of peace we now turn in an absolutely different direction and to disasters of quite a different kind.

4.3. The Holocaust and the Gulags: living and silent memories

While COVID-19 will almost certainly mark the years 2020-2021 for many societies for centuries to come, it draws our theoretical attention to time, to the immediate duration of disasters, and to ensuing periods of cultural commemoration and personal trauma. These all play a part in the cases that follow which have been quite intentionally drawn from the single, interdisciplinary journal – *Mortality* – already mentioned above.

In one special 2007 issue of *Mortality* dedicated to 'Memoria, memory, and commemoration', Victor Jeleniewski Seidler, a social theorist with wide interests in philosophy, gender studies, and ethics, published an insightful reflective history of his Jewish family's life in Vienna and of the impact of the Holocaust, most especially on his migrant relatives, all framed by his mother's dementia, her momentary patterns of recall, and a previously enduring period of family silence over that 'past' life. It includes an account of a deeply personal and most vivid dream that shook him and gave him a 'different kind of connection with her'.¹⁹

¹⁸ S. PARSONS: 'The answer to our prayers', in *The Observer*, 17 January 2021, 7.

¹⁹ V.J. SIEDLER: 'Fragmented memories. The Holocaust, ghosts, and dead bodies', in *Mortality* 12/2 (2007) 142-158, p. 148.

He also depicts and analyses a formal ceremony conducted in Vienna on 27 April 2002, including president Thomas Klestil, marking the burial of “the last two of the almost 800 children and babies killed in Vienna in the Nazi regime’s euthanasia programme”.²⁰ He speaks of how some felt a degree of hollowness in the president’s speech given that the medical perpetrator and alleged murderer had not been brought to justice, having been reckoned senile. Quoting a *Guardian* journalist, Seidler echoes the sense that the ceremonial event with its “black metal urns” of remains failed “to lay to rest the ghosts of Austria’s recent past”.²¹ He then takes us back into British history of anti-Semitism with the murder of the majority of London Jews, “in 1190 (...) in a pogrom”, followed by the expulsion of Jews from Britain and their absence for 365 years.²²

Complementing that paper was a telling account by Jehanne Gheith, an oral historian of the Soviet Gulags in which estimates of those dying in them reach from four to twenty million over between the 1920s to 1980s. This scholar of Slavic and Eurasian Studies, emphasizes this long period and lists reasons why such Soviet Union Gulag treatment has not received the same public or historical treatment and censure as the Holocaust. Not least of the factors he highlights is that of ‘indifference’. Rooted in her experience of these oral histories, and running contra many Western-focused accounts of trauma, she is set against the idea “that narrative is the necessary basis for healing traumatic experience”.²³ Gheith’s decided theoretical preference takes us into complex case studies and unexpected themes. One of these concerns an ex-Gulag man who named a much-loved German Shepherd dog ‘Joseph Stalin’. While this invites much greater analysis than I can offer here, let it stand for the adaptive and creative energy of one man whose naming of a dog was a way of giving him a sense of control in the here and now compared with his entire lack of freedom then and there. He has transformed Stalin as masterful despot into someone under his control. So when he commands his dog to ‘come’ or ‘sit’ he is no longer a passive recipient of another’s will but owns active agency over it. This in no sense invokes cruelty or the like, simply a symbolic means of re-ordering experience and memory

²⁰ SIEDLER: ‘Fragmented memories’ 150.

²¹ SIEDLER: ‘Fragmented memories’ 151.

²² SIEDLER: ‘Fragmented memories’ 153.

²³ J.M. GHEITH: “I never talked”. Enforced silence, non-narrative memory, and the Gulag’, in *Mortality* 12/2 (2007) 159-175, p. 162.

in the here and now. In terms of ritual analysis this could not be depicted as a social ritual in any ordinary sense, but it is, nevertheless something of a ritual-symbol reminiscent of a verbal idiolect. This is one man's use of language to frame a relationship, but is not the same as a psychiatric account of 'ritualized' hand-washing or the like. It is a creative and not a pathological use of behaviour.

Another interviewee, a Russian woman this time, who had been imprisoned by Nazis after fleeing from Kiev, and who intentionally sought marriage with someone – anyone – named Mikhail – so that she might have a daughter (she was sure it would be a daughter, and it was) who could be named Zoya Mikhailovna after her mother who had been shot and killed by the Nazis. She did so marry and give birth to a daughter and, with her new husband, "chose to care (...) in concrete and practical as well as emotional ways (...) for a being named after someone associated with deep pain" and thereby turning an original tragedy "into new growth".²⁴ To many 'modern' minds this might, at first glance, seem to be an instrumental act – amoral, if not deeply negative in moral intention. But that seems far from the case. She was, in effect, seeking to recreate a present that, in some measure transformed her deeply painful past into a liveable present.²⁵

4.4. Ritualized numbering – numbing the devastation

Even these extremely brief and almost embarrassingly few accounts of diverse contexts and events reflect something of the shared deuterodiscipline of Death Studies. Before ending these brief observations of Death Studies and disasters, however, there remains one final phenomenon to bring to sharp focus as, perhaps, its own rite-like behaviour typical of disaster scenarios.

Although almost too banal to state, disasters are defined by multiple human deaths. Whether in terms of 'natural disasters' such as a tsunami, earthquake, flood, or famine or events following human failure of neglect such as the Grenfell Towers fire in London (2017) or the focused intentionality of terrorism and New York's Twin Towers (2001), the fact of many deaths seems to demand some form of classification of event-linked behaviour. One such lies in the far from banal behaviour of

²⁴ GHEITH: "I never talked" 167.

²⁵ GHEITH: "I never talked" 162.

counting the dead, and suggesting some interpretation of it. At one level this might be taken to be nothing more than an empirical fact. The media report how many have died, often along with those seriously injured. There is a pragmatic 'duty of care' element to this as society accounts for people, as the dead are recovered the overall number grows, and so does some reflective sense of the magnitude of the disaster. But, perhaps, there is much more than statistics involved in this practice, for while a number is, in and of itself, one of the most emotionally neutral of phenomena, the event of a disaster is highly evocative of emotion. Television and other media reveal images of relatives weeping or anxiously awaiting news of potential survivors, as well as the strenuous endeavours of those seeking any who may still be alive: these easily evoke the emotions of even the general public. The visual force of distress prompts a degree of distress even amongst most distanced viewers, albeit for a short space of time. Indeed, there is something about this emotion that is powerful yet limited in immediate duration, and may pass in waves as successive reports are heard.

The accompanying reports usually add a parallel yet different quality of comment that distances the media correspondent from the grief-stricken. The numbering of the dead allows for a sense of enormity to frame the visual emotionality of the scene of disaster without simply repeating its emotionality. To number is to make sense of the disaster in a distinctive fashion: it is precisely those who report on disaster incidents who deal in numbers; bewailing relatives seldom do so despite their prevailing anxiety, fear, and grief. While this numbering of the dead allows for news-reporting that provides a commentary upon an event and not simply a participation in its raw emotionality, it may also serve the function of assessing the magnitude of this disaster in comparison with others. It may not always be easy to slip an event into an appropriate category in terms of the emotions felt at different times and places, indeed to do so might be regarded as a devaluing of what has just happened, but numbers aid comparison. Similarly, the number of people shot in one act of gun-rampage can be allied with others shot in other places while the motives of the gunmen – and it is usually men – may differ or be quite unknown. Numbers allow for an acceptable point of comparison of something that can be reported, said, and commented upon. This distancing effect of numbers shows something of the way in which 'ideas' may carry a different level of emotional affect from the more emotional-laden depictions of actual deaths.

Historically speaking, disasters of the past frequently carry the numbers of victims as with the Plague, the Spanish Flu, and now the coronavirus crisis of 2020-2021. As far as the last is concerned at the time of writing – January 2021 – the numbers are still in process of being counted and, if I take the UK as an example, are also the most obvious and publicly communicable means of asserting the dangerous nature of the pandemic. At various points across 2020-2021 daily bulletins made by senior members of the government alongside senior scientists and medical doctors highlight the numbers reported as infected by the virus, hospitalized, and who have died. The formula that has emerged announces – ‘those who have died within 28 days of having been diagnosed with the virus number (...)’ – becoming its own almost ritualised litany of mortality. Without the numbers the event would lose much of its sense and impact. In its own way this act of numbering implies a degree of knowledge and perhaps even a slight sense of coping with the disaster, but perhaps a powerful dynamic of this numbering lies in its own form of numbing the reality of multiple deaths and the precariousness of human existence itself.

5. CONCLUSION

It is that very precariousness that also shares in the appeal of Death Studies for at least some of its devotees, and though it is relatively rare for scholars to express their personal emotional drivers that does not hide a certain sense of mutual interest that lies deeper than shared cognitive models of behaviour. It is just that ethos and implicit sympathy with the fact of death as experienced by both individuals and communities that I sought to embrace through the discussion of deuterio-truth and this emergent discipline of Death Studies. So much more could be said, but perhaps all scholars end knowing that, in the end, much will remain unsaid.

RESTORING A NEGATIVE DESTINATION IMAGE: THE CASE OF PALESTINE

RAMI ISAAC & MEREL SIJM

1. INTRODUCTION

Terrorism and politically related conflicts like civil wars are said to have a bigger impact on a destination than a natural or human-caused disaster, since the level of perceived risk and uncertainty about the destination increases.¹ This particularly intimidates (potential) tourists and has an impact on tourism demand.²

Terrorism, political conflicts and tourism are related in a complex way.³ When these conflicts occur, they are widely covered in the media. The intensity of the media coverage has a big influence on the destination image.⁴ Tourists and pilgrimage are influenced by this negative media coverage of the destination, and therefore their perceived risk of a destination is more likely to outweigh the actual risk.⁵ The result is a negative destination image, and based on the sustained period of violence and the

¹ S.F. SÖNMEZ & A.R. GRAEFE: 'Influence of terrorism risk on foreign tourism decisions', in *Annals of Tourism Research* 25/1 (1998) 112-144. R.K. ISAAC: 'The attitudes of the Dutch market towards safety and security', in R.K. ISAAC, E. ÇAKMAK & R. BUTLER (eds.): *Tourism and hospitality in conflict-ridden destinations* (Abingdon 2019) 39-55.

² J.C. HENDERSON: 'Terrorism and tourism. Managing the consequences of the Bali bombings', in *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 15/1 (2003) 41-58. D.M. BAKER: 'The effects of terrorism on the travel and tourism industry', in *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 2(1) (2014) 58-67.

³ BAKER: 'The effects of terrorism'.

⁴ E. NEUMAYER: 'The impact of political violence on tourism', in *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48/2 (2004) 259-281. E. AVRAHAM: 'Marketing and managing nation branding during prolonged crisis. The case of Israel', in *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 5/3 (2009) 202-212. M.D. ALVAREZ & S. CAMPO: 'The influence of political conflicts on country image and intention to visit: A study of Israel's image', in *Tourism Management* 40 (2014) 70-78.

⁵ SÖNMEZ & GRAEFE: 'Influence of terrorism risk'.

amount of media coverage, it can take a long time before the negative image is eradicated.⁶

In order to restore the negative destination image, destination marketers promote their destination in such a way that the negative image is changed to a positive one. The first research studies about image restoration of negative destination image focussed mainly on destinations affected by a crisis. For example, the killing of nine tourists in Miami between 1992 and 1993,⁷ the catastrophic impact of 9/11⁸ and the Bali Bombings in 2002.⁹ However, destinations suffering from a prolonged negative destination image, caused by a civil war or long-lasting political conflict, are a different story, since it can take a long time to change that image.¹⁰ There have been numerous studies on destinations with a prolonged negative image on destinations like Israel,¹¹ Palestine,¹² Myanmar¹³ and Northern Ireland.¹⁴ Most of these studies focus on post-conflict destinations, whereas a conflict consists of three different stages; pre-, during and post-conflict.¹⁵ Nevertheless, only a limited amount of research has

⁶ NEUMAYER: 'The impact of political violence on tourism'.

⁷ D.J. TILSON & D.W. STACKS: 'To know us is to love us. The public relations campaign to sell a business-tourist-friendly Miami', in *Public Relations Review* 23 (1997) 95-115.

⁸ D. BEIRMAN: 'Restoring tourism destinations in crisis. A strategic marketing approach', in R.L. BRAITHWAITE & R.W. BRAITHWAITE: *Riding the wave of tourism and hospitality Research* (Lismore 2003) 1146-1150.

⁹ J.C. HENDERSON: 'Terrorism and tourism. Managing the consequences of the Bali bombings', in *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 15/1 (2003) 41-58.

¹⁰ NEUMAYER: 'The impact of political violence on tourism'.

¹¹ AVRAHAM: 'Marketing and managing nation branding'. E. AVRAHAM & E. KETTER: 'Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images. Towards a theoretical model', in *Tourism Geographies* 15/1 (2013) 145-164.

¹² E. CAKMAK & R.K. ISAAC: 'What destination marketers can learn from their visitors' blogs. An image analysis of Bethlehem, Palestine', in *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 1 (2012) 124-133. ISAAC: 'The attitudes of the Dutch market'. R.K. ISAAC & T.A. EID: 'Tourists' destination image. An exploratory study of alternative tourism in Palestine', in *Current Issues in Tourism* 22/12 (2019) 1499-1522.

¹³ S. HUDSON: 'Let the journey begin (again). The rebranding of Myanmar', in *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 5 (2016) 305-313.

¹⁴ S.W. BOYD: 'Post-conflict tourism development in Northern Ireland. Moving beyond murals and dark sites associated with its past', in ISAAC, CAKMAK & BUTLER: *Tourism and hospitality in conflict-ridden destinations*.

¹⁵ R. BUTLER: 'Tourism and conflict. A framework for examining risk versus satisfaction', in ISAAC, CAKMAK & BUTLER: *Tourism and hospitality in conflict-ridden destinations* 13-24.

focused on which image restoration strategy works best for the different stages of conflict in a conflict-ridden destination.¹⁶

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has a long history and is an ongoing event, which has a big impact and effect on both destinations, not only economically and socially, but also on the tourism industry and pilgrimage. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to analyse which image restoration strategy or strategies are most influential in changing a negative destination image into a positive one.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The relationship between tourism and conflict

The tourism industry is fragile and dependent on many internal and external factors. As explained by Dirk Glaesser,¹⁷ “the tourism sector is fragile in nature and is greatly affected by broader natural, economic and socio-political events, which can trigger a tourism crisis”.¹⁸ Peace, or the absence of conflict, in a destination is a general prerequisite for successful tourism.¹⁹ Therefore, for destinations with conflict it is much harder to appeal to tourists and attract visitors.

Political instability is the natural result of conflict and is described by Michael Hall and Vanessa O’Sullivan as “a situation in which conditions and mechanisms of governance and rule are challenged as to their political legitimacy by elements from outside the normal operations of the political system”.²⁰ Terrorism, the imposing of martial laws and riots are actions creating conflict, instability and violence in these countries.²¹ This situation of political instability in a country can have a big influence on the tourism sector and its markets especially when the “political

¹⁶ E. AVRAHAM: ‘Destination image repair during crisis. Attracting tourism during the Arab Spring uprisings’, in *Tourism Management* 47 (2015) 224-232.

¹⁷ D. GLAESSER: *Crisis management in the tourism industry* (London 2006).

¹⁸ E. ÇAKMAK & L. GORLERO: ‘The PEGIDA movement and social conflict in Dresden, Germany’, in ISAAC, ÇAKMAK & BUTLER: *Tourism and hospitality in conflict-ridden destinations* 153-167, p. 157.

¹⁹ BUTLER: ‘Tourism and conflict’.

²⁰ C.M. HALL & V. O’SULLIVAN: ‘Tourism, political stability and violence’, in A. PIZAM & Y. MANSFIELD: *Tourism, crime and international security issues* (New York 1996) 106.

²¹ HALL & O’SULLIVAN: ‘Tourism, political stability and violence’. ÇAKMAK & ISAAC: ‘What destination marketers can learn’.

conditions appear unsettled” as stated by Linda Richter and William Waugh.²² This factor becomes especially crucial when the (potential) visitor and tourist perception of safety in the destination is affected because of political instability.²³

2.2. Economic and social impact of conflict on tourism destinations

When a conflict occurs, tourist arrivals are the first thing to be affected. According to research by Eric Neumayer, “events of violence can affect a tourism destination long after the event has passed and stability has, in effect, been restored”.²⁴ He argues that it can take up to three to nine months before tourists arrivals start to decrease drastically when a conflict has happened in a destination.²⁵ This is a result of the sensitivity of tourists to negative image of a destination.²⁶ When a country is confronted with conflict, the image of this country is immediately affected in a negative way. The affected country is, from that moment on, considered “unsafe”, “risky” and “a place to avoid”.²⁷ Consequently, tourists will simply choose an alternative and safer destination for their holiday.²⁸

This negative image of a destination is a result of the perceived risk to their safety experienced by (potential) tourists.²⁹ Sevil Sönmez and Alan Graefe were some of the first authors to investigate the influence of risk on holiday decision making and concluded that terrorism or conflict in a particular place “increases the level of perceived risk and uncertainty about the place and thus has negative effects on tourism demand and behaviour”.³⁰ Risk can cause unanticipated, possibly

²² L.L. RICHTER & J.R. WAUGH: ‘Terrorism and tourism as logical companions’, in *Tourism Management* 7/4 (1986) 230-238, p. 231. ÇAKMAK & ISAAC: ‘What destination marketers can learn’ 126.

²³ ISAAC: ‘The attitudes of the Dutch market’.

²⁴ NEUMAYER: ‘The impact of political violence on tourism’ 262.

²⁵ NEUMAYER: ‘The impact of political violence on tourism’.

²⁶ NEUMAYER: ‘The impact of political violence on tourism’. ALVAREZ & CAMPO: ‘The influence of political conflicts’.

²⁷ NEUMAYER: ‘The impact of political violence on tourism’. ISAAC: ‘The attitudes of the Dutch market’.

²⁸ ÇAKMAK & ISAAC: ‘What destination marketers can learn’.

²⁹ ISAAC: ‘The attitudes of the Dutch market’.

³⁰ SÖNMEZ & GRAEFE: ‘Influence of terrorism risk’. ISAAC: ‘The attitudes of the Dutch market’.

unpleasant, consequences for tourists.³¹ Perceived risk is defined as “a consumer’s perception of the overall negativity of a course of actions based upon an assessment of the possible negative outcome and the likelihood that those outcomes will occur”.³² Risk perception plays a vital role in the holiday decision-making process.³³ As mentioned by Bingjie Liu et al., “like risk perceptions, safety perception is specific to a destination and influences the travellers’ choice of destination”.³⁴ It has been argued by several researchers that the level of perceived risk is related to personality traits and demographics like age, gender, education and income.³⁵

The destination image is greatly affected by conflict and results in a drop in tourist arrivals and tourism receipts.³⁶ This certainly has an effect on the country itself but might also affect countries within the same region. According to Neumayer, “it is not quite clear how violence in one country affects other countries in the same region”.³⁷ Some researchers share the opinion that the surrounding countries are negatively affected as well and will also face a decline in tourist arrivals.³⁸ As stated by Metin Kozak et al., “a single act of terrorism, natural disaster and spread of disease may sometimes lead to forming overall negative image of all the neighbourhood countries, resulting in a global devastating impact in the region”.³⁹ People sometimes forget that the Middle East or Africa consists

³¹ ISAAC: ‘The attitudes of the Dutch market’. R.K. ISAAC & V. VELDEN: ‘The German source market perceptions. How risky is Turkey to travel to?’, in *International Journal of Tourism Cities* 4/4 (2018) 429-451.

³² J.C. MOWEN & M. MINOR: *Consumer behaviour* (Upper Saddle River, NJ 1998⁵) 176.

³³ ISAAC & VELDEN: ‘The German source market perceptions’.

³⁴ B. LIU, A. SCHROEDER, L. PENNINGTON-GRAY & S. FARAJAT: ‘Source market perceptions. How risky is Jordan to travel to?’, in *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management* 5/4 (2016) 294-304, p. 296.

³⁵ LIU, SCHROEDER, PENNINGTON-GRAY & FARAJAT: ‘Source market perceptions’. M. KARL & J. SCHMUDE: ‘Understanding the role of risk perception in destination choice. A literature review and synthesis’, in *Tourism* 65/2 (2017) 138-155. ISAAC: ‘The attitudes of the Dutch market’. ISAAC & VELDEN: ‘The German source market perceptions’.

³⁶ NEUMAYER: ‘The impact of political violence on tourism’.

³⁷ NEUMAYER: ‘The impact of political violence on tourism’ 262.

³⁸ RICHTER & WAUGH: ‘Terrorism and tourism’. NEUMAYER: ‘The impact of political violence on tourism’.

³⁹ M. KOZAK, J.C. CROTTTS & R. LAW: ‘The impact of the perception of risk on international travellers’, in *International Journal of Tourism Research* 9/4 (2007) 233-242, p. 240.

of more countries and it is not *one* country, therefore, when a conflict occurs, people perceive the whole region as unsafe or risky. Due to this lack of geographical knowledge about countries and continents, all of a sudden, all countries in the region are affected by political instability.⁴⁰

2.3. Destination branding and (negative) destination image

Since the 1990s, the field of destination marketing and branding has been emerging. While the first stream of research measured the perception of a tourism destinations, nowadays more and more researchers are combining the field of destination image and branding. According to Eli Avraham and Eran Ketter, the destination image focusses on how a tourism destination is perceived, while destination branding is about understanding how destination marketers promote their destination.⁴¹

Destination branding has been defined by several researchers, however Bill Baker provides a comprehensive definition of them all.⁴² According to him, destination branding can be defined as follows: “destination branding is an organized principle that involves orchestrating the messages and experiences associated with the place to ensure that they are as distinctive, compelling, memorable, and rewarding as possible. Successful destination brands reside in the customer’s heart and mind, clearly differentiate themselves, deliver on valued promise, and simplify customer choice”.⁴³ In other words, as concluded by Avraham and Ketter, destination branding attempts to improve the destinations’ image and their target markets’ perception.⁴⁴

There are different definitions of the concept of brand image, however the most accurate one has been created by Charlotte Echtner and J.R. Brent Ritchie.⁴⁵ According to them, a brand image or destination image can be best described as follows: “a combination of perceptions, attributes, characteristics and psychological associations with intangible aspects of a destination; a combination of functional and holistic attributes”.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ ISAAC & VELDEN: ‘The German source market perceptions’.

⁴¹ AVRAHAM & KETTER: ‘Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images’.

⁴² B. BAKER: *Destination branding for small cities* (Portland, OH 2007).

⁴³ BAKER: *Destination branding for small cities*.

⁴⁴ AVRAHAM & KETTER: ‘Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images’.

⁴⁵ C. ECHTNER & J. RITCHIE: ‘The meaning and measurement of destination marketing’, in *Journal of Tourism Studies* 2/2 (1991) 2-12.

⁴⁶ ECHTNER & RITCHIE: ‘The meaning and measurement of destination marketing’.

The destination image is constructed on both ‘cognitive’, which includes the intellectual beliefs and knowledge of a destination, and ‘affective’ appraisals, which contains the tourists’ feelings and attachment towards a destination, which together form the overall image. This can result in either a positive or a negative image and perception about a destination.⁴⁷ Avraham and Ketter concluded there are two different types of place images: open images and closed images.⁴⁸ Open images are the images to which more characteristics could be added, whereas closed images are the images where it is not likely to add new characteristics. The latter type of images are also known as stereotypes.⁴⁹ Stereotypes are “simplified attitudes or beliefs about a place that are not examined thoroughly and are difficult to change”.⁵⁰ When conflicts happen in a destination, this location will be labelled as a place where certain type of events occur, and this becomes the stereotype of the destination. As a result, other, positive events, are less likely to be covered in the media.⁵¹ The formation of a destination image by tourists depends on personal factors (internal), and is especially formed by informal sources (external) in the form of secondary and primary sources, such as news in the media.⁵² Therefore, it can be stated that the media and their coverage of a conflict, can have a positive or negative impacts on the image of a destination in the minds of (potential) tourists.

2.4. Image restoration strategies

When a destination is suffering from a negative image caused by a conflict, there are several things destination marketers can do. Avraham and Ketter have described six major goals for marketing destinations based on their current image.⁵³ The following table provides an overview of the type of destination and its image together with the conditions for changing this image:

⁴⁷ ISAAC & EID: ‘Tourists’ destination image’.

⁴⁸ AVRAHAM & KETTER: ‘Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images’.

⁴⁹ AVRAHAM & KETTER: ‘Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images’.

⁵⁰ J. EILZUR: *National Images*. (Jerusalem 1986).

⁵¹ AVRAHAM & KETTER: ‘Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images’.

⁵² ISAAC & EID: ‘Tourists’ destination image’.

⁵³ AVRAHAM & KETTER: ‘Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images’.

Table 6.1: Changing the destination image for different type of destinations (Avraham & Ketter, 2013)

	Destination	Destination marketing goal
1	Destinations that have suffered from an enduring negative image	Alter their image to rise on the tourism or investment map
2	Destinations that have undergone a major crisis	Looking for ways to be re-consumed, even though the crisis is not yet over (terror attack)
3	Destinations that have undergone a major crisis	Looking for ways to be re-consumed, as the cause of the crisis has faded (natural disaster)
4	Destinations that were consumed by a certain audience or for a certain reason	Looking to expand their consumption
5	Destinations that do not have any particular image problems	Market themselves regularly
6	Destinations that are over-consumed	Wish to decrease their consumption in order to limit the load of tourists

In the first three types of destinations, the destination image is most of the time negative. It can be already for a long-lasting period (first type) or have changed over time (types two and three). There is a need to restore the image, in order to attract tourists (again).

As much as a negative image is formed by the media, restoring a negative image is also done through the media. Previous studies have been focussed on the role of the media during crisis situations and image restoration of organizations, companies and places and have resulted in a variety of models and concepts.⁵⁴ First of all, Kurt Stocker illustrated the Basic Response Strategy, which consists of three or four steps, being: 1) expression of regret that the situation happened; 2) action to solve the situation; 3) ensuring the situation will not occur again and/or 4) offering of restitution to the injured parties.⁵⁵ Another, more elaborated model is made by William Benoit.⁵⁶ His

⁵⁴ AVRAHAM & KETTER: 'Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images'.

⁵⁵ Quoted in AVRAHAM & KETTER: 'Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images'.

⁵⁶ W.L. BENOIT: 'Image repair discourse and crisis communication', in *Public Relations Review* 23/2 (1997) 177-186.

Image Restoration Discourse focusses on the message options organizations and firms have when restoring their image.⁵⁷ Benoit's theory offers five categories of image repair strategies, which are 1) denial; 2) evasion of responsibility; 3) reduce offensiveness; 4) corrective action and 5) mortification.⁵⁸ W. Timothy Coombs has a very similar approach to Benoit; however, he added a couple of strategies and made a list of seven possible communication strategies: 1) attack the accuser; 2) denial; 3) excuse; 4) justification; 5) ingratiation; 6) corrective action and 7) full apology.⁵⁹

While most of the aforementioned image restoration theories are often used by organizations and companies, destinations that have undergone an immediate crisis can adopt several of these strategies. However, as concluded by Avraham and Ketter, destinations with a prolonged negative image, like those that suffer from war, cannot always use these strategies. They state that destinations with a prolonged negative image "cannot promise that they will change overnight, to apologize, blame someone else or take responsibility for a problematic image and reality that were created by various factors over the course of years".⁶⁰ Therefore, Avraham and Ketter created a new model (a multi-step model) that was exclusively designed for destinations to restore their negative image.

Besides the multi-step model, Avraham and Ketter created another theoretical model. This model is more aimed at destinations with a prolonged negative image and their willingness to either generate an in-depth change in the destination's reality, or make a cosmetic change without changing the factors that caused the negative image.⁶¹ Figure 6.1 displays the Strategic versus Cosmetic Approach model created by Avraham and Ketter. Strategic approach strategies are about the extent of change in reality (by hosting sport events for example), whereas cosmetic approach strategies are more about ignoring the problem.

According to Avraham and Ketter, a destination can deal with the conflict in two ways, depending on the type of destination. In general, destinations with a well-developed infrastructure, might prefer the cosmetic approach since the negative image is based on stereotypes or

⁵⁷ BENOIT: 'Image repair discourse and crisis communication'.

⁵⁸ BENOIT: 'Image repair discourse and crisis communication'.

⁵⁹ Quoted in AVRAHAM & KETTER: 'Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images'. HUDSON: 'Let the journey begin (again)'.

⁶⁰ AVRAHAM & KETTER: 'Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images' 149.

⁶¹ AVRAHAM & KETTER: 'Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images'. HUDSON: 'Let the journey begin (again)'.

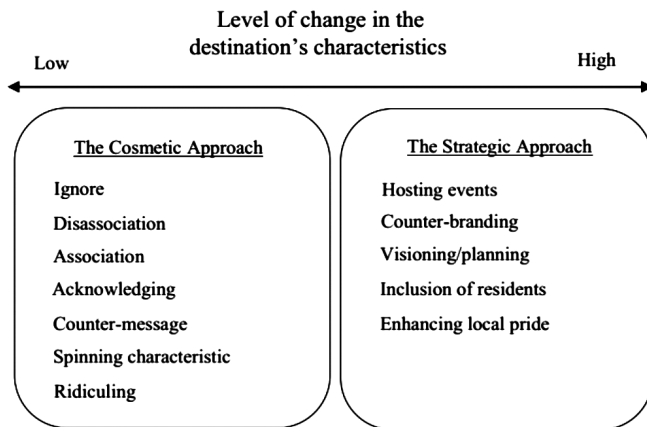


Figure 6.1: Strategic versus Cosmetic approach (Avraham & Ketter, 2013).

historical factors. The strategic approach is needed when destinations suffer from fundamental problems and need to change and improve their destinations first to restore the negative image.⁶²

The following table provides an overview of the well-known image restoration strategies:

Table 6.2: Image restoration strategies

Author	Name of strategy	Elements
Stocker, 1997	Basic Response Strategy	Expression of regret, action to solve
Benoit, 1995	Image restoration theory	Reduce offensiveness, corrective action
Coombs, 1996	Image restoration theory	Excuse, justification, ingratiation, corrective action
Avraham & Ketter, 2008 ⁶³	Multi-step model for altering place image	Source strategy, audience strategy, message strategy
Wouters & Mair, 2012	10 Common message strategies	

⁶² AVRAHAM & KETTER: 'Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images'.

⁶³ E. AVRAHAM & E. KETTER: 'Introduction to place marketing and branding', in E. AVRAHAM & E. KETTER: *Media strategies for marketing places in crisis* (Oxford 2008) 3-17.

Avraham & Ketter, 2013	Strategic vs cosmetic approach for altering prolonged negative destination images	Strategic approach: extend of change in reality Cosmetic approach: ignoring the problem
Isaac & Eid, 2018	Alternative tourism	

This table presents an overview of the different image restoration strategies to restore a negative destination image. The different strategies have been tested and analysed in different cases, from a destination affected by a crisis to destinations suffering from prolonged negative images due to long-lasting conflicts. However, limited research has been conducted to find out which strategy or strategies are most influential during each stage of the conflict. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap in literature in order to analyse which strategy or strategies would be most influential for Palestine.

3. CONTEXT ANALYSIS: PALESTINE

Palestine is located in the Middle East and is located strategically in the centre of this part of the world. It is one of the world's most important destinations for historical, religious and cultural sites and landmarks for Christianity, Islam and Judaism.⁶⁴ It would be expected for tourism to be flourishing; however, the opposite is true. The country has been heavily affected by political conflict over the last decades, which has had a big impact on the tourism industry. In 1948 Israel was established; however, this means that almost 77% of historical land of Palestine was confiscated. This resulted in hundreds of thousands of Palestinians being forced to flee and leave their homes. The remaining parts of the country were divided into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In 1964, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed to establish a plan for a Palestinian state within Israel, with Yasser Arafat as the leader. The Six Day War of 1967 resulted in major gains for Israel and the West Bank and the Gaza Strip came under Israeli occupation. This led to decades of violence between the two states, with the First Intifada in 1987 as the peak of conflict in this period of time. Several peace attempts

⁶⁴ This section is based on ISAAC & EID: 'Tourists' destination image'. J. KELLY: 'Travel and Tourism – Palestine – May 2018' (London 2018).

were made, including the Oslo Peace Accords, signed in 1993, whose goal was to create a timetable and plan for an interim Palestinian government in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The Palestinian National Authority (PNA or PA) was established to run parts of the Palestinian land as interim body, which was divided into three administrative zones. In 2000, a Second Intifada began, which resulted in a five-year period of violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis. In 2004, Yasser Arafat died. However, the PA and Israel agreed to continue the road to peace. A year later, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip, but retained control over the airspace, seafront and access into the land. From that moment on, the Palestinian militant group Hamas was on the rise, which was explicitly against the Oslo Peace Accords and Israel as a state. After a long battle with Fatah, Hamas gained control of the Gaza Strip, while Fatah rules over the West Bank area. Tensions remain, and the declaration of president Donald Trump in 2017 recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital added only more fuel to the fire. This move angered the Palestinians, as well as the Arab world and Western countries. To this date, there is a growing criticism of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, its ongoing confiscation of Palestinian's land and illegal settlement expansions in the West Bank. The UN reported in February 2018 that Gaza would be unlivable in 2020, looking at the humanitarian and economic situation. When no significant actions are undertaken to improve basic services and infrastructure, the lives of two million Palestinians would be at risk.

When looking at the tourism numbers of Palestine, it is interesting to look at both overnight tourists and day visitors, since religious or pilgrimage tourism is done in both Israel and Palestine regardless where the visitors stay. It is noticeable that in 2015, the tourism numbers dropped quite drastically. Starting in 2014, the conflict between the country and Israel became very violent, resulting in a decrease of international overnight tourists of 22.3% in 2015 and 7.4% in 2016. However, in 2017, the UNWTO reported that Palestine was the fastest growing tourism destination of that year worldwide. In the first quarter of 2017, the tourist arrival number had grown with 57.8% compared to the same time the year before and this growth continued in the following quarters. Reported in *The Telegraph*, the growth in tourist arrival numbers shows the "country's ability to bounce back after a string of

terrorist attacks”.⁶⁵ Banksy, the famous street arts, had opened the politically charged Wall Off Hotel, which overlooks the segregation wall and its watchtowers, to raise awareness about Palestine as a destination as well as shine light on the conflict. It was estimated that the country would receive 630,000 international overnight tourists in 2017; however, that is still to be confirmed by the Palestinian government.⁶⁶

4. METHOD

This research can be described as an “empirical study”. Primary research was conducted by means of three case studies.

Most of the previous studies on image restoration strategies of conflict-ridden destinations with a prolonged negative image are individual case studies.⁶⁷ In order to understand which strategy is most influential to restore a negative image of a conflict-ridden destination, this research uses Palestine as case study. The conflict between Israel and Palestine is still ongoing and therefore these destinations are an accurate choice of ‘during conflict’ destinations.

In order to understand the image restoration efforts of Palestine, different materials were collected (by means of desk research). First, advertisements, news articles, and interviews with officials and marketers discussing the destinations image and restoration of it, which were published in local and international magazines and newspapers (such as *The New York Times*, *Condé Nast Traveller*, *The Maker*), were used. Second, reports that discuss marketing initiatives and campaigns in order to restore a destinations’ negative image as well as promotional material published in the printed media or online (on the destinations’ official tourism and foreign ministries’ websites and other websites) were used. Finally, academic articles that discuss the chosen destinations’ marketing strategies and efforts to restore the negative destination image were used. In order to have a reliable set of data to conduct the analysis on a maximum of ten documents discussing the destinations’ efforts to restore their negative image were collected and analysed.

⁶⁵ G. HAINES: ‘10 surprising destinations where tourism is booming in 2017’, in *The Telegraph*, 27 September 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/news/surprising-countries-where-tourism-is-booming-in-2017/>.

⁶⁶ HAINES: ‘10 surprising destinations’. KELLY: ‘Travel and Tourism’.

⁶⁷ AVRAHAM & KETTER: ‘Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images’.

To analyse the data conducted, a qualitative analysis was used based on a semiotic interpretation of text.⁶⁸ By means of this method, general discourse patterns are revealed through the text. Qualitative content analysis is a very popular method about destination marketing and branding.⁶⁹

The coding and categorization of the data is based on the method of Avraham and Ketter, who looked for two different aspects:⁷⁰

- 1) marketing/branding aspects, like slogans, symbols, text and visuals used while promoting the destination
- 2) strategy/physical aspect, which includes activities that go beyond the destinations' representation.

The researchers used the following set of criteria in order to code the collected data:

- characteristics of the destination;
- characteristics of the target audience;
- characteristics of the image crisis;
- campaigns goal and timing;
- willingness to acknowledge the negative image;
- willingness to confront the negative image;
- willingness to change the physical reality.

These criteria formed the themes of which the gathered data was analysed in this research. The coding, which means the identification of the themes in the selected material, was analysed by hand using different colours for each theme to make the identification easier. Afterwards, the results were analysed and conclusions and generalizations were drawn. This way, general trends and patterns in the use of image restorations strategies by destination during conflict could be identified.

5. FINDINGS

Palestine was a peaceful country until the establishment of the State of Israel on historical Palestinian land in 1948. From that moment on,

⁶⁸ AVRAHAM & KETTER: 'Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images'.

⁶⁹ AVRAHAM: 'Marketing and managing nation branding'. A.E. DE JAGER: 'How dull is Dullstroom? Exploring the tourism destination image of Dullstroom', in *Tourism Geographies* 12/1 (2010) 349-370. AVRAHAM & KETTER: 'Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images'.

⁷⁰ AVRAHAM & KETTER: 'Marketing destinations with prolonged negative images'.

the two states have been in an ongoing conflict. The war in 1967, the Six Day War, had a catastrophic ending for the Palestinians and marked the beginning of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This war and political conflict have been widely covered in the international media and caused Palestine to have a negative destination image.

5.1. Negative destination image

The State of Palestine and its ongoing conflict with Israel has been and is widely covered in the international media and has left its mark on the destination image as perceived by the (potential) tourists. The negative images are created around tourists and pilgrimage perception of safety and security. Some experts describe this better:

The State of Palestine's unique history is often what attracts tourists but at the same time this history has been the cause of the unrest and perceived insecurity (...)⁷¹

The general perception of Palestine is not favourable in the media that represent it as a dangerous place to visit⁷²

Palestine is not a safe destination⁷³

The occupation and control of Israel adds to the instability of the state and has a negative impact on the destination image. As described by the following experts:

(...) inability of the State of Palestine to control its borders and the circulation of people within its territory⁷⁴

On the other hand, just like Israel, Palestine is seen solely as a pilgrim destination. Palestine is often associated with the Holy Land, as the main destination for pilgrimage, religious and cultural tourism for pilgrims for the three monotheistic or Abrahamic religions.

⁷¹ R.K ISAAC, C.M. HALL & F. HIGGINS-DESBIOLLES: 'Palestine as tourism destination', in R.K ISAAC, M.C. HALL & F. HIGGINS-DESBIOLLES (eds.): *The politics and power of tourism in Palestine* (Abingdon 2016) 15-34.

⁷² ISAAC & EID: 'Tourists' destination image'.

⁷³ S. KHOURY: 'Destination Palestine – Perceptions vs. reality', in *This week in Palestine*, November 2013, <http://archive.thisweekinpalestine.com/details.php?id=4133&ced=224&cedid=224>.

⁷⁴ ISAAC & EID: 'Tourists' destination image'.

5.2. Marketing strategies and efforts

In the past, the focus on the Palestinian tourism industry was on religious tourism, especially on Christian religious tourists, since 96% of the tourists were Christians.⁷⁵ Christian religious and pilgrimage tourism are the biggest market; however, just like seen in Israel, it is a difficult market to increase. Reasons for that are given by several experts:

These visitors generally adopt a low budget/low margin travel programme. This service is also subject to high seasonal fluctuations around religious feasts, and pilgrimage visitors are less susceptible to influence by marketing as their motivation is spiritual.⁷⁶

(...) but margins for this service may be smaller than for other services because these visitors generally adopt low budget/low margin travel programmes. Furthermore, the performance of the tourism services sector has been troubled by a range of issues, such as borders, restriction of freedom of movement, points of entry/exist, and the Israeli occupation.⁷⁷

The tourism industry of Palestine was not considered as a priority sector and has been underfunded by the Israeli government during the Israeli occupation.⁷⁸ However, with the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA/PA) in 1993, a Ministry of Tourism was first established. This was the start of some changes and improvements in the tourism sector.

The first noticeable changes that the Ministry of Tourism did was to broaden the range of tourism products and services, which resulted in an increased number of actors in the tourism industry.⁷⁹ An example, besides focussing on Christian religious tourists and pilgrims, the government tried to encourage Islamic religious tourists, mainly from Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia – with success. Existing tourism services and products were further developed, and new investments in the tourism industry were made.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ MA'AN NEWS: 'Tourists in Palestine to exceed 2.8 million by end of 2018', 6 December 2018, <https://maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=782002>.

⁷⁶ MINISTRY OF NATIONAL ECONOMY: 'Tourism sector export strategy 2014-2018', October 2014. Retrieved from Paltrade: <https://www.paltrade.org/upload/multimedia/admin/2014/10/5448e8c6d8011.pdf>

⁷⁷ ISAAC & EID: 'Tourists' destination image'.

⁷⁸ ISAAC, HALL & HIGGINS-DESBIOLLES: 'Palestine as tourism destination'.

⁷⁹ MINISTRY OF NATIONAL ECONOMY: 'Tourism sector export strategy 2014-2018'.

⁸⁰ ISAAC & EID: 'Tourists' destination image'.

This changed the way tourism was seen in Palestine, as stated by one of the experts:

It [tourism] opens space for contact between locals and international visitors. It allows for Palestinians to assert their identity, safeguard their cultures and, above all, enlists advocates who will go out and speak for their human rights and dignity.⁸¹

Several inbound tour operators started to jump into this industry and started to cater other market segments by means of the so-called alternative tourism products and services. This type of tourism presents, through its offering, a critical look at the culture and history of Palestine.⁸² The aim of these forms of tourism is to create closer contact between the host and the visitor, by means of gaining experience and supporting local life through bed and breakfast offerings and activities.⁸³ One expert describes this in more detail:

(...) mobilising travellers as justice tourists who come to see the reality, (facts on the ground), carry away a message and design forms of solidarity through which they advocate for justice and peace in Palestine.⁸⁴

In 2014, the Ministry of Tourism created a Tourism Export Strategy for 2014 to 2018 in which they aim to “develop new tourism segments and markets and implement structural changes to the tourism value chain to increase efficiency”.⁸⁵ Besides pilgrimage tourism, new packages and attractions have been created in order to attract an increasing number of Islamic heritage tourists, business visitors, ecotourists, cultural tourists and solidarity tourists.⁸⁶

5.3. Influential impact on tourism industry?

Despite the marketing strategies and efforts initiated by the Palestinian government and various stakeholders, the growth and development of tourism industry was hindered. The Israeli occupation brings along a

⁸¹ R. KASSIS: ‘Tourism and human rights in Palestine’, 16 September 2013. Retrieved from Tourism Watch: <https://www.tourism-watch.de/en/focus/tourism-and-human-rights-palestine>.

⁸² ISAAC & EID: ‘Tourists’ destination image’.

⁸³ ISAAC & EID: ‘Tourists’ destination image’.

⁸⁴ KASSIS: ‘Tourism and human rights in Palestine’.

⁸⁵ MINISTRY OF NATIONAL ECONOMY: ‘Tourism sector export strategy 2014-2018’.

⁸⁶ MINISTRY OF NATIONAL ECONOMY: ‘Tourism sector export strategy 2014-2018’.

strict control of Israel on Palestine. This means that Palestine has no control over its borders and points of entry, restrictions of freedom of movement for Palestinians and even tourists and remains vulnerable to Israeli policies regarding entry and accessibility. The Segregation Wall and hundreds of checkpoints across the West Bank make movement difficult. Furthermore, Israel controls the flow of international tourists. As explained by experts in more detail:

Israel has a stranglehold and monopoly on the flow of international tourists, starting from visa issuing, lodging, (Israeli) guides and tours within the country.⁸⁷

These challenges hindered the Palestinian tourism industry from growth and development, as well as proper tourism planning. One expert explains

Tourism planners are challenged in developing long-term plans due to many uncertainties.⁸⁸

However, despite the occupation and control of Israel, Palestine has been able to build a tourism industry and the marketing strategies used by the Ministry of Tourism raised the awareness about Palestine as a nation and as a tourism destination worldwide. Since 2008, the tourist arrival numbers have been on the rise.⁸⁹

The resilience of Palestine's tourism industry was rewarded in 2017, when according to UNWTO Palestine was one of the fastest growing tourism destinations in the world in terms of tourist numbers. In the first six months of 2017, Palestine welcomed 57.8% more foreign travellers compared to the same period the year before. This growth was linked to the well-publicized opening of the Walled Off hotel in 2017. It raised awareness in Europe about the option of visiting the West Bank.⁹⁰

These efforts and initiatives are turning out to be having a positive effect on the image of the destination.

⁸⁷ ISAAC, HALL & HIGGINS-DESBIOLLES: 'Palestine as tourism destination'.

⁸⁸ S. KHOURY: 'Developing tourism in Palestine – Challenges and opportunities', April 2017. Retrieved from Bright Star of Bethlehem: <http://brightstarsbethlehem.org/2017/04/sami-khoury-tourism-palestine-challenges-opportunities/>.

⁸⁹ ISAAC, HALL & HIGGINS-DESBIOLLES: 'Palestine as tourism destination'.

⁹⁰ M. GILAD: 'Palestine Authority tops UN list of fastest-growing tourist destinations', 12 August 2017. Retrieved from Ha'aretz: <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/pa-tops-un-list-of-fastest-growing-destinations-1.5441355> [last accessed July 2021].

5.4. Current destination image

Despite the changing perceptions of potential tourists and perceived image of Palestine, the international image of the country remains partly tarnished because of the permanent conflict with Israel and the bad reputation caused by terrorist attacks.⁹¹

A major need for Palestine is the creation of one brand and positioning strategy for the country on which all the tourism stakeholders have agreed upon.⁹² Currently, there are different initiatives and ways of promoting the country, but having one strategic state branding, which all stakeholders agree upon, will have a huge impact. One expert explains in more detail:

As Palestine's recognition grows worldwide, Palestine needs to consider opportunities in promoting itself, its image, products and resources by means of strategic state branding. Tourism is a very important sector that can be a starting point for increasing and promoting the image. This as a result may also improve the place image from a negative to a positive one.⁹³

Palestine's current battle is to counter the Israeli claims that Palestine is an unsafe tourist destination. According to one expert, Palestine is succeeding in that challenge:

We also had to refute the Israeli claims that there is no security in the Palestinian territories, and we succeeded in persuading them through participating in international events and stressing that we did not have any problem with any tourist but that Israel wants to sabotage Palestinian tourism.⁹⁴

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to analyse which image restoration strategy or strategies are most influential in order to change the negative destination image into a positive one, with Palestine functioning as a case study.

Overall, it can be concluded that the tourism industry of Palestine is highly hindered by the conflict as well as the Israeli occupation that is still affecting the country to this day. This is especially the case, because the destinations need(ed) to deal with political instability caused by

⁹¹ MINISTRY OF NATIONAL ECONOMY: *Tourism Sector Export Strategy 2014-2018*.

⁹² KHOURY: 'Developing tourism in Palestine'.

⁹³ ISAAC & EID: 'Tourists' destination image'.

⁹⁴ MA'AN NEWS: 'Tourists in Palestine to exceed 2.8 million by end of 2018'.

ongoing conflict and war, which was widely covered in the media. This increased the perceived risk of the (potential) travellers and resulted in a negative destination image. The destinations were associated as being unsafe, risky and dangerous to visit. Research has shown that the frequency of terrorism in a destination has much more impact on the tourism demand than the severity of the terrorism attack.

Despite the ongoing conflict, Palestine was able to keep welcoming tourists to visit the country, mainly through religious, pilgrimage and cultural tourism.

Particularly, destinations during conflict like Palestine are spreading the word that the destination is safe to travel to and encourages travellers to come to visit. This is done by promoting the different tourism products that the country has to offer.

Palestine is using the Cosmetic Approach by spreading counter-messages to the messages spread by Israel that the destination is unsafe to travel to. Palestine has used the strategy of expanding the tourism offer and targeting new market segments, which are less sensitive in times of conflict. Palestine is, besides religious and pilgrimage tourism markets, expanding the alternative tourism sector, which is more about cross-cultural interactions between the Palestinians and the guests in order to learn and understand more of the Palestinian side of the conflict as well as the daily life of Palestinians.

The image restoration strategies adopted by Palestine can be called influential, since tourism numbers have increased significantly. Most importantly, the negative destination image is shifted towards a more positive one. It needs to be noted that other factors could also have had influence on this change: for example, the UNWTO recognizing Palestine as one of the fastest growing tourism destination in the world, in terms of tourist arrivals, in 2017. It is shining a positive light on the destination, which is picked up by the international media, and changes the perceptions held by the (potential) travellers about the destination. It turns out to be changing the destination image for the better.

All in all, it can be concluded that there are different strategies to restore a negative destination image. The most influential image restoration strategy for a destination during conflict is the Cosmetic Approach. The message is spread of being a safe destination, by means of acknowledging the conflict and spreading counter-messages. This research shows that the tourism industry plays an important role in changing the negative image of a conflict-ridden destination.

“GROANING INWARDLY WHILE WAITING
FOR THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODIES”.¹
TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF TRAUMA

ERIK BORGMAN

1. INTRODUCTION

Voice of Witness is a San Francisco-based not-for-profit organization. Its mission is to advance human rights “by amplifying the voices of people impacted by injustice”. *Voice of Witness* is driven by its belief in “the transformative power of the story” and by the conviction “that an understanding of crucial issues is incomplete without deep listening and learning from people who have experienced injustice firsthand”. As *Voice of Witness* states on its website:

In the media, COVID-19 has been frequently described as a great equalizer, but the reality is that long-standing inequities have been further exacerbated. (...) [I]ndividuals and families marginalized by this country’s carceral and immigration systems (...) have been hit particularly hard.²

Thus, COVID-19 leads to a triple trauma: the deadly threat of the disease, the fact that some are more at risk than others, and the experience that some stories do not resonate in the public domain. Amplifying the unheard stories, *Voice of Witness* not only addresses the third trauma. The organization believes “the transformative power of the story” also contributes to the healing of the wounds caused by being disproportionately at risk or by being life-threatening at risk in the first place. Stories heal trauma.

¹ Cf. Rom. 8:23.

² Cf. the *Voice of Witness* website, <https://voiceofwitness.org/unheard-voices-of-the-pandemic/> [last accessed 29 June 2020].

But is ‘healing’ the right metaphor here? Educationalist Parker Palmer writes in a blog post about his own experience with the personal trauma of clinical depression:

The human soul doesn’t want to be advised or fixed or saved. It simply wants to be witnessed – to be seen, heard and companioned exactly as it is. When we make that kind of deep bow to the soul of a suffering person, our respect reinforces the soul’s healing resources, the only resources that can help the sufferer make it through.³

By witnessing to what happens to human beings, their resilience is enhanced, Palmer suggests. In this essay, I argue that there is more to it. Witnessing through stories and rituals can be life-saving and life-changing, because they change a situation to the core. What formerly was at the center of trauma, the ongoing pain of being wounded, becomes a source of change and renewal.⁴ This is related to what I, for reasons that will become clear during the course of this essay, call the theological aspect of rituals and stories. This theological aspect is not located in their messages, like the promise of liberation and deliverance from trauma and suffering. They open up the situation of trauma in a new way, not leaving it behind but enabling it to speak in a new manner.

One of the effects of trauma is the demolition of meaningful language. Communicating speech has to be learned anew to avoid being isolated and lonely within the heart of pain.⁵ Ugandan theologian Emmanuel Katongole, from a confrontation with unimaginable atrocities in Africa, and taking as his starting point what he calls the ‘narrative wreckage’ they entail, reads the Biblical book of Lamentations together with the book of Jeremiah and the Psalms of lament as texts that recapture speech by complaining.⁶

³ P.J. PALMER: ‘The gift of presence, the perils of advice’, 27 April 2016, <https://onbeing.org/blog/the-gift-of-presence-the-perils-of-advice/> [last accessed 29 June 2020].

⁴ For the development of the broad contemporary understanding of ‘trauma’ as a category, cf. J. HERMAN: *Trauma and recovery. The aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror* (New York 2015 [1992]); C. CARUTH: *Unclaimed experience. Trauma, narrative, and history* (Baltimore/London 2016 [1996]). For an overview of trauma theory, cf. L. BOND & S. CRAPS: *Trauma* (Abington 2020); for the bodily aspects of trauma, cf. B. VAN DER KOLK: *The body keeps the score. Mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma* (New York 2014).

⁵ E. SCARRY: *The body in pain. The making and unmaking of the world* (New York 1987).

⁶ E. KATONGOLE: *Born from lament. The theology and politics of hope in Africa* (Grand Rapids 2017). Katongole’s analysis of Lamentations depends heavily on K.M. O’CONNOR:

Psalm 137 even suggests that it is liberating to sing about the inability to sing, because ‘we’ are deported to a foreign land. Thus, it changes homelessness itself into a place to dwell. This is, in my view, what ritualizing and storytelling can do: change trauma into a dwelling place where healing is awaited, and thus anticipated.

2. BELOVED

How rituals can change traumatic experiences is suggested by Toni Morrison in her 1987 novel *Beloved*. The fugitive slave Sethe remembers her mother-in-law, Baby Shuggs, who was bought and freed by her son. Slave life having “busted her legs, back, head, hands, kidneys, womb, and tongue”, Baby Shuggs decided that she had “nothing left to make a living with but her heart” and worked as an unchurched preacher. In a clearing in the woods, Baby Shuggs restores the humanity of her congregation of traumatized slaves by breaking the inner chains of life in slavery. At the start of the gathering, she first has the children laugh, the men dance, and the women cry, but after a while, everything gets mixed up – the men laugh, the women dance, and the children cry – until finally, silence follows. Baby Shuggs does not tell her congregation “they are the blessed of the earth, the inheriting meek or its glorybound pure”, in the novel’s words, but says:

Here (...) in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes, they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin of your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty?⁷

Baby Shuggs sums up all the different body parts, naming their traumas and stimulating her congregation to love them. She ends her sermon saying:

And all the inside parts they just as soon slob for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver – love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart,

Lamentations and the tears of the world (Maryknoll 2002); cf. also her *Jeremiah. Pain and promise* (New York 2012).

⁷ For this and what follows, cf. T. MORRISON: *Beloved* (London 2016 [1987]) 103–104. For background on and interpretation of Morrison’s highly complex novel, cf. P. McDONALD: *Reading Toni Morrison’s ‘Beloved’* (Penrith 2013).

love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than longs that yet have to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.

Then she rises and dances to the music her congregation is now able to give her. “Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh.”

Love conquers the hearts of the enslaved bodies through their traumatized flesh, changing the place in the woods into a true clearing. Baby Shuggs does not promise freedom for the future; she makes it present as desired in a clearing in the jungle of pain and oppression. As the Psalm says, in her sermon they hear a voice they had not known: “I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket” (Psalm 81:5-6). When the members of Baby Shuggs’ congregation return ‘yonder’, oppression, of course, also returns. The trauma of pain, sorrow, and suffering will take possession of their bodies again. But although enslaved, they *are* not slaves anymore. Baby Shuggs leads them into experiencing themselves as having been brought from death to life (cf. Romans 6:13). In the apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans, he tells his readers they are not their own and suggests that they cannot do whatever they want with their bodies. Baby Shuggs presents to the members of her congregation the truth that they are not totally owned by their masters. Whatever happens to their bodies, the congregants remain ‘the temple of the Holy Spirit’ that lives within them (cf. 1 Cor. 6:13).

Thanks to Baby Shuggs, the members of her congregation experience that they *are* not their traumas, thus enabling them to witness to what happens to them. What black sociologist W.E.B. DuBois (1869-1963) has dubbed their ‘Sorrow Songs’—the folksongs, the spirituals, and the blues—made this an enduring possibility for black people in the United States during slavery and the reconstruction period.⁸

3. WITNESSING LOVE

Against this background, I present a sketch of what I consider to be a credible theology of trauma. I take my starting point in Shelly Rambo’s

⁸ W.E.B. DU BOIS: ‘The souls of Black folk’ (1903), in W.E.B. DU BOIS: *Writings* (New York 1986) 357-547, especially p. 541; cf. also J. BALDWIN: ‘Of the sorrow songs. The cross of redemption’ (1979), in J. BALDWIN: *The cross of redemption. Uncollected writings* (New York 2011) 145-153.

change, in her groundbreaking theological reflections on trauma, of what she herself calls ‘the classic question’, from “Where is God in the midst of suffering?” into “Where is God? In the midst of suffering.” As Jewish theologian Malissa Raphael has written in her reflections on the possibility of theology after Auschwitz, God’s Shekinah is present as a witnessing and sustaining love in the midst of even the deepest evil.⁹ Rambo writes:

Persons who experience trauma live in the suspended territory, between death and life. To imagine and re-create life in the aftermath of this experience is the challenge of traumatic survival, and one that cannot be imagined apart from the encounter with death. (...) The possibility of traumatic healing lies in the capacity to witness to the complex relationships between death and life.¹⁰

For Rambo, witnessing this complex relationship between death and life brings Christian theology into its own, although in her estimation historical Christianity tends to suggest the possibility and even the necessity to leave death and suffering behind in order to gain life. For Rambo, however, living in the afterlife of trauma forgoes any escape from its wounds. The wounds themselves have to be resurrected in order to become sources of life. The cover of Rambo’s second book carries an unsigned drawing of barbed wire – the image of captivity and imprisonment – from which the thorns metamorphosize into flying birds, images of freedom and life. It is not about resurrecting *from* being wounded, but about *Resurrecting Wounds*, as her second book is titled. Rambo wants to theologize suffering anew through what in her view is the traumatic afterlife of the cross.¹¹

Just as she wants to re-theologize suffering, Rambo wants to re-theologize the cross, the main Christian symbol of suffering and redemption. She does this by starting with the theological narrative on the *Mysterium Paschale*, the Pascal mystery, by Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988). However, this is an odd choice indeed. To Balthasar, the Paschal mystery is unilaterally the mystery of God’s self-surrendering love, not of trauma. In 1970, he wrote that “everything that can be thought and imagined where God is concerned is, in advance, included and transcended in his self-destitution (*Selbstentäußerung*)

⁹ M. RAPHAEL: *The female face of God in Auschwitz. A Jewish feminist theology of the Holocaust* (London/New York 2003).

¹⁰ S. RAMBO: *Spirit and trauma. A theology of remaining* (Louisville 2010) 25-26.

¹¹ S. RAMBO: *Resurrecting wounds. Living in the afterlife of trauma* (Waco 2017) 6.

which constitutes the person of the Father, and, at the same time, those of the Son and the Spirit.” This includes what Balthasar calls “the eternal super-Kenosis” by which God “makes himself ‘destitute’ of all that he is” and makes himself able to suffer and even to descend into hell, which is the very opposite of God.¹² Balthasar shifts the focus from Jesus’ historical suffering and death, from the historical cross in other words, to the drama immanent in the divine Trinity that supposedly is expressed by this history. From that perspective (and this is why Rambo’s choice to go with Balthasar is so strange), trauma as utter damage to human beings by the experience of overwhelming suffering becomes, in fact, irrelevant. According to Balthasar’s speculative imagination, God in the self-destitution of his love has always already embraced, and thus metaphysically overcome, all suffering.

Rambo sees this problem. She tries to reconnect Balthasar’s speculative theological narrative to trauma with the help of an earlier version of his narrative. In 1943, Balthasar published a meditation called *Das Herz der Welt* (The Heart of the World). His focus here is not just on the inner mechanisms of the divine self-destitution. It is – as the title suggests – presented as the heart of the world. In what for Rambo is a key passage, Balthasar presents a mystical vision of a situation of “chaos, beyond heaven and hell”, of “shapeless nothingness behind the bounds of creation”. This is what the crucifixion unveils, in his view, and Rambo reads it as an analogy for trauma. Balthasar describes how in this situation a hesitant new creation coming directionless to the fore in the chaotic and hellish emptiness that is left behind by the death of God the vision presents. He calls it *Karsamstagzauber*, the mystery of Holy Saturday. This is how he describes it:

What is this light glimmer that wavers and begins to take form in the endless void? It has neither content nor contour. A nameless thing, more solitary than God, it emerges out of pure emptiness. It is no one. It is anterior to everything. Is it the beginning? It is small and undefined as a drop. Perhaps it is water. But it does not flow. It is not water. It is thicker, more opaque, more viscous than water. It is also not blood, for blood is red, blood is alive, blood is a loud human speech. This is neither water nor blood. It is older than both, a chaotic drop. Slowly, slowly, unbelievably slowly the drop begins to quicken. (...) It is not the beginning of God,

¹² H.U. VON BALTHASAR: *Mysterium paschale. The mystery of Easter* (San Francisco 2000); German original: *Theologie der drei Tage* (Einsiedeln/Freiburg 1990 [1970]).

who eternally and mightily brings himself into existence as Life and Love and triune Bliss. It is not the beginning of creation, which gently and in slumber slips out of the Creator's hands. It is a beginning without parallel, as if Life were arising from Death. (...) And is this wellspring in the chaos, this trickling weariness, not the beginning of a new creation?¹³

Balthasar was inspired by the mystical visions of his friend and spiritual companion Adrienne von Speyr (1902-1967).¹⁴ It is an opaque text, first and foremost suggesting mystery. And of course, the birth of order from chaos and of life from death is a deep mystery.

In Rambo's reading, Balthasar presents a manner of witnessing. It is the manner in which, in her view, trauma should be witnessed: remaining with pain and chaos and death in order to witness how pain, chaos, and death give birth to new life, delicately and mysteriously. In Rambo's view, by lyrically following Speyr in his description and attempting to express her experiences in language, Balthasar's iron trinitarian orthodoxy in fact dissolves. This dissolution enables a witnessing to the hiatus of Holy Saturday, of the death of all things divine and the descent into hell, that in Rambo's view is unique in theology.¹⁵ It is not difficult to see the devastating consequences of the Second World War in the background of the attraction this vision had for Balthasar.

However, on a closer look, Balthasar remains very much within the boundaries of what would become his intransigent metaphysics of divine love. He writes:

Could this [wellspring in the chaos, this trickling weariness] be the residue of the Son's love which, poured out to the last when every vessel cracked and the old world perished, is now making a path for itself to the Father through the glooms of nought? Or, in spite of it all, is this love trickling on in impotence, unconsciously, laboriously, toward a new creation that does not yet even exist, a creation that is still to be lifted up and given shape? Is it a protoplasm producing itself in the beginning, the first seed of the New Heaven and the New Earth?¹⁶

It is certainly a touching and beautiful image: a New Heaven and a New Earth born from what is left that spills over from the love of the crucified, bridging the void of nothingness represented by the cross.

¹³ H.U. VON BALTHASAR: *Heart of the world* (San Francisco 1979) 151-152.

¹⁴ BALTHASAR: *My work* 105-106.

¹⁵ RAMBO: *Spirit and trauma* 58-62.

¹⁶ BALTHASAR: *Heart of the world* 152.

However, the precariousness Rambo reads in it, is, in fact, very much lacking in Balthasar's account. For him, the love of the Son always is and remains God's love, and in Balthasar's view, it is impossible for God's love *not* to be victorious. However, to be credible, the remaining of love that opens up new life in the afterlife of trauma should mirror the precariousness that comes with trauma. Rambo quotes a line from a poem by Paul Celan to indicate the core experience of trauma and witnessing to it: "The world is gone, I have to carry you" (*Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen*).¹⁷ In Celan's poem, there is no guarantee whatsoever that this assignment can be fulfilled. Or to change to a theological vocabulary, when Jesus says in the Gospel of John that the greatest love is "to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13), the point is that one can never be certain whether this will lead to new life. That is what 'laying down one's life' means: being in solidarity with the fragile and threatened situation of those between life and death, without any guarantee that this will bring new life.

This, I would argue, was 'the obedience' that God's Son had to learn, according to the letter to the Hebrews, "through what he suffered", offering up "prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (John 5:7-8). Sharing the uncertainties of trauma: that is what characterizes witnessing to trauma in love.

4. INNOCENT SUFFERING AS AN ACT OF LOVE

To give flesh to the image in Hebrews, therefore, we have to turn away from von Balthasar and his speculative approach. Intending to give the image in Hebrews its due, Spanish-Salvadorian Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino turned to the Jesus of Nazareth of the Gospels, who is so casually pushed aside by Balthasar. Sobrino emphasizes that Jesus was learning throughout his life, going through different crises. The crisis of his immanent and unavoidable death by crucifixion is the last one in line. When Sobrino searches for what he calls 'the historical Jesus', the theologian is not indicating the Jesus figure historians and Biblical scholars have reconstructed through their sophisticated methodologies. For Sobrino, the 'historical Jesus' is the Jesus thoroughly imbued in the history of his time and place, truly incarnated in it, as he is pictured in the

¹⁷ RAMBO: *Spirit and trauma*, 21; cf. P. CELAN: *Breathturn into timestead. The collected later poetry* (New York 2014) 96 (German) and 97 (English).

synoptic Gospels.¹⁸ Sobrino is able to connect this Jesus intimately to the traumatic situation in which he writes in the 1980s: amid poverty and deadly violence, oppression and civil war in El Salvador, and closely connected to the traumas of what Sobrino calls its ‘crucified people’.

Sobrino puts the cross at the center of his account of how Jesus, thoroughly intertwined with history, reveals God. Sobrino starts with clarifying that from a Biblical point of view “the future is one of God’s modes of being” and that “God is the power that moves history from the future and will show his power at the end by renewing all things”. From this point of view, Jesus’ crucifixion is first of all a severe crisis. As Sobrino writes:

The cross reveals not power but impotence. God does not triumph over the power of evil, but succumbs to it. The faith-interpretation (...) sees in this the love of God, in solidarity, to the end, with human beings, but what appears on the cross on the surface is the triumph of the idols of death over the God of life.¹⁹

If we nevertheless insist on seeing the cross in faith as a revelation of God’s unrestricted solidarity, this has deep implications for how we see God, according to Sobrino:

Part of God’s greatness is his making himself small. And paradoxically, in this plan of his taking on what is small God makes himself a greater mystery, a new and greater transcendence.

Thus, for Sobrino, God is not transcendent in overcoming evil and death by leaving it behind or, as Balthasar suggests, by having always already overcome it in his divine love. God’s transcendence is not located in ‘the residue of the Son’s love’ after having descended in nothingness. God’s love is *in* the descending into despair and death and nothingness. The divine transcendence connects with trauma not by overcoming it from the outside but by voluntarily participating in it.

In Sobrino’s view, to know God is to participate in the suffering of Jesus who embodied God’s transcendence by participating in the suffering of humankind.²⁰ Not because the suffering is in itself divine or even

¹⁸ Cf. previously J. SOBRINO: *Christology at the crossroads. A Latin American approach* (Maryknoll 1978 [1976]) 273-310; see J. SOBRINO: *Jesus the liberator. A historical-theological reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll 1993 [1991]) 36-63.

¹⁹ For this and what follows, SOBRINO: *Jesus the liberator* 248-249.

²⁰ Sobrino seems to be at least partially aware that he is presenting an alternative to Balthasar’s account of the cross. Balthasar first published the initial version of his account

positive, but because only from suffering, and in connection to the impatient cry ‘how long’ of those who suffer, can God’s liberating power be truly and credibly witnessed. Taking his clue partly from European theologians who stress the need to deal with the fact that we are doing theology ‘after Auschwitz’, Sobrino follows Gustavo Gutiérrez’s idea that in Latin America in the 1980s theology was taking place amid analogies of Auschwitz: mass killings, excessive and random violence, turning the life-world of the poor into a hopeless wasteland.²¹ It is to those who share in the suffering, the longing, the attempts to “take the crucified people from the cross”, and the ongoing frustration of being unsuccessful at it, that God can reveal his presence and in which God can be recognized as God, Sobrino argues.²² He follows in the footsteps of his Jesuit *confrère*, philosopher and theologian Ignacio Ellacuría (1930-1989), who showed how the image of Jesus in the New Testament mirrors the image of the Suffering Servant of God in Second Isaiah, who, in turn, is the mirror image of the suffering people of El Salvador. Isaiah pictures the suffering of the Suffering Servant as a saving mystery.²³

Ellacuría was the rector of the Jesuit José Simeón Cañas Central American University (*Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas*) in San Salvador, where Sobrino was also teaching. Ellacuría was brutally assassinated, together with five other Jesuits, their housekeeper, and her daughter, as revenge for their work in support for the poor and their rights in El Salvador. By mere coincidence, Sobrino happened to be out that evening.²⁴ Ellacuría and the others were witnesses to the traumatic

of the *Mysterium paschale* in the encyclopedia *Mysterium salutis*, edited by Karl Rahner during and immediately after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). In 1992, in the midst of fundamental debates of liberation theology and its preferential option for the poor, Jon Sobrino edited with Ignacio Ellacuría *Mysterium liberationis: Fundamental concepts of liberation theology* (Maryknoll 1993). The original Spanish edition was published in 1990. In the context of *Mysterium liberationis*, Sobrino presents a chapter on ‘Systematic christology. Jesus Christ, the absolute mediator of the reign of God’, p. 440-461.

²¹ G. GUTIERREZ: ‘How can God be discussed from the perspective of Ayacucho?’, in *Concilium* 26/1 (1990) 103-114. Gutierrez picks up especially on the notion of ‘theology after Auschwitz’ as it was developed by Johann Baptist Metz (1928-2019).

²² SOBRINO: *Jesus the liberator* 251-252.

²³ SOBRINO: *Jesus the liberator* 254-255; cf. I. ELLACURÍA: ‘The crucified people. An essay in historical soteriology’ (1978), in I. ELLACURÍA: *Essays on history, liberation, and salvation* (Maryknoll 2013) 195-224.

²⁴ For background, see R. LASSALLE-KLEIN: *Blood and ink. Ignacio Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino, and the Jesuit martyrs of Central America* (Maryknoll 2014) 3-184. For the vision

situation in El Salvador in the time before their martyrdom. From his position, Ellacuría identified with the writer of the Songs of the Servant in Isaiah, who saw innocent suffering and unjust death, and attributed salvation and redemption. Ellacuría writes: “Only in a difficult act of faith is the sacred writer able to discover, in the Songs of the Servant, that what seems in the eyes of history to be the complete opposite.” From the paradox that someone innocent is burdened with the evil he did not commit and willingly accepts this, the writer of the Songs of the Servant concludes that God must ascribe deep salvific value to this taking of an absolute historic injustice to oneself.²⁵ This faith in innocent suffering as an effective act of love is vindicated in Jesus’ death and resurrection, according to Ellacuría. But at the same time, faith remains necessary to see salvific value in Jesus’ death and in the death of his sisters and brothers: the crucified people throughout history.

It is this faith that is necessary in order to be a witness to trauma as ‘resurrecting wounds’. The witness is standing – as Sobrino characterizes his or her position – at the foot of the cross, hearing and seeing utter abandonment, but saying, as the centurion did as he watched Jesus die at the end of the Gospel of Mark, “Truly, this man is a son, this woman is a daughter of God” (cf. Mk. 15:39). As Parker Palmer writes, it is not the contradiction that the experience of being abandoned in suffering asks for. It is faithful accompaniment that is required, witnessing to enduring hope that God ultimately will reveal himself as ‘the power that moves history from the future’ and will show this power by renewing even this devastated life.

5. HOPE DISGUISED AS HOPELESSNESS

But how is this salvific? To explain this, Ellacuría makes a connection with what Karl Rahner has called the ‘supernatural existential’. In traditional scholastic language, this was labeled the *desiderium naturale videndi Deum*, the natural desire to see God. For Thomas Aquinas, human beings by nature desire to know the cause of the goodness they experience in their

behind the work of the Jesuits at the UCA, Ellacuría among them, cf. J. HASSETT & H. LACEY (eds.): *Towards a society that serves its people. The intellectual contribution of El Salvador’s murdered Jesuits* (Washington 1991). For Ellacuría’s contribution, cf. R. LASALLE-KLEIN: ‘The Christian university for a globalized world: Ignacio Ellacuría’s Vatican II advance on Cardinal Newman’s classic statement’, in J.M. ASHLEY [et al.]: *A grammar of justice. The legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría* (Maryknoll 2014) 173-188.

²⁵ ELLACURÍA: ‘The crucified people’ 217-218.

lives. This cause is God. Rahner clarified how this desire is, in fact, an openness to God's revelation that He is the source of all goodness and therefore, the goal and end of all search for goodness.²⁶ Ellacuría argues that this openness to God has to be understood as openness to history and historical newness. In Ellacuría's view, openness to the future is not just a characteristic of human beings but is also a historical reality:

History itself is transcendental openness, because it embraces both the openness of reality and the double, unified openness of the intelligence and the will of apprehension and option. This openness (...) becomes (...) the elevated transcendental openness of a gratuitous historicity.

He suggests that being truly historical means being open not only to further development of what has already begun but also to what "super-venes and irrupts in what is already given and elaborated as an unforeseeable and gratuitous future". In theological terms, it is ultimately the history of everything and all that is called to become salvation history, according to Ellacuría, by being changed through God's renewal of all things.²⁷

In Ellacuría's view, human beings are ultimately called to witness to the graceful irruptions of new possibilities in history by investing their intelligence and will in receiving and contributing to realize them. Thus, human beings give God the glory in and through their capability to notice the necessity and the possibility of what liberates from everything that closes off the present from a redeemed future. Remaining with and being a witness to situations in which it is impossible to live and to sustain a future, that is, situations of trauma, therefore, is an expression and an announcement of the hope that what is as yet unimageable will somehow become possible nevertheless. Solidarity with trauma keeps open space for an unforeseeable and gratuitous future. In embodying hope amid hopelessness by sharing hopelessness, Sobrino has made this the foundation of the spirituality of following Jesus.²⁸

²⁶ Cf. Thomas AQUINAS: *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 17, art. 2; K. RAHNER: 'Concerning the relationship between nature and grace', in K. RAHNER: *Theological investigations* 1 (Baltimore 1961) 297-317; ('Über das Verhältnis von Natur und Gnade', in K. RAHNER: *Schriften zur Theologie* 1 [Einsiedeln 1954] 323-345).

²⁷ I. ELLACURÍA: 'Salvation history', in ELLACURÍA: *Essays on history, liberation, and salvation* 169-194, p. 174.

²⁸ J. SOBRINO: *Spirituality of liberation. Toward political holiness* (Maryknoll 1988 [1985]); cf. O.E. VALIENTE: *Liberation through reconciliation. Jon Sobrino's christological spirituality* (New York 2016).

The wounds of trauma need to be witnessed in hope to enable them to become resurrecting wounds. In an interview conducted in the 1980s, Vaclav Havel, then still a dissident Czech artist and playwright, famously declared hope not to be “the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out”. This hope, Havel believes, gives the strength to live and to try new things, even in conditions that seem utterly hopeless – as was the case in Central Europe under communist control. Considering himself an agnostic, Havel uses quasi-religious language in his description of hope:

It transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons. (...) I feel that its deepest roots are in the transcendental, just as the roots of human responsibility are, though of course I can't – unlike Christians, for instance – say anything about the transcendental.²⁹

Hope, in other words, frees from the dictatorship of the possible and opens the gate for real, innovative change.

Following this line of thought, Czech philosopher, psychologist, and theologian Tomáš Halík, who has worked with Havel, was converted to Roman Catholicism and clandestinely ordained a priest. Halík calls hope a crack in the supposed closeness of our reality “through which a ray of light from the future falls into the present”. This is what Jesus embodies, according to Sobrino, together with the thousands of people like him with whom he was given the grace to meet in El Salvador, as he once wrote.³⁰ Halík follows in the footsteps of French poet and essayist Charles Péguy (1873-1914), who considered hope an aspect of God in which the hope of people participates. Giving hope, God shirks human categories, breaks through human expectations, and appeals to people in an unprecedented way, making them enter the realm of what is impossible from the perspective of what is given.³¹ To consciously bear witness to the experience that life is unbearable, as trauma does, equals entering into what is impossible. It is a way to inhabit and embody the crack through which a ray of light from the future may fall into the present,

²⁹ V. HAVEL: *Disturbing the peace. A conversation with Karel Hvizd'ala* (New York 1990) 181-182.

³⁰ J. SOBRINO: ‘With hope and gratitude’, in LASALLE-KLEIN: *Blood and ink* xiii-xiv, p. xiii.

³¹ T. HALÍK: *Stromu zbývá naděje: Krize jako šance* (Praha 2009; not translated into English); cf. C. PÉGUY: *Le Porche du mystère de la deuxième vertu* (Paris 1916).

as Halík says, and in which the future may open itself unexpectedly. In this light, even trauma itself may be revealed as ultimately an act of love, carrying the suffering of the world without being in any way guilty, possessing nothing but the ‘loud cry’ that expresses pain and humiliation, suffering and death, *and* the protests against all this by denouncing the situation that causes it.

6. GOD DOES ‘NOT DESPISE OR ABHOR THE AFFLICTION OF THE AFFLICTED’

It is through witnessing in solidarity to situations of traumatic suffering that the reign of God is proclaimed in the midst of what undeniably presents its absence and defeat. This makes the wounds, indeed, the form of the resurrection and the sharing of the pain the openness to that reign. However, it is not that reign itself, but the beginning of its possible realization. As Ellacuría made clear, God’s salvation comes through its realization in history, not through just the proclamation of its nearness.

Witnessing trauma in solidarity makes sense only if the wounds of trauma really resurrect as starting points of redemption, for which there is no guarantee. This can occur, however, only to those who entrust themselves to this redemption, by necessity or by choice. In other words, it is the Gospel mantra over again: “Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for the sake of the Gospel, will save it” (Mk. 8:35; cf. Mt. 10:39; 16:25; Lk. 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25). Taking a poem by Guatemalan poet Julia Esquivel as a cue, Emmanuel Katongole uses the image of those killed in the traumatic atrocities of history as “threatening us with resurrection”. They make it impossible for us to forget their suffering and death, their witnessing to life in the midst of death and suffering, and the protest this implies. They are alive in their being resurrected as witnesses to their unjust deaths, not allowing us to be asleep to the ongoing deadly injustices and sufferings.³² As German theologian Johann Baptist Metz (1924-2019) argued, the resurrection of Jesus means a dangerous *memoria passionis*, a memory of suffering that is still going on and that is not reconciled.³³

³² KATONGOLE: *Born from lament* 243-259; cf. J. ESQUIVEL: *Threatened with resurrection. Prayers and poems for an exiled Guatemalan* (Elgin 1994). See also Esquivel’s comments in P.J. PALMER: *The active life. A spirituality of work, creativity, and caring* (San Francisco 1990) 139-157.

³³ Starting in J.B. METZ: *Faith in history and society. Toward a practical fundamental theology* (New York 1980) (German: *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Studien zu*

However, this is not a matter of semi-heroic personal behavior. As I have shown, and as Sobrino and Ellacuría attest, trauma is not just a personal condition, but an expression of the historical situation. Not healing or coping with the trauma, but keeping it alive as unbearable, may lead to its conversion in ‘resurrecting wounds’.

How witnessing trauma as a historical condition could work is suggested in the development of the stained-glass window in the south transept of Cologne Cathedral. The window in question was designed by the German artist Gerhard Richter and was installed in 2007. The original south transept window’s six panes had pictures of six standing figures, all saints. They were completely destroyed during the Second World War, and the window was re-glazed in 1948 with colorless glass. A brief description of what Richter did with his design for the new window is on the Cologne Cathedral website:

The finished window contains 11,263 squares of genuine mouth-blown glass, each of which measures 9.6 × 9.6 cm. Richter used a specially developed computer program to determine the random arrangement of the colored squares in each of the panes. This arrangement was only calculated for one half of the window, the arrangement in the second half being a mirror image of the computer-generated arrangement.³⁴

In other words, the color squares are arranged randomly, but the randomization was effected in a highly sophisticated process. The colors were chosen to harmonize with the colors in the other windows of Cologne Cathedral.

Richter’s design was an alternative to the original wish, in 2002, to make the window into a memorial to the Holocaust, a tribute to six twentieth-century Catholic martyrs who died during that period: Edith Stein (1891-1942), Rupert Mayer (1876-1945), Karl Leisner (1915-1945), Bernhard Lichtenberg (1875-1943), Nikolaus Groß (1898-1945), and Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941). The designers who tried to fulfill this assignment, however, did not convince the cathedral chapter. The cathedral’s master builder Barbara Schock-Werner had asked Richter

einer praktischen Fundamentaltheologie [Mainz 1977]) and later, much more explicit in *Memoria passionis. Ein provozierenden Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft* (Freiburg 2006).

³⁴ Cf. the Cologne Cathedral website, <https://www.koelner-dom.de/en/fenster/window-of-the-south-transept-2007/window-of-the-south-transept-2007> [last accessed 14 July 2020].

also to create a design, and he cut up a photograph of his 1974 painting '4096 Farben' (4096 colors) and pasted the pieces behind the tracery of the window.³⁵ In 2005, the cathedral chapter asked Richter to develop his design further, and in 2006 he was officially commissioned. On 25 August 2007, the new window was unveiled.³⁶

Cardinal Joachim Meisner (1933-2017), who was the archbishop of Cologne in 2007 though not a member of the cathedral chapter, was highly critical of Richter's design. He stated: "The window would be better suited to a mosque or another house of prayer. If we're going to have a new window, it should be one that reflects our faith. Not just any." Richter had purposely moved away from picturing anything recognizable, because the catastrophe routinely revered as 'the Holocaust' cannot be adequately represented. What Meisner interpreted as being in line with the Islamic ban on representational art was, in fact, connected to Richter's struggle to find out what it means to be a painter 'after Auschwitz'. Responding to the situation 'after Auschwitz', Richter has made randomization the focus of his art. He considers it an alternative to willful creation.³⁷ One could even say that he makes chance into his partner, using it to create something objective, beyond the arbitrariness of choice but also beyond the uncertainty of truthfully representing reality. Without the artist making a statement or expressing a point of view, in and through Richter's stained-glass window reality shines with beauty and speaks with authenticity.³⁸

The criticism by Meisner and others of Richter's design could be, and actually has been, countered by pointing out the medieval tradition of abstract window patterns in cathedrals, symbolically envisioning the divine 'true light that enlightens everyone' and everything (cf. John 1:9). From a slightly different angle, Cologne Cathedral's provost Norbert Feldhoff has observed how the window "animates, enlivens, encourages

³⁵ For her version of the developments, cf. B. SCHOCK-WERNER: 'The new window as an integral part of the Cathedral's historical glazing: The genesis of a design', in *Gerhard Richter – Zufall: Das Kölner DOMFENSTER und 4900 FARBEN / The Cologne CATHEDRAL WINDOW, and 4900 COLOURS* (Köln 2007) 109-116.

³⁶ See H. BUTIN: 'Gerhard Richter's window for Cologne Cathedral', in *Gerhard Richter – Zufall* 117-124.

³⁷ Cf. A. ROTTMAN: 'Randomizing painting. Notes on Richter's abstractions', in S. WAGSTAFF & B. BUCHLOH (eds.): *Gerhard Richter. Painting After All* (New York 2020) 82-93.

³⁸ See B. PELZER: 'Chance as partner. Gerhard Richter's colour fields, 2007', in *Gerhard Richter – Zufall* 125-145.

meditation and creates an atmosphere that makes us receptive to religion". Therefore, he considers it apt for a place of worship.³⁹ However, this seems to me still too apologetic, hiding instead of revealing the true impact of Richter's window and how it deals with trauma. I would argue that Richter's stained-glass window does through art what the martyrs who were to be depicted according to the original assignment did by laying down their lives. They surrendered to the violence that overwhelmed them, trusting that them doing so was a contribution to making the massively deadly wounds of their times, their culture, and their religion places of redemption and resurrection. Surrendering to the God-forsakenness, they witnessed to God's faithfulness amid the Godforsakenness. In an analogous way, by surrendering to our cultural forsakenness 'after Auschwitz', Richter's window bears witness the unexpected presence of beauty and authenticity amid this forsakenness. This beauty is not at anybody's disposal, but comes to light where and when it chooses. And it chose Richter's window to come to light.

7. LOVE SEES WHAT IS INVISIBLE

In the context of Cologne Cathedral as a place of worship and prayer, Richter's window states, with Psalm 22:25, that God "did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted" and does not hide his face, but hears those who call to him. Thus, the window embodies hope by being almost literally a crack in the closeness of our reality "through which a ray of light from the future falls into the present", in Halk's phrase. Surrendering to trauma facilitates the overcoming of trauma.

Love sees what is invisible, wrote French mystic Simone Weil (1909-1943), *l'amour voit l'invisible*.⁴⁰ It sees the power present in what is weak, the victory hidden in defeat, the love buried in being overcome by hatred and the pain it inflicts. Love sees the resurrection in the wounds, life in death, the impossible hidden in all that presents itself as undoubtedly possible and massively real. God is love and awaits the future into being and converts trauma from being unbearable into a force of giving birth to new life. By loving what seems unlovable, we participate in this divine love. There is no way of explaining how it is possible, just as there is no way of explaining how the random ordering of colors in Richter's

³⁹ BUTIN: 'Gerhard Richter's window for Cologne Cathedral' 122-123.

⁴⁰ S. WEIL: *Attente de Dieu* (Paris 1966 [1950]) 103.

window can produce beauty. But the possibility reveals itself in its realization, time and again. Ultimately, in all the situations with which we cannot cope, all we can do is name the wounds, lament the pain, protest its cruelty, cry out the impossibility of enduring it any longer. We are sustained by the remembrance of those who did this before, in circumstances that were totally different but equally desperate, and who had their despair miraculously changed into hope, their wounds resurrected in new perspectives and possibilities. In other words, we have no hope in trauma but the miracle of resurrection, and our trust in the faithfulness of the God who is love and who made resurrection real in the past.

PART II
CASE STUDIES

COPING WITH SUFFERING IN A MEMORIAL CEREMONY AFTER THE 2011 TSUNAMI IN JAPAN

YU FUKUDA

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the achievements of the 2003 *Disaster Ritual* project¹ is the framework it set (i.e., a working definition of disaster and ritual²), in which various researchers from many disciplines can approach this contemporary phenomenon.³ One of the ways to further develop the discussion starting from this pioneering, explorative project, then, is to use the same framework with a particular perspective that the previous project presents and apply it to other cases outside the Euro-American contexts to reflect upon and to explore the new features of the disaster rituals. This chapter examines memorial services conducted after the 2011 tsunami in Japan by employing the perspective of coping with suffering. To analyze the case, I focused on the speeches and narratives given in memorial services of the tsunami: the same approach that the previous project applied to the case of the airplane crash in Eindhoven (1996) and the café fire in Volendam (2001).

2. CASE STUDIES: MEMORIAL CEREMONIES OF THE 2011 TSUNAMI IN ISHINOMAKI

This chapter will examine how people cope with suffering with regard to the 2011 tsunami in Japan in the City of Ishinomaki. Firstly, it describes the tsunami caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Next, it discusses

¹ P. POST, R.L. GRIMES, A. NUGTEREN, P. PETTERSON & H. ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual. Explorations of an emerging ritual repertoire* (= Liturgia condenda 15) (Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA 2003).

² POST [et al.]: *Disaster ritual* 24-25, 39.

³ A part of this chapter was published in Japanese in H. TAKAKURA & M. YAMAGUCHI (eds.): *Shinsaigo no chiiki bunka to hisaisya no minzokushi (Ethnography of local cultures and victims after the catastrophe. Toward the disaster field-oriented humanities)* (Tokyo 2018) 181-196.

the memorial services conducted to commemorate the fatalities of the disaster in Ishinomaki. Lastly, it examines fifteen speeches in the memorial services in Ishinomaki as a ‘privileged source’⁴ of the ritual after the disaster.

2.1. The Great East Japan Earthquake and the tsunami in Ishinomaki

11 March 2011 marks the deadliest event in postwar Japan. At 2:46 on a Friday afternoon, a series of massive earthquakes occurred off the northeast coastal area of Japan. It took forty to sixty minutes for the tsunami to reach the Pacific coast of the region. That tsunami killed approximately twenty thousand people. Ishinomaki, a city located in the Miyagi prefecture, was the most severely damaged municipality in that area and lost nearly four thousand citizens in that massive tsunami. Relatively easy access from other regions made Ishinomaki one of the central areas for the media to concentrate on, as well as for disaster-relief volunteers who came with relief funds and resources. It was not an unprecedented disaster, especially for the coastal fishery villages in Ishinomaki such as Ogatsu or Kitakami, which recurrently suffered from tsunamis in 1896 and 1933. Compared to previous tsunamis, the 2011 tsunami affected not only those areas characterized as the Ria coastlines, but also the plain area facing Sendai Bay, which is the center for the municipal, industrial, and residential areas. Although the Earthquake Research Committee of the Headquarters founded by the Japanese Government reported in 2000 that another earthquake could occur within the next thirty years (with a probability of greater than 90%) offshore of the Miyagi prefecture, few people expected the scale of this disaster.⁵ In this regard, despite the notion of the disaster-prone area, the 2011 tsunami was a sudden and unexpected event that caused great suffering of the people in Ishinomaki.⁶

2.2. Memorial ceremonies in Ishinomaki

Ishinomaki city held two memorial services within a year of the 2011 tsunami to memorialize the fatalities. Firstly, the city held ‘*Irei-sai*’, literally, a service to appease the spirits of the dead.⁷ The service was held in the

⁴ POST [et al.]: *Disaster ritual* 257.

⁵ Report of the Headquarter for Earthquake Research Promotion; available at <https://www.jishin.go.jp/main/chousa/00nov4/miyagi.htm>.

⁶ POST [et al.]: *Disaster ritual* 25.

⁷ The idea that the living must appease or pacify the spirits of the dead after a disaster is that “when an individual unwillingly forfeited his/her life to powers beyond his/her

city park on 18 June, one hundred days after the tsunami struck. The organizer of the service set up a stage decorated with flowers under a big white tent and placed an obelisk on the center of the stage on which was inscribed “the spirit of the fatalities of the Great East Japan Earthquake, the city of Ishinomaki”. Participants filled four thousand seats and included delegates of the citizens, the bereaved, and volunteers who came to Ishinomaki to provide disaster relief. The service began with a minute of silence, but later many guests, mostly members of the Japanese Diet, gave speeches that were followed by an address given by the mayor of Ishinomaki. Then, a representative of the bereaved families gave a speech in front of the obelisk, which symbolized the dead. Lastly, the participants of the service offered white carnations in tribute to the deceased. They were laid in the order of the representatives of the bereaved families from seven districts,⁸ the mayor, guests, and finally the remaining participants.

On the first anniversary of the tsunami, 11 March 2012, the city held a memorial service (*Tsuitou shiki*⁹) at the General Athletic Park. The city constructed a stage in the gym with an obelisk situated in the center of the stage (Figure 8.1). With twenty-five hundred citizens in attendance, the service started at 2:30 pm. Firstly, a choral group from the Cultural Association of Ishinomaki sang a song to memorialize the tsunami fatalities. After an address by the mayor, two big screens situated at both side of the stage broadcast the national memorial service that was simultaneously being held at the National Theatre in Tokyo. With the virtual attendance of the

control, their spirit is thought to become angry and very possibly vengeful”; see J. NELSON: ‘From battle field to atomic bomb to the pure land paradise. Employing the Bodhisattva of compassion to calm Japan’s spirits of the dead’, in *Journal of contemporary religion* 17 (2002) 155. The ritual attitude “to stave off the possibilities that their souls might cause problems to the living” is still observable in memorial services after disasters in contemporary Japanese society; see I. READER: *Religion in contemporary Japan* (Honolulu 1991) 44.

⁸ Seven districts were absorbed into the city of Ishinomaki in the year 2005. It can be considered that those delegates represented each district.

⁹ Although the name of the service changed from *Irei-sai* to *Tsuitou-shiki* the content remained the same. This also applied to other cities and towns. For example, Minamisanriku, the town in the Miyagi prefecture also known as an area that was completely devastated in the Great East Japan Earthquake, held the *Irei-sai* on 11 September, six months after the tsunami. Later, on 11 March, the first anniversary of the day of the tsunami, Minamisanriku held a memorial service called *tsuitou-shiki*, but the program was substantially the same; see Y. FUKUDA: ‘Research note on post-disaster rituals of the Great East Japan Earthquake in Minamisanriku-chou’, in *Annual review of the institute for advanced social research* 10 (2013) 33-43.

Prime Minister, the Japanese Emperor, and other guests through the screens, the participants stood and observed a minute of silence at 2:46 pm, the exact time that the earthquake struck, to memorialize the people who lost their lives. Next, the audience listened to the Japanese Emperor express his condolences, which was followed by a speech given by the Prime Minister. Then, the national memorial service of the tsunami that was being broadcast by relay ended. Thereafter, a representative of the bereaved families gave a speech. Finally, the ceremony ended with the offering of flowers.



Figure 8.1: A man giving his speech in front of the obelisk during the memorial service of the tsunami in Ishinomaki, Japan. The obelisk inscribed with the words “the spirit of the Great East Japan Earthquake’s fatalities, the city of Ishinomaki”.

The form of these rituals within the memorial services is characterized by its non-religious manner. Rituals such as a minute of silence and flower offerings cannot be ascribed to any particular religious tradition. Religious contexts are carefully avoided in public ceremonies in Japan. The non-religious context of disaster rituals is an institutionalized form of public ritual to memorialize fatalities that occur in a disaster in postwar Japanese society, which was initiated by the Shinto Directive. This is a directive that was issued by the U.S. General

Headquarters on 15 December 1945 and was designed to prohibit the Japanese government from supporting Shrine Shinto or State Shinto.¹⁰ It ordered not only the removal of official support by the government but also all rites and practices as well as ideas and symbols that were considered to be linked to ultranationalism.¹¹ In addition to this context, owing to some cases around the 1970s that raised the issue of the separation of church and state, Japanese public services remove elements of a particular religion from the public space.¹² Along with this historical context, according to sociologist Kenta Awazu, the practice of silent prayer was first observed in 1924 during the first anniversary day of the Kanto Great Earthquake to memorialize the fatalities.¹³ It was a modern ritual imported and appropriated during twentieth-century Japan that is useful to express grief, regret, or condolence while avoiding any expression of any particular religious faith or political affiliation at the same time.¹⁴

In contrast to the public memorial service, religions organized memorial services that incorporated religious content: the Ishinomaki gathering of prayer, *Ishinomaki inori no tsudoï*. On 13 August, five months after the tsunami, Shinto priests, Buddhist monks, pastors, and other members of the clergy and leaders of Japanese New Religions gathered at a Shinto shrine (Kashima Miko shrine).¹⁵ The precincts of the shrine

¹⁰ Shrine Shinto is “the oldest and most prevalent” type of Shinto, which was absorbed into State Shinto in the Meiji period; see S. ONO: *Shinto. The kami way* (Rutland, VT 1962) 14. After World War II, with the abolition of State Shinto by the Shinto Directive, “Shrine Shinto was divorced from the state and began a separate existence as an explicitly religious entity”; see I. HORI (ed.): *Japanese religion. A survey by the agency for cultural affairs* (Tokyo 1972) 33.

¹¹ J. BREEN & M. TEEUWEN: *A new history of Shinto* (Oxford 2010) 13.

¹² Cases such as the administrative litigation over the Japanese groundbreaking ceremony (*jichin-sai*) in Tsu (sued in 1965), the suit of a Japanese Self-Defence official in Yamaguchi enshrined together with other spirits in Gokoku-jinja Shrine (sued in 1973), and the administrative litigation with regard to a monument to the dead (*Chuukonnhi*) in Minoo (sued in 1976).

¹³ K. AWAZU: ‘Rituals of silence. The shaping of memorial services in wartime and postwar Japan’, in *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 37 (2013) 52-63.

¹⁴ AWAZU: ‘Rituals of silence’ 54.

¹⁵ Japanese New Religions is one of the categories in the study of Japanese religion. Most of these groups were established in the mid nineteenth century, and their characteristics are “innovative and syncretistic, transforming and combining religious elements from the preexisting cultural milieu.” R. KISALA: ‘Images of god in Japanese New Religions’, in *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 25 (2001) 19-32.

are located on the top of the Hiyori mountain, where people can look down upon the tsunami-devastated area of Ishinomaki and the sea (Figure 8.2). Hiyori mountain was nearly surrounded by the tsunami on the day of the earthquake. Some local residents took refuge at this shrine and looked down on their hometown as it was being swallowed by the incoming ocean. It seems that this context of the disaster made the shrine an appropriate place where people could reflect upon the day of the tsunami. Assembling less than a hundred people, mostly members of their group, the clergy performed rituals with their own styles directed near the altar. All of the rituals, including a Shinto purifying ritual and a reciting of a Buddhist sutra, were directed to the sea. At that point, and even now, the sea was thought to be the place where some missing victims reside. Finally, all the participants stood facing the sea and observed a minute of silence, a rite that various religions can perform together regardless of their difference.

Although ritual repertoire between the public memorial ceremonies and religious rituals differ significantly in manner, we can point to their mutual similarities as well. Firstly, almost all of the rituals and utterances



Figure 8.2: Hiyori mountain (Ishinomaki, Japan): A look at the Ishinomaki gathering of prayer. Clergies give their rituals in front of the tiny altar facing the sea (photograph: Yu Fukuda, 13 August 2011).

were directed toward objects that symbolize the dead – the obelisk and the sea. All of the rituals in the public memorial service were directed toward the obelisk. In the religious meeting, all the rituals were directed toward the sea. The sea became a common focus, especially after the year of 2011, to memorialize and perform rituals in honor of the dead. In this regard, the Japanese memorial service conducted after a disaster can be characterized as a ritual performed in honor of the dead and as an attempt to construct a relationship between the living and the dead.¹⁶ Secondly, it was hard to find narratives to explain the meaning of suffering. The 2011 tsunami brought suffering to both the living and the dead. Some people in the memorial services directly asked why this had to happen. The question ‘why’ was also observable in the disaster rituals in the Netherlands described in the previous project.¹⁷ In both countries, people ask the reason for or the purpose of the disaster, but no direct answer can be given.

Compared to the Japanese and Dutch cases, in the case of Acehese commemoration of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami religious narratives to answer the ‘why’ questions were observable.¹⁸ The Indonesian province of Aceh is the most devastated area of the 2004 tsunami. The death toll there reached one hundred seventy thousand. The province of Aceh conducts a public memorial service every year to memorialize the tsunami. One of the highlights of the annual service is a religious sermon (*ceramah*) given by an Islamic preacher (*ustaz*). Every year preachers emphasize common Islamic thinking regarding the tsunami. First of all, it was Allah who brought the disaster with his divine purpose (*bikmah*), denying the understanding of the tsunami as a punishment from God. Secondly, those who lost their lives by the tsunami should be regarded as martyrs who are promised to enter paradise (*Jannah*) in the afterlife. One can attribute this context of religious coping not only to the demographic and institutional aspects of Acehese society (specifically, this can be attributed to a Muslim population in Aceh exceeding 97% and

¹⁶ In the case of the commemoration of the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb, it is interesting to see the transition of the direction of rituals from the dead to the living. See Y. FUKUDA: ‘Transition of rituals in the Nagasaki city atomic bomb memorial ceremony’, in *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* 24 (2014) 78-91.

¹⁷ POST [et al.]: *Disaster ritual* 91, 105, 106.

¹⁸ Y. FUKUDA & S.P. BORET: ‘Theodicy of tsunami. A study of commemoration in Aceh, Indonesia’, in N.C. LIN (ed.): *Exploring religio-cultural pluralism in southeast Asia. Intercommunion, localization, syncretisation and conflict* (Tainan 2019) 227-242.

the existence of Islamic law [*Shari'a*]), but also to their historical background and the context of the Acehnese daily life, which make that line of thinking regarding suffering possible.

Conversely, the interpretation that directly imbues meaning to the tsunami was absent in both public and religious memorial ceremonies in Ishinomaki. Although one can observe the interpretation of the disaster in major newspapers and magazines, such as divine retribution or the warning sign, it is hard to find an interpretation of the tsunami in the Japanese public memorialization of the tsunami.¹⁹ In the next section, I will examine speeches observed in the memorial services of Ishinomaki to characterize how people cope with suffering in the Japanese memorialization of the 2011 tsunami.

2.3. Narratives in the memorial ceremonies of the 2011 tsunami

Fifteen speeches are examined here. They were observed in the two memorial services previously mentioned: the first memorial service (*irei-sai*), which took place one hundred days after the tsunami, and the other (*tsuitou-shiki*) at the occasion of the first anniversary of the tsunami. In the first memorial service, there were eight speeches. The speakers at the service were the mayor of Ishinomaki, the chairman of the House of Representatives, the chairman of the House of Councilors, a representative of the members of the Diet (legislative assembly of the country) elected in the Miyagi prefecture, the governor of the Miyagi prefecture, the chairman of the city council, and the representative of the bereaved families. The speakers at the memorial service for the first anniversary of the tsunami in 2012 were the mayor, the governor, the chairman of the city council, the Minister of Finance, and the representative of the bereaved families. In addition, the audience listened to speeches given by the Prime Minister and the Emperor of Japan. These were broadcast by relay. Some of the speeches were read by proxy. A copy of speech transcripts, except for those of the Prime Minister and the Emperor of Japan, were given to me by the city of Ishinomaki during my fieldwork. It is often observed in Japanese memorial services after a disaster that speakers leave their text beneath the obelisk after they finish their speech. That is the reason why the city of Ishinomaki was able to keep those transcripts.

¹⁹ S. FUJIWARA: 'Reconsidering the concept of theodicy in the context of the post-2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami', in *Religion* 43/4 (2013) 499-518.

Analyzing the speeches, I see several patterns or recurrent themes. Below, I quote a long section from the speech given by the representative of the bereaved families in the first memorial ceremony as a typical example.

Today, we offer our condolences at the memorial service to the spirits whose precious lives were called to heaven following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The magnitude 9.0 Tohoku-Pacific Ocean Earthquake on 11 March at 2:46 pm and the resulting tsunami caused a wave height of more than ten meters, and it ran to a maximum 40.5 meters in some places. It caused catastrophic damage, especially along the Pacific coast, and resulted in calamitous casualties. I, myself, lost my parents and my son in an instant because of that nightmarish tsunami. Three months have passed, but I still cannot believe that it happened. I continue to wish that it were a bad dream and still blame myself for being unable to rescue them. I suppose my emotional wounds will never be healed for the rest of my life. Some of the people who are in attendance here today must have lost their precious husbands and wives, their fathers and mothers, and children whom they cherished and were a source of hope for the future. I am sure that some of you went through a harsher time than I. I am sure that those who lost their lives had wished for much more in the future. My heart is wrenched when I think about how they must have felt.

Under such circumstances, I was really encouraged by the warmth and heart-felt support given by my neighbors and colleagues, as well as the tremendous support and backup from society at large. Not only from the supporters like them but people who also suffered, yet cooperated with each other in the wake of the disaster, solidifying their spirit and uniting their hearts in the same circumstance. It has been three months since the tsunami, and the town is gradually rebuilding. The difference of feelings and attitudes between those affected and those who narrowly escaped death is widening, which led to dissatisfaction, irritation, and unconcern among people. I am worried about that situation. In spite of these difficulties, we must step forward, hoping for the future, supporting our families, believing that we can smile more often. I believe that to help to rebuild and revitalize heavily damaged Ishinomaki as its original historic town will make for the repose of their soul (*kuyou*), nothing is as good as that. Please watch and see how the city will be revived after the disaster. It may take longer, but you will be able to see a more beautiful city than before. May the souls of all the people who lost their lives in the Great East Japan Earthquake rest in peace, and we pray for the health of the bereaved families. These are my words of condolence. Heisei 23, 18 June. Ishikawa Yoshihiro, the

representative of bereaved families.²⁰ (translated by the author from Japanese)

The utterances in the memorial services dedicated to the symbol of the spirit of the fatalities take a form that is similar to each other. Firstly, the speakers clarify the aim of the speech, which is to offer their condolence (*Aitou no ji wo sasageru*) to the symbol of the fatalities.²¹ Next, the speakers mention the date of the damage and the harm (usually the number of deceased and missing) caused by the disaster and express how they feel about the event. For example, the governor states in the memorial service on the first anniversary day of the tsunami that “it’s truly a regret, and I want to express my sincere condolences [to the people who perished]”. Also, the mayor expressed his sentiment in the first memorial service by saying “the event was so cruel that it is still hard to believe that it was real”. The following is an appreciation for the Self-Defense Forces (the Japanese military forces), police officers, firefighters as well as for the volunteers who came from all over the world and did a tremendous amount of work in the wake of the disaster.

Finally, as a delegate of the city, prefecture, nation, or the bereaved families, each speaker pledged or promised to the symbol of the fatalities to rebuild and to revitalize the city. In the memorial service one hundred days after the tsunami, the mayor said the following to his audience:

In order to respond to the regretful souls of those who have died, upon our basic philosophy for recovery, which is to create a disaster-resistant town, revitalize industry and the economy, and build a resonant society through bonds and cooperation, I hereby pledge to create the New Ishinomaki.

In the same fashion, the Speaker of the House of Representatives gave his speech as follows:

To prevent such a catastrophe from happening again, we must deeply engrave this disaster in our heart as a valuable lesson, pass it on to future generations, and revitalize Ishinomaki as a city where people can live with a strong resilience against disasters. We believe that this is the only way to comfort those spirit of the fatalities, and that it is our responsibility to execute the program.

²⁰ For information regarding the transcription of quotations on this and the next page, see the explanation on page 184.

²¹ Other speakers mention aims such as dedicating words to mourn (*Tsuitou no kotoba*) (governor in the first memorial ceremony) or sincerity of condolence (*Aitou no makoto*) (chairman of the House of Councilor) to the spirits of the dead.

Speeches concluded with a wish and a prayer for the spirits of the deceased to rest in peace.

What can be seen in the common form of the speech, especially the last part, the promise and pledge to the dead, is the peculiar attempts to make meaning out of the suffering in a non-religious context. In comparison to commemorations of the disaster rituals such as the 9/11 terrorist attack or the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami,²² justifications of the suffering (such as interpretations for those who suffered as sacrifices for the country) or religious interpretation (that considers the victims as martyrs to imbue its meaning) are not part of the Japanese tsunami commemorations. Instead, the speakers at the Japanese services try to find the meaning of the suffering by making a promise to the people who perished. They promise to rebuild the city of Ishinomaki to the state it was before the tsunami. Making such a promise implies that they are giving themselves an order. Why would one give themselves an order? The reason is that it is the only way not to let this tragedy be in vain. If they didn't, how could the people who narrowly escaped death find any kind of significance in such violent death? There was only a fine line separating the lost from the escaped. Anyone could have been killed that day. For what reason would they have been killed? For what purpose could they have survived? These were questions for which religions could provide answers.²³ However, those religious ways of coping with the suffering are not allowed in Japanese public services. How could it be possible, then, to find some reason or a purpose that would make such a horrible tragedy bearable? It is through this way of coping by giving oneself an order to rebuild and revitalize the city and never to let the tragedy happen again. By realizing these goals, the meaning of the suffering might be found in the future. Of course, no one who lost their lives by the tsunami intended to sacrifice their lives for a better future. However, it is only through making such a promise between the living and the dead that the disaster potentially is allowed to have any meaning.

²² In the case of the 9/11 terrorist attack, see Simko's research on theodical analysis of the commemoration. C. SIMKO: 'Rhetorics of suffering. September 11 commemorations as theodicy', in *American Sociological Review* 77/6 (2012) 880-902. For the commemoration of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, See FUKUDA & BORET: 'Theodicy of tsunami'.

²³ G. STERN: *Can god intervene? How religion explains natural disasters* (Westport, CT 2007). Y. TERADA: 'Views on the pursuit of happiness in Japanese New Religions. The vitalistic conception of salvation and systems of instruction', in *Religious Studies in Japan* 3 (2016) 41-65.

Some might be able to think that these speeches are merely the performances or the customs that follow the protocols in the past. Whatever they promise in the public memorial service, few audiences literally accept the message. However, we cannot think of any other form of speech to cope with the suffering in the contemporary memorial services after disasters in the Japanese context. Given that the room for any religious attempt to find meaning out of the suffering is restricted in the public space, and if we can attempt to reject or temporarily shelve the meaninglessness of the disaster, the only thing we could do is to promise to the spirit of the dead a better life in the future. In this way, we can hope for making the undeserved death be converted into something that potentially has some meaning in the future.

3. CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the memorial ceremonies for the 2011 tsunami in Ishinomaki to characterize how people cope with the problem of suffering in Japanese disaster rituals. Compared to Dutch disaster rituals, one of the characteristics of the Japanese disaster ritual is the exclusion of the clergy and any symbolic elements that can be ascribed to any particular religion. Another feature that stands out in the Japanese disaster ritual is the symbol of the spirits of the dead that plays a significant role in the ceremony. All the rituals were directed toward the symbol of the dead. From the perspective of the coping with suffering, the promise between the living and the dead is at the heart of the ritual. Why is the promise with the spirits of the dead so crucial in the Japanese disaster rituals? The reason is that nothing but this promise can provide a way to deal with suffering in the context of public commemoration in contemporary Japanese society where religious rites are disallowed. One can recognize a similarity with the Dutch disaster rituals on the one hand (a secular attempt to deal with suffering that emphasize 'self-determination')²⁴ and at the same time find a difference, seeking the intervention of the spirits of the dead. In practice, the Japanese disaster ritual creates the meaning of the suffering through a promise to the spirits of the deceased.²⁵ If this coping strategy can be understood as one

²⁴ POST [et al.]: *Disaster ritual* 144.

²⁵ Put another way, by resembling the meaning-making of the suffering to the concept of salvation, the person who promises in rituals himself creates his own salvation,

of the practices to avert misfortune and promise salvation related to superhuman powers, it might imply the possibility of international comparative analysis of disaster rituals from the perspective that Martin Riesebrodt coined, which escapes from the problem concerned with the postcolonial aspect of the concept of religion.²⁶ Services to memorialize the Great East Japan Earthquake are practiced every year in most of the towns and cities of the coastal area not only in Miyagi prefecture and also in Iwate and Fukushima. Synchronic and diachronic comparison of those rituals remain for further research.

or as would be more correct, the conviction of it. See M. WEBER: *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (London 2001) 69.

²⁶ M. RIESEBRODT: *The promise of salvation. A theory of religion*, transl. S. RENDALL (Chicago 2012).

THE PACIFIC ISLANDS: ENCOUNTERS WITH DISASTER
AND RITUALIZED RESPONSES

ANDREW J. STRATHERN & PAMELA J. STEWART

PREAMBLE

Rituals and ritualized responses to environmental concerns and disasters are an arena of growing interest as scholars study climate change, environmental alterations due to conflict/fighting, and environmental disasters (e.g., cyclones, typhoons, floods, bush fires, etc.).¹

Dimensions of rituals and ritualized behavior include actions that are repetitive, authorized by tradition, and somewhat invariant. But rituals vary from one performance to another and are context dependent, and they are often creatively molded to encompass new meanings and functions, either within or outside of earlier dimensions of action. Ritualized actions in themselves encode meanings and values, giving them structured forms that create and express communication and attempt to assist in coping with difficulties.² We will look at some examples from the Pacific.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF DISASTER IN THE PACIFIC

‘Pacific’ means ‘peaceful, calm’. But the Pacific islands are variously subject to dangerous blasts of strong weather, connected to the turbulent movements of wind, water, and temperature changes across the vast areas of the ocean into which these islands are set, highlighting the appropriate character of the region’s other general name, Oceania.³

¹ P.J. STEWART & A.J. STRATHERN: *Diaspora, disasters, and the cosmos. Rituals and Images* (Durham, NC 2018).

² P.J. STEWART & A.J. STRATHERN: *Ritual. Key concepts in religion. Case studies* (London 2014).

³ A.J. STRATHERN, P.J. STEWART, L.M. CARUCCI, L. POYER, R. FEINBERG & C. MACPHERSON: *Oceania. An introduction to the cultures and identities of Pacific islanders* (Durham, NC 2017²).

The islands, occupied by humans for thousands of years, differ greatly in the potentialities they offer to human settlement. Geographers generally distinguish between high volcanic upthrust islands and low-lying atolls that are coral reefs surrounding a sunken volcano that has become an inner lagoon. High islands offer greater areas for growing crops and for forest resources. Atolls depend more on fishing and making gardens in isolated pockets of soil. Big, volcanic islands offer greater possibilities for the development of hierarchy and chiefship, as well as for large-scale responses to environmental challenges. In a huge island like New Guinea, environmental dangers come to the mountains in the form of earthquakes, hailstorms, and flooding as a result of the collapse of land rendered unstable by tectonic shifts. In coastal areas, tsunami-induced floods also cause much damage. Cities such as Jakarta in Indonesia are often vulnerable because their drains cannot cope with flash floods brought on by rainfall. Volcanoes can also explode and cover dwelling areas with ashes and make islands sink or new islands appear. Pacific islanders have had to contend with these elemental forces long before the recent intrusion into their world of outsiders from other continents. These societies have all developed their knowledge of challenges and ways of adjusting to them, although currently there is a growing feeling among inhabitants of lower lying islands that the sea may overwhelm the narrow areas of low-lying land that they have to inhabit. In the meantime, however, these islands need as much help as possible in order to be able to mitigate the dangers to their ways of life and to adapt to changes that are visibly happening.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES

One mode of adaptation that is broadly based in tradition is storytelling. Stories center around events and characters, but they also carry reference to much indigenous knowledge, including environmental knowledge. Scholars refer to this as TEK, traditional ecological knowledge, which combines mythology about how the world was constituted by the acts of spirits and deities with a wealth of information about ways of adapting to and using the environment so created, and the risks and dangers that go with such adaptation.⁴ In general, we may say that such

⁴ A.J. STRATHERN & P.J. STEWART: 'Knowledge, experience, and policy. Environmental issues in the Pacific Islands. The Palgrave Studies in Disaster Anthropology Series Editors' Preface' in J. BRYANT-TOKALAU: *Indigenous Pacific approaches to climate change*.

knowledge has acted as a reliable guideline to human survival; but indigenous narratives also often encompass events that have caused populations to migrate, leaving their traditional areas. Dilemmas regarding staying or leaving continue to be significant in areas at risk.

Indeed, in some instances these dilemmas have come to be dominant in people's lives. In parts of Kiribati (previously the Gilbert Islands) the land does not rise more than two meters above sea level, and it is therefore highly vulnerable to rising sea levels linked to global warming. Its inhabitants see themselves as at risk of losing their habitat. It has been suggested that they may have to find somewhere else to migrate to. Another response has been to consider the possibility of designing floating houses, so that water could become for them like land in the sense of living space. Pacific Islanders have traditions of sea-going voyages, so they are used to water as a part of a total way of living. But their traditions of travel are all migration stories, people in canoes carrying supplies and looking for new land to settle. For this reason, it is more likely that Kiribati people will try to go elsewhere if they lose their land. We do not know in any detail exactly why the original historical migrations to all the Pacific islands took place. We can guess from contemporary instances that social conflicts and/or resource shortages may have been push factors and that conflicts may have emerged from disputes among kin groups about succession to chiefly status, leading to younger members or junior segments migrating. In Kiribati, the island on which the capital, Tarawa, is located is overcrowded, increasing the pressure for shifting elsewhere. When the weather is too stormy, they cannot move out but at other times a shift of habitat is always a possibility, until all of the islands would be filled up. Efforts have been made to find other, more distant, places to go to. Tuvalu is another island society which is experiencing climate-related problems, and its government has tried to gain special status for some of its citizens who have lost resources so that these persons could become classified as 'climate refugees' through the United Nations and gain the right to seek access to residence in some country of choice. Even without such special access, Pacific Islanders who belong to states that have historically been under the aegis of New Zealand can in any case often get permission to go to New Zealand, in

Pacific island countries (New York 2018) vii-x; A.J. STRATHERN & P.J. STEWART: 'Knowledge encounters. Planning for climate change in Aotearoa / New Zealand. The Palgrave Studies in Disaster Anthropology Series Editors' Preface', in L. CARTER: *Indigenous Pacific approaches to climate change in Aotearoa / New Zealand* (London 2018) v-vii.

some instances because they have dual citizenship status. This is true for Cook Islanders. Mostly, people go to Auckland, the capital city where there are numerous enclaves of Pacific Island migrant populations (or the geographic areas within Oceania that are often referred to as Micronesia and Polynesia).⁵

The rights given to Cook Islanders result from the fact that many traditions state that the Cook Islands were at least one of the areas from which canoes arrived in New Zealand carrying the founding groups of the Maori people. The Cook Island language is a version of the Maori language, in fact. On the island of Rarotonga there is a particular beach area from which local traditions record that the first seafaring canoes went out that made their way across the ocean to landfall eventually in what they called Aotearoa, 'the land of the long white cloud' (from the way that clouds sit on the top of the ranges of mountains north to south there). Traditions of this kind provide an important background to how Pacific people see their own histories and how they form contemporary allegiances.

Most Pacific islands have some ecological problems. One such problem can be a lack of adequate freshwater supply, making the islands vulnerable to drought conditions. In the last ten years while we have been visiting in Rarotonga, an engineering project to bring a water supply to the urban areas was funded by Chinese loans but ran into difficulties because of land disputes.⁶ Another problem arises when sea water infiltrates the water table of an island, rendering garden water saline and brackish and destroying crops. The same thing happens when there is a cyclone that lashes an island and causes flooding, with associated damage to crops and dwellings. Cyclones can cause extreme damage, in fact, and are a major cause of devastation on a regular basis, with examples in Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, and many other places in recent history. There is every indication that while such events may possibly be on the increase, they are also a part of the longer-term history of these islands recorded in oral accounts prior to scientific documentation of the more contemporary time periods. The

⁵ L.M. CARUCCI & L. POYER: 'Part III' [Micronesia], in STRATHERN [et al.]: *Oceania*; R. FEINBERG & C. MACPHERSON: 'Part II' [Polynesia], in STRATHERN [et al.]: *Oceania*.

⁶ We developed a Study Abroad program through the University Pittsburgh, USA and in conjunction with the University of Otago, New Zealand called 'Pitt in the Pacific' in 2015, and the program continues to date. Students from North America spent a semester in the Pacific Islands (e.g. New Zealand, Cook Islands, and Samoa) learning about life and culture in the Pacific.

testimonies of individuals on this topic form a part of the traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). On Rarotonga, we were privileged to meet twice with the coordinator for disaster research and disaster responses (in 2016 and 2018). This person drew the attention of ourselves and our students to two important points based in observations of how environmental cues can be observed as indicators of climatic alterations.

One point was that the real basis for people knowing how to deal with disasters comes with TEK. He gave us an example here of the ways in which natural phenomena give clues to impending risks. If, for example, mango trees produce more fruit than usual, two fruits appearing on a single stem, this is a sign that there will be bad weather and a loss of produce later. The second point was that the further the people live from access to introduced government and commercial services, the better they preserve their TEK on how to survive disasters since they need to be more self-reliant. One such area that he had visited, he told us, was the Northern Cook cluster of islands, cut off from Rarotonga by a great distance and without regular transport by air. A part of this section of the Cook Islands is Penrhyn Island or Tongareva. A senior Penrhyn Islander whom we know lives with his wife in Cairns in Northern Queensland in Australia. He recalls how typhoons can lash Penrhyn and completely destroy properties, and this has caused many families to migrate to New Zealand or elsewhere. He also said, however, that those who are left possess much TEK of how to survive such events. Throughout the Pacific such knowledge is becoming more, rather than less, relevant and important for the future, as ecological problems tend to escalate. Traditional ways of responding to environmental challenges are likely also to have included ritual practices linking people's actions to cosmological ideas of order in the world. This kind of link forms a part of the response of South Island New Zealand Maori groups engaged in ameliorative work on their coastal lands, as recounted by Lyn Carter in her book.⁷

3. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Dr. Carter focusses on her own Maori group, the Kai Tahu, and how they work in concert with the government in a context of anticipated and actual climate change to combine Maori TEK with outside scientific knowledge and weave it all into policies to deal with climate and

⁷ CARTER: *Indigenous Pacific approaches to climate change*.

environmental change issues. Dr. Carter points out that in the Maori world view they belong to both the land and the sea, and there is a struggle between these two, conceived of as *atua*, deities, with humans mediating between them. Maori conservation work starts from *mahika kai*, places that provide food. Some Kai Tahu people have been restoring the catchment areas for the whitebait fish, an important traditional source of food for coastal groups. The fish live in wetlands and estuaries. They are freshwater dwellers and are at risk from seawater flooding. They hide in river edges, and Kai Tahu have been planting new riverine grasses there to give the fish more secure habitats. In restoring the habitat for these fish, the Maori are also reclaiming these places for themselves. Using the old name of Matainaka for these habitats, the Maori also gain a sense of re-empowering themselves to look after and conserve the habitats of the fish as well as their own habitat, where their own cultural values can be revived and nurtured. A symbolic or ritual element therefore enters into the process of environmental restoration. Conservation of the environment means conservation of identity. Thus, conservation work may be interpreted to have some ritualized aspects. It is here, then, that we can find the deeper meanings of the work of relief for disaster-struck areas or areas vulnerable to future disasters. The South Island Maori brought Indigenous Knowledge (IK⁸) with them from their Pacific origin places, but they also adapted this IK to the more temperate ecological needs of their new environment. Dr. Carter mentions here how the Maori found a way to extract sugar from the Ti tree and also created preservation storage pits for sweet potato crops. The sweet potato can flourish in cool climates, although it cannot withstand freezing temperatures. The harvested tubers will keep for some days before rotting, but for longer-term storage the Maori learned how to make lined pits in which they were kept cool and protected from insects or sun. We do not know of this technique being used elsewhere in the Pacific, so it must be considered a local achievement of these Maori settlers in the South Island.

These kinds of adaptations are also very relevant in the case of food shortages resulting from damage done to gardens. In many places, people know of wild plants of the forest or bush that they can go to if necessary, when bad weather spoils their crops or is too stormy for them safely to

⁸ Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is the sum of all cultural knowledge that people have, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is the sum of their knowledge about ecological matters.

go fishing. People also need to know where they can find fresh spring water to drink. Knowledge of the land, pathways in it and streams running through it, is potentially vital. In urban conditions, this kind of local knowledge may die out as people take for granted a piped water supply and the fact that they can always find some rice or flour in local trade-stores, assuming they have money to buy these things.

In Rarotonga we noticed in 2016 and 2018 that collection points were set up for people to obtain safe drinking water from a communal tap. There were also public notices saying where people should gather in the event of a storm warning with an accompanying tsunami. Islands such as Rarotonga are used to cyclones and tsunami possibilities, so these precautions are well established there.

The situation in the central highlands of a very big island such as New Guinea is rather different. There, by and large, crops do not regularly fail and earthquakes happen only rarely, (although there was a massive one in early 2018 that registered 7.2 on the Richter scale and shook the whole island). These highland areas, however, are by no means immune from weather risks. At the high altitudes of 6,000 feet above sea level there can be frost or hail storms that destroy sweet potato plants.

A case like this happened on 25 December 2019 in the Hagen area in three different neighboring tribal areas, as reported in the Papua New Guinea *National* newspaper for Friday, 3 January 2020, p. 3 of the 'Nation' section. The news report stated that a freak hailstorm had affected some three thousand people among the Nkika Mugaga, Kunungaka-Palka, and Ruruka Mimka groups. They had lost sweet potato crops, along with bananas and sugar cane in the hailstorm. Teregl village was a place hit badly, according to the Provincial disaster coordinator Robin Yakumb. He explained that for the last three years his office had no funds to do any relief work for such an event, and he called on the government's National Emergency Disaster Centre to rectify this situation.

The vulnerability of high-altitude gardens in the Highlands is felt most strongly at above 7,000 feet above sea level. Anthropologists have studied this problem in parts of the Enga and Western Highlands Provinces. The problem results from the upwards historical expansion of the sweet potato crop into higher altitude places as population grew.

The sweet potato was brought into the Highlands some three to four hundred years ago, and it enabled gardening to spread out from valley areas, where taro had long been grown, up the hillsides. Enhancing its ability to grow in a colder environment, women made big mounds of

earth to house the sweet potato roots and filled the mounds with mulch to raise the temperature inside the mound. Nevertheless, with frost, the crop might fail as the sweet potato leaves shriveled in the cold air and the roots were deprived of sustenance. In such circumstances high altitude groups temporarily migrated downhill to stay with kin until they could replant and harvest their gardens.⁹

In ordinary times, they would also trade forest items such as the pandanus tree nuts, a high-altitude food rich in fat, for vegetables grown at lower altitudes. With the advent of new vegetables such as carrots, cabbage, and Irish potatoes, which are sold in markets, pandanus nuts have been joined with all these food sources that do well in high altitudes and can be sold in markets. Places like Tambul have in this way gained new access to wealth not available previously.

Our earlier long-term research in the Hagen area revealed to us an important feature of Tambul: that in precolonial times it was the source of diffusion of a range of ritual practices that all took their impetus from ecological problems.¹⁰ Vagaries of harvest crops in the high-altitude areas were at the heart of stimulating rituals directed towards powerful nature spirits, whose presence it was thought would ensure the fertility and abundance of crops. The origin story of one of the most prominent of these spirits, the Female Spirit (*Amb Kor*, *Kor Ngenap*) makes this underlying rationale clear. The *Amb Kor* is supposed to be one of a number of Sky sisters, who are all tricked by a man into becoming human except for the youngest one who becomes the *Amb Kor* and is manifested in storms with heavy rainstorms, thunder, and lightning. Once, bad weather was causing crop failure in the area said to be her home, Tambul, and she was said to appear in a dream to a leader giving him instructions on how to set up a secret ritual enclosure where he and his clansmen should collect numbers of sacred stones that she would reveal to them as markers

⁹ P. SILLITOE, P.J. STEWART & A.J. STRATHERN: 'Horticulture in Papua New Guinea. Case studies from the Southern and Western Highlands', in *Ethnology Monograph Series* 18 (Pittsburgh 2002); A.J. STRATHERN & P.J. STEWART: *Story of the Kuk UNESCO World Heritage Prehistoric Site and The Melpa, Western Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea. Pride in place* (Catrine 2018).

¹⁰ P.J. STEWART & A.J. STRATHERN: 'Female spirit cults as a window on gender relations in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea', in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5/3 (1999) 345-360; A.J. STRATHERN & P.J. STEWART: *The spirit is coming! A photographic-textual exposition of the female spirit cult performance in Mt. Hagen* (Pittsburgh 1999).

of her power. They were to put these stones into a special house decorated with leaves and ferns and arrange a very big pig kill as a sacrifice to her. After this, fertility was said to return to the land and the animals living in the place.

As with all major rituals involving the amassing of resources, the *Amb Kor* festivals would take up months of preparations for the climactic event, rearing of pigs and the procurement of special ritual paraphernalia including tall poles of trees planted at the entrance gateway to the enclosure. The ritual entailed the passing on of arcane knowledge to the participants. This knowledge was held by ritual experts belonging to one or another of the kin groups near Tambul recognized as originators of the ritual complex itself. These experts gave instructions on how to perform the actions needed and the local participants paid them with goods just before the final ritual dance was held. One of the rites involved was the cooking and consumption of the leaves of a special forest plant, intended to provide protection for the participating men against dangers of contamination. The plant is called *uipip*. The ritual experts bring it with them. They also present the forest plants to the men as markers of fertility and regeneration. All this takes place in the enclosure, unseen by anyone not actually taking part. When the time comes for the final, earth-shaking ritual dance the participants decorate themselves elaborately and wear a feather head-dress of the White Bird of Paradise as a mark of the Female Spirit herself. The men come out in pairs, each pair representing an alliance of ‘men’s house’ and ‘women’s house’ participants. Finally, they load up netbags (an important material cultural object)¹¹ of pork from pigs slaughtered inside the enclosure, take these onto high platforms built around a ceremonial ground, and distribute pieces of pork onto an array of upturned spears held by the crowd of spectators. The climax presents a brilliant and dramatic scene of achievement and access to ritual power. Leaders of the performing groups can now act as ritual experts themselves, able to pass on the knowledge they have gained to the next group that decides to hold the ritual. In this way, a round of performances tends to take place, as each group’s leaders feel they need to get the cosmological benefits putatively brought by the Female Spirit. Each group thus stimulates its production and disbursement of wealth, enhancing its productive capacities and channeling that

¹¹ P.J. STEWART & A.J. STRATHERN: ‘Netbags revisited. Cultural narratives from Papua New Guinea’, in *Pacific Studies* 20/2 (1997) 1-30.

productive effort into networks of exchange. When we consider again that all of these performances arose from responses to ecological problems experienced in the cold high-altitude Tambul area, we realize that the whole system is a ritualized response to environmental challenges, either ones experienced or ones that might be experienced in the future.

It is interesting to compare the processes we have just outlined with earlier discussions about the ecological concomitants of periodic pig killing festivals among the Tsembaga Maring groups of people in the Simbai area north of Mount Hagen. Roy Rappaport's detailed study of one such festival sought to highlight a total ecological and sociological system of relationships operating around the imperative of raising enough pigs to hold the festival, known as the *kaiko*.¹² Using the idea of 'carrying capacity' of the land, he considered whether the pig-killings overtaxed the system or were sustainable in the longer run. After the completion of a *kaiko*, pig herds were considerably depleted. Since women were the major persons responsible for feeding these pigs, via the task of digging up the sweet potatoes that pigs eat, it was their complaining about the pressure on themselves and on their gardens that finally made the men agree to set the *kaiko* in hand. As soon as a *kaiko* was over, the groups that celebrated it would expect soon to embark on a round of fighting in order to even the score of killings between themselves and their enemies. Having killed pigs and feasted with their allies and compensated them for any deaths they had suffered in warfare, and also having appeased the angry spirits of kinsfolk from their own group slain in battle, the group would in theory be ready to meet the next challenge.

Because of these circumstances triggering the *kaiko*, it is fair to see the *kaiko* as a major component of Maring ecological adjustment to the environment. The rituals for the *kaiko* that were carried out were all connected to activities of growing and harvesting crops, so that the ritual cycle was also an ecological cycle. The Maring *kaiko*, then, as Rappaport saw it, exemplified the interdependent weaving together of ritual practices with ecological elements, and the pigs were killed when the women said they could no longer look after all of them. Rappaport locates the impetus of the *kaiko* in local politics and warfare. Pigs were said to be killed as sacrifices for the ancestors, who were then expected to assist their descendants in the ensuing rounds of warfare. In effect, however,

¹² R.A. RAPPAPORT: *Pigs for the ancestors* (New Haven 1984²); R.A. RAPPAPORT: *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity* (Cambridge 1999).

these pig-killings were also for the environment, because they took place before the environment became degraded by the needs of too many pigs.

In both cases – the Hagen *Amb Kor* and the Maring *kaiko* – important ecological processes can be seen to have been at work to avert disasters.¹³ From another area of the Highlands, Pangia, during the early 1970s, the timing of pig kills was often said to be decided by the fact that hungry pigs were breaking into the gardens and there were not enough people to control them, so that the only way to return to a less stressful situation was to kill the pigs and turn them into exchange objects, creating debts and creditors, and stimulating the enactment of ritualized processes of competition.¹⁴

What we have been exploring here, then, is the centrality of an ecological component in the dynamic of pig-killing festivals in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. These festivals are designed to demonstrate the wealth of particular local groups. They also show that such festivals may be stimulated by environmental challenges.

Such challenges are experienced most poignantly when people are faced with actual disasters. We have encountered ritualized behavior in response to disasters in both Japan and Taiwan, and we extend our geographical purview here to these Pacific Rim areas, which are vulnerable to many forms of such disasters including by earthquakes, tsunamis, or fire and floods.¹⁵ In Japan,¹⁶ the massive tsunami of 2011 that devastated large parts of the Tohoku area led to a number of memorials, starting with the informal placement of flowers and later in more permanent forms of memorials to the dead. In one place we investigated

¹³ A.J. STRATHERN & P.J. STEWART: 'Rappaport's maring. The challenge of ethnology', in E. MESSNER & M. LAMBEK (eds.): *Ecology and the sacred. Engaging the anthropology of Roy Rappaport* (Ann Arbor, MI 2001) 277-290.

¹⁴ A.J. STRATHERN & P.J. STEWART: 'Outside and inside meanings. Non-verbal and verbal modalities of agonistic communication among the Wiru of Papua New Guinea', in *Man and Culture in Oceania* 15 (1999) 1-22; A.J. STRATHERN & P.J. STEWART: 'Dangerous woods and perilous pearl shells. The fabricated politics of a longhouse in Pangia, Papua New Guinea', in *Journal of Material Culture* 5/1 (2000) 69-89.

¹⁵ P.J. STEWART & A.J. STRATHERN: 'Disaster anthropology', in P.J. Stewart & A.J. Strathern (eds.): *Research companion to anthropology* (2015) 411-422; STEWART & STRATHERN: *Diaspora, disasters, and the cosmos*.

¹⁶ Both Japan and Taiwan are places that we have spent time in over many years, being affiliated with research and academic institutions in both places since 2000 (see, e.g., P.J. STEWART & A.J. STRATHERN: *Working in the field. Anthropological experiences across the world* [London 2014]).

the deaths of school children at a secondary school, and we found that a stone memorial had been put up in the courtyard of the now abandoned school with the names of all the students who had been drowned by the tsunami engraved upon it. Visitors were encouraged to touch the stone as an encounter with the names and identities of the dead. Such ritual responses to disasters are often triggered in this way by grief for those who have died.

In Taiwan, we have studied the effects of environmental disasters on areas belonging to the indigenous Austronesian-speaking minority groups. We have worked especially among the Paiwan people of Taitung and Pingtung.

These indigenous communities have their traditional village sites on mountain slopes but were relocated in riverine edge sites by General Chiang Kai-Shek after 1949, when he instituted martial law there. Typhoon Morakot in 2009 caused heavy damage to their new habitats. One village was entirely engulfed in a landslide and many died. Ritual practitioners were hired by their remaining kin to try contacting the souls of the dead and help them on their way to the afterworld. The kinsfolk also set up a kind of stone village with stone pillars standing for each family and their names on these pillars, and at the side small memorial spaces for each person where messages could be left. Finally, a museum was built with government money to portray the ways of life of people of the village in former times. This is just one example of a marked ritual response to environmental disasters, corresponding to the extreme loss of life and the grief of the kinsfolk that resulted from the landslide.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In all of the examples that we have presented, the ritualized responses to disasters are ways that humans can start to move forward and out of the entrapment of prolonged grief and sorrow.

In many of the Pacific Island examples that we have presented churches have played a big part both during the immediate coping with and after a disaster and in the longer-term recovery phases. Prayers for the dead and for the living are often presented on a continuous basis, again to provide psychological support, along with the solidarity and help of kinship groups.

THE GREAT WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE OF 2008:
DARK TOURISM, SEISMIC MEMORIALS, AND DISASTER
RITUALS

KEN FOOTE & TANG YONG

The Wenchuan earthquake of May 2008 was one of China's greatest seismic disasters. With an epicenter near Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province in southwest China, the earthquake left over 87,000 dead or missing, over 374,000 injured, and over 5.5 million homeless. In the aftermath, three types of disaster ritual seemed to emerge. The first were national and provincial efforts to commemorate the losses centered on major memorial projects such as the Beichuan National Earthquake Museum, the Yinxiu Earthquake Epicenter Museum, and the Hanwang Earthquake Memorial Park. 'Dark' or disaster tourism was a second response to the earthquake, attracting thousands of domestic and international tourists to the sites of destruction. Equally important are new secular rituals that emerged in local towns and ethnic communities. This chapter examines the emergence of some of these new rituals and the ways they are rooted, somewhat paradoxically, in older spiritual traditions and Confucian practices. The findings offer a spatial perspective on the roles locality and scale play in the emergence of rituals after major disasters.

1. OVERVIEW

Recent research on disaster ritual has highlighted the wide range of responses that emerge in contemporary societies after events of tragedy and violence.¹ One issue that has received less attention is the spatiality

¹ K. FOOTE: *Shadowed ground. America's landscapes of violence and tragedy* (Austin 2003²); X. LI, N. LAM, Y. QIANG, K. LI, L. YIN, S. LIU & W. ZHENG: 'Measuring county resilience after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake', in *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science* 7 (2016) 393-412; P. POST, A.L. MOLENDIJK & J.E.A. KROESEN (eds.): *Sacred places in modern Western culture* (Leuven 2011); E. SIMPSON & S. CORBRIDGE: 'The geography of things that may become memories. The 2001 earthquake in Kachchh-Gujarat

of disaster ritual: how space, place, and location are involved in the emergence of disaster ritual. Here, we focus on how multiple rituals sometimes emerge from a single disaster in a variety of places, across a range of spatial scales. Major disasters like the Wenchuan earthquake of 2008 have impacts on communities at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Our interest is in how these losses are commemorated at these different scales and how these responses sometimes reflect both traditional and new ritual practice. In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, secular museums and memorials were created and disaster tourism did occur, but local communities confronted their losses in other ways by blending religious and secular traditions.

The Wenchuan earthquake is of interest because it was one of the largest and most destructive seismic events of the past century and had a major impact on a wide range of communities over a very large area. Striking Sichuan Province in west, central China, the earthquake devastated both urban and rural areas that include ethnic minorities such as the Qiang and Tibetan peoples (Fig. 10.1). For these reasons, the Wenchuan disaster offers opportunities to focus on the emergence of ritual practice at a variety of scales across a range of rural, urban, and ethnic communities.

2. THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The opening essay of this volume provides a summary of the field of disaster ritual, as well as an overview of current research challenges. Of these issues, this chapter focuses especially on the emergence of new forms of ritual practice and how they arise as hybrids of traditional and new ritual practice. We draw attention to the spatiality of this process: that is, how space and place are related to the development of ritual practice. Here, we follow in the path of pioneering scholars such as Jonathan Smith and Kim Knott, as well as the early, influential work

and the politics of rehabilitation in the prememorial era', in *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 96/3 (2006) 566-585; Y. TANG: *Memorial landscapes of earthquakes. Landscape perception and sense of place* (Chengdu 2019); G.A. WILSON: 'Community resilience, social memory and the post-2010 Christchurch (New Zealand) earthquakes', in *Area* 45/2 (2013) 207-215; and E.M. ZAVAR & R.L. SCHUMANN: 'Patterns of disaster commemoration in long-term recovery', in *Geographical Review* 109/2 (2019) 157-179.

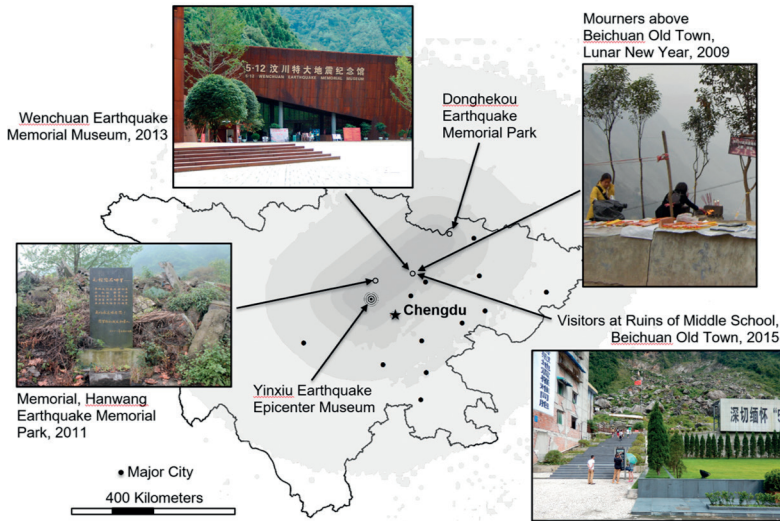


Figure 10.1: Area of impact of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan Province indicating major memorials and including photographs of four of these sites. Gray shading indicates the major areas of destruction as the earthquake spread from its epicenter at Yinxu (photographs: the authors).

of Maurice Halbwachs.² He argued that localization is an important way of sustaining religious practice, a key argument of his *La Topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre sainte*.³ The themes have been developed further by a wide range of scholars, especially in geography,

² K. KNOTT: *The location of religion. A spatial analysis* (London 2005); K. KNOTT: 'Geographies of the urban sacred', in S. LANWERD (ed.): *The urban sacred. How religion makes and takes place in Amsterdam, Berlin and London* (Berlin 2016) 51-57; K. KNOTT: 'From locality to location and back again. A spatial journey in the study of religion', in *Religion* 39/2 (2009) 154-160; J.Z. SMITH: *To take place. Toward a theory of ritual* (Chicago 1979); and M. HALBWACHS: *On collective memory*, transl. L. COSER (Chicago 1992).

³ M. HALBWACHS: *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte. Etude de mémoire collective (Legendary topography of the gospels in the holy land. A study in collective memory)* (Paris 1941). See also D. MIDDLETON & S.D. BROWN: 'Memory and space in the work of Maurice Halbwachs', in D. MIDDLETON & S.D. BROWN (eds.): *The social psychology of experience. Studies in remembering and forgetting* (London 2005) 29-49.

cultural and religious studies, and sociology.⁴ Our point is that rituals sometimes gain their meaning from taking place on the exact site of a disaster while, in other cases, an off-site location may be chosen instead. Positioned on the exact site of a tragedy, a ritual space can serve to stress a shared sense of community loss, perhaps after a disaster in which a community has rallied to overcome the adversity. Positioned off-site, a memorial space may serve to distance victims and families from what might have been a shocking or shameful event, such as a terrorist attack or mass murder, or perhaps a disaster that might have been avoided with greater foresight, such as the collapse of a poorly designed dam or bridge. Our point is that, just as the positions and movements of chess pieces on the game board are keys to strategy, understanding the spatiality of rituals is often important in understanding their meaning. In the case of this chapter, we are most interested here in how the responses to a major disaster vary across a range of scales from the local, to the regional and national, and how responses to a single disaster may vary across these scales.

One related research area in which space and location also matter is 'dark tourism' or 'thanatourism'. It is not unusual for sites of disaster, violence, and tragedy to attract visitors and pilgrims, but dark tourism focuses on how such places sometimes develop into sites of mass tourism through promotion and advertising.⁵ Contemporary dark tourism

⁴ A. ÁRVAY & K. FOOTE: 'The spatiality of memoryscapes, public memory, and commemoration', in S. DE NARDI, H. ORANGE, S. HIGH & E. KOSKINEN-KOIVISTO (eds.): *The Routledge handbook of memory and place* (New York 2020) 129-137; K. FOOTE & M. AZARYAHU: 'Toward a geography of memory. Geographical dimensions of public memory and commemoration', in *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 35 (2007) 125-144; K. FOOTE: 'Shadowed ground, sacred place. Reflections on violence, tragedy, memorials and public commemorative rituals', in P. POST & A.L. MOLENDIJK (eds.): *Holy ground. Re-inventing ritual space in modern western culture* (= Liturgia condenda 24) (Leuven 2010) 93-117; M. AZARYAHU: 'Mount Herzl. The creation of Israel's national cemetery', in *Israel Studies* 1 (1996) 46-74 and M. AZARYAHU: 'The spontaneous formation of memorial space. The case of Kikar Rabin, Tel Aviv', in *Area* 28 (1996) 501-513. In sociology, see J. OLICK, V. VINITZKY-SEROUSSI & D. LEVY (eds.): *The collective memory reader* (New York 2011) and J. OLICK: *The politics of regret: On collective memory and historical responsibility* (New York 2007).

⁵ An excellent review of research in this area is provided by R. HARTMANN: 'Dark tourism, thanatourism, and dissonance in heritage tourism management. New directions in contemporary tourism research', in *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 9/2 (2014) 166-182. Other keys works are J. LENNON & M. FOLEY: *Dark tourism. The attraction of death and disaster* (London 2000); P.R. STONE, R. HARTMANN, T. SEATON, R. SHARPLEY &

also focuses on a range of stigmatized or taboo places that, until recently, tended to be effaced or ignored, such as those associated with political terror, torture, or mass murder. Dark tourism has grown to the point that these days, after major events like the Wenchuan earthquake, dark tourism seems to emerge almost spontaneously as one type of disaster ritual.⁶

Finally, our case study touches on issues of public memory and commemoration and how disasters are gradually woven into narratives that help define local, regional or national identities. Disaster rituals can sometimes emerge as what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have termed ‘invented traditions’ – stories, legends, and commemorative practices that express a community’s sense of identity and common purpose.⁷ Benedict Anderson has coined the term ‘imagined communities’ to describe how these invented traditions can serve to legitimize, naturalize, and reproduce social relationships from generation to generation.⁸ This means that sites of disasters are sometimes transformed into shrines that testify to a community’s, or a nation’s, resilience, perseverance, and courage.⁹ Barry Schwartz calls these sites ‘registers of sacred history’, which emerge in a variety of situations and scales after disaster, tragedy, and war as varied as the Great Famine of Ireland in 1845-49; the Chicago Fire of 1871; the San Francisco earthquake of 1906; the Long March of 1934-35; the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park for the atomic bombing of 1945; the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004; the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami of 2011 and so many others.¹⁰ Our point is that disaster ritual, dark tourism, and issues of public memory and commemoration

L. WHITE (eds.): *The Palgrave handbook of dark tourism studies* (London 2018); and M. TUMARKIN: *Traumascapes. The power and fate of places transformed by tragedy* (Melbourne 2005).

⁶ A. MARTINI & C. MINCA: ‘Affective dark tourism encounters. Rikuzentakata after the 2011 great East Japan disaster’, in *Social & Cultural Geography* (2018) 33-57 and Y. LIN, M. KELEMEN & R. TRESIDDER: ‘Post-disaster tourism. Building resilience through community-led approaches in the aftermath of the 2011 disasters in Japan’, in *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 26/10 (2018) 1766-1783.

⁷ E. HOBSBAWM & T. RANGER (eds.): *The invention of tradition* (New York 1983).

⁸ B. ANDERSON: *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (New York 1991).

⁹ V. ROUDOMETOF: *Collective memory, national identity, and ethnic conflict. Greece, Bulgaria, and the Macedonian question* (Westport, CT 2002) 8.

¹⁰ B. SCHWARTZ: ‘The social context of commemoration. A study in collective memory’, in *Social Forces* 61/2 (1982) 374-402.

are all involved in the responses seen in China following the Wenchuan earthquake.

3. THE WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE AND ITS LEGACIES

On Monday, 12 May 2008, at 2:28 p.m., local time, the Wenchuan Earthquake struck Sichuan Province of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The affected areas had a combined urban and rural population of 21.23 million, including Qiang and Tibetan ethnic minorities. The 8.0 magnitude earthquake was the strongest seismic event, with the widest impact, since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the second deadliest natural disaster following the Tangshan Earthquake of 1976.¹¹

The epicenter was near Yinxiu town, about 80 km west-northwest of Chengdu, the provincial capital, but damage extended across 417 counties in 10 provinces, including those of Chongqing, Gansu, Hubei, Shaanxi, and Yunnan.¹² The earthquake caused extensive damage to basic infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, roads, water systems, and the World Heritage sites of United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).¹³

The Chinese government declared 'Level 1 emergency contingency plan' as the highest emergency response to the disaster the same day in the aftermath and had allocated an emergency funding of ¥70 billion (about \$10.1 billion) for the relief and reconstruction in the year 2008 alone.¹⁴ Ultimately the restoration and reconstruction completed on 27 February 2012 was hailed as a great success, with a total funding of ¥1.7 trillion (about \$240.9 billion). The earthquake was a turning point

¹¹ PLANNING GROUP OF POST-WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION: 'The overall planning for post-Wenchuan earthquake recovery and reconstruction' (Beijing 2018) and X.M. FAN, C.H. JUANG, J. WASOWSKI, R.Q. HUANG, Q. XU, G. SCARINGI, G.J. VAN WESTERN & H.B. HAVENITH: 'What we have learned from the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake and its aftermath. A decade of research and challenges', in *Engineering Geology* 241 (2018) 25-32.

¹² UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY: M 7.9 – eastern *Sichuan*, China, <https://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eventpage/usp000g650/impact>.

¹³ W.Q. YANG: 'Impact of the Wenchuan earthquake on tourism in Sichuan, China', in *Journal of Mountain Science* 5/3 (2008) 194-208.

¹⁴ XINHUA: 'China initiates disaster relief emergency plan for Sichuan quake', http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/12/content_6679131.htm [last accessed August 2019].

in the development of China's disaster preparedness and emergency response planning.¹⁵

4. SITES OF REMEMBRANCE AND THE RISE OF DARK TOURISM

Disaster rituals and memorialization began quickly. One week after the disaster, three minutes of silence were observed throughout the country at exactly 2:28 p.m., a commemoration now held annually on 12 May 12. On the first anniversary, several towns that had been closed to the public since their destruction were opened temporarily to survivors, families, and visitors, then closed again. The major Wenchuan Earthquake Memorial Museum in the town of Qushan was opened on the fifth anniversary of the earthquake in 2013. These activities mirror rituals that have been used after other disasters.

The activities diverged from responses to most other disasters in their promotion of dark tourism. This is because four of the abandoned towns were eventually reopened to visitors as 'relic sites', symbols of the hard work of disaster relief and reconstruction [Table 10.1].¹⁶ This promotion of dark tourism had several goals. One of the most important was the revival of tourism. Sichuan Province is a major destination for domestic and international tourists, and the earthquake caused a dramatic drop in tourist numbers. Efforts were made quite quickly to rebuild access to the province's traditional attractions, as well as to open the relic sites to visitors so that they could see the destruction caused by the earthquake and honor the victims.

¹⁵ Y.N. HUANG, L.L. ZHOU & K.N. WEI: '5.12 2008 Wenchuan earthquake recovery, government policies and none-government organizations' participation', in *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development* 21 (2011) 77-91; W.Q. YANG, D.J. WANG & G.J. CEN: 'Reconstruction strategies after the Wenchuan Earthquake in Sichuan, China', in *Tourism Management* 32 (2011) 949-956. China revised its Law of the People's Republic of China on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters and National Contingency Plan on Earthquakes. Other legacies include the construction of earthquake early warning systems started on August 2015, and the new Ministry of Emergency Management inaugurated on April 2018. XINHUA: 'China to form ministry of emergency management', http://english.www.gov.cn/state_council/ministries/2018/03/13/content_281476076465182.htm [last accessed August 2019]; XINHUA: 'China starts construction of quake early warning projects', http://english.www.gov.cn/state_council/ministries/2015/08/21/content_281475172539404.htm [last accessed August 2019].

¹⁶ Y. TANG: 'Dark touristic perception. Motivation, experience and benefits interpreted from the visit to seismic memorial sites in Sichuan Province', in *Journal of Mountain Science* 11/5 (2014) 1326-1341, p. 1329-1330.

Table 10.1: Major earthquake memorial projects in the aftermath of the Wenchuan Earthquake

Projects	Location	Area (km ²)	Opening date	Death/fatality
Donghekou Earthquake Memorial Site Park	Qingchuan County	50	12 November 2008	300
The park is the first public memorial sites dedicated to the 2008 disaster in Sichuan, which is under the Protection, Construction and Management Office for the Donghekou Earthquake Memorial Site Park, the People's Government of Qingchuan County.				
Beichuan National Earthquake Museum	Old Beichuan County Seat	50	12 May 2010	20000
The museum, together with the abandoned county seat, is one of the largest earthquake memorial sites in the world, which is under the Managing Office of the Wenchuan Earthquake Museum, the Mianyang Municipal Government.				
Yinxu Earthquake Epicenter Museum	The rebuilt Yingxiu Town	2.5		12000
The museum is situated at the epicenter of the Wenchuan earthquake and best exemplifies the roles of seismic memorial sites of Wenchuan earthquake, which is under the Managing Office of the Yinxu Earthquake Epicenter Museum, the Wenchuan Municipal Government.				
Hanwang Earthquake Memorial Park	Old Hanwang Town	1.7	12 May 2012	5000
The park is at the intersections of ghost industrial town and seismic memorials arising from the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, which is under the leading group for construction of the memorial project of the Mianzhu Municipal Government and then the HEMP managing committee.				

Turning the memorial sites into tourist attractions provoked considerable debate. Access was at first limited and tightly controlled, but grew rapidly as experience was gained managing the large numbers of people who wanted to visit the relic sites. The Donghekou Park, the first public memorial site, has received over 260,000 tourists from November 2008 to May 2009.¹⁷ Up until May 2010 only 1,000 visitors had been

¹⁷ Y. TANG: 'Travel motivation, destination image and visitor satisfaction of international tourists after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. A structural modelling approach', in *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* 9/11 (2013) 1260-1277; 'China opens first memorial park on May 12 quake ruins', in *China Daily*, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/life/2008-11/13/content_7201909.htm [last accessed August 2019].

permitted to visit the abandoned county seat of Beichuan. Five years later, the number of visitors increased rapidly after the Beichuan National Earthquake Museum was opened, offering bus shuttle access to the relic site. Chinese visitors, more than survivors, were particularly interested in seeing these devastated sites in Dujiangyan, Pengzhou, Mianzhu, Guangyuan, and Yingxiu especially during the Spring Festival (a time for family gatherings on the New Year), the Tomb-sweeping Festival honoring ancestors, and the May Day holiday. The Yinxu Epicenter Earthquake Museum reported 200,000 tourists during 2012 Spring Festival alone. The boom in dark tourism helped the tourism industry in Sichuan rebound quickly after 2008. The province received 220 million visits in 2009 and ¥147.2 billion (\$20.7 billion) in tourism receipts, a 17.4% and 21.0% increase over 2007, respectively.

The commoditization of disaster sites is a highly contested phenomenon, if only because tourism can sometimes conflict with commemoration, one aiming at entertainment, the other honoring community loss.¹⁸ In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake, the conflict between tourism and commemoration was modest. Fascination with death, suffering, and destruction as well as interest in reconstruction were central to dark touristic motivations to memorial sites, and this was not incompatible with the obligation of commemoration arising from emotional connections with the victims and the site. Visiting such sites allows dark tourists to express sympathy for the victims, but the sites also offer an authentic arena for critical thoughts and self-reflection on the meanings of mortality. It is true, however, that dark tourism can be difficult or even emotionally scarring experience if dark tourists are not psychologically prepared for the dangers or emotions associated with deathscapes.¹⁹

¹⁸ Y. TANG: 'Dark tourism to seismic memorial sites', in P.R. STONE [et al.]: *The Palgrave handbook of dark tourism studies* 423-442.

¹⁹ Y. TANG: 'Contested narratives at the Hanwang earthquake memorial park: Where ghost industrial town and seismic memorial meet', in *Geoheritage* 11/2 (2019) 561-575; L.L. QIAN, J. ZHANG, H.L. ZHANG & C.H. ZHENG: 'Hit close to home. The moderating effects of past experiences on tourists' on-site experiences and behavioral intention in post-earthquake site', in *Asia Pacific Journal Tourism Research* 22 (2017) 936-950; B.J. YAN, J. ZHANG, H.L. ZHANG, S.J. LU & Y.R. GUO: 'Investigating the motivation-experience relationship in a dark tourism space. A case study of the Beichuan earthquake relics, China', in *Tourism Management* 53 (2016) 108-121; A. BIRAN, W. LIU, G. LI & V. EICHHORN: 'Consuming post-disaster destinations. The case of Sichuan, China', in *Annals of Tourism Research* 47 (2014) 1-17.

5. LOCAL EXPRESSIONS OF LOSS

The politics and rules of disaster rituals in China today are deeply rooted in the teachings of the Four Books and Five Classics, the authoritative works compiled before the Qin and Han Dynasties that express the core values and beliefs of Confucianism. Rituals, ceremonies, and rules of conduct are a special focus of the Classic of Rites (one of the Five Classics), as well as other foundational Confucian texts including the Book of Xunzi and, in particular, the Rites of Zhou, the Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial, and the Classic of Rites.²⁰ Traditional Chinese mourning rituals also involve other spiritual traditions including Daoism and Buddhism. The interplay of these belief systems can be seen in the responses that unfolded from the first day of the disaster onward.²¹

Grassroots rituals began with candlelight vigil on Tuesday, 13 May 2008, as rescuers continued to search for bodies still buried in the rubble of the Juyuan Middle School in Juyuan, Dujianyan.²² Before nightfall, heartbroken parents placed candles around the bodies, already covered in white cloth and placed in rows under a tent. This was a private moment for families to say goodbye and apologize to their loved ones, as they cried and prayed for forgiveness for letting their children go to school. The candlelight vigil with yellow ribbons and paper cranes was such a simple and accessible way to mourn the losses that it had been widely used across the entire country. Other cases include students at the China Youth University for Political Sciences in Beijing and the Fujian Normal University who held

²⁰ M. BROWN: *The politics of mourning in early China* (Albany 2007); P.B. EBREY: *Confucianism and family rituals in imperial China. A social history of writing about rites* (Princeton 2014); C. JEYSOOK: 'A weeping man and the mourning ritual. Literati writing and the rhetoric of funeral oration in eighteenth-century Joseon', in *Korean Journal* 51 (2013) 14-171; N. KUTCHER: *Mourning in late imperial China. Filial piety and the state*. (Cambridge 1999); The *Four books* and the *Five classics* (四书五经). The *four books* include the *Lunyu* (论语), the *Daxue* (大学), the *Zhongyong* (中庸), the *Mengzi* (孟子). The *five classics* include the *Yijing* (易经, *The classic of changes*); the *Shujing* (尚书, *The classic of history*); the *Shijing* (诗经, *The classic of poetry*); the *Lijing* (礼记, *The classic of rites*); and the *Chunqiu* (春秋, *The spring and autumn annals*). The other classical texts are the *Zhouli* (周礼); the *Yili* (仪礼); the *Liji* (礼经).

²¹ S. QIN & Y. XIA: 'Grieving rituals and beliefs of Chinese families', in J. CACCIA-TORE & J. DE FRAIN (eds.): *The world of bereavement cultural perspectives on death in families* (Cham 2015) 81-97; J. LI: 'Xunzi's philosophy of mourning as developing filial appreciation', in *Dao* 16 (2017) 35-51; S. ROBERTSON: 'Nunchi, ritual, and early Confucian ethics', in *Dao* 18 (2019) 23-40.

²² J. HU, E. EILSSON & Y.N. HU: *Unshakable Sichuan* (Beijing 2010).

a candlelight vigil for the victims.²³ They stood in silence for three minutes to mourn the victims, but also sang with arms upraised and yellow ribbons on their wrists. Paper cranes were also used as prayers by students in Xiangfan, Hubei Province.²⁴ These sacrifices were not only to mourn the dead, but also to help survivors to continue their lives. When a much broader range of people got involved in commemorating the victims, virtual memorial platforms were created online by the affected communities as well as by the news media, government, and non-governmental organizations, and even individuals. The trend had been toward an instant response from communities to display their grief and concerns publicly as user-generated content ranging from virtual offerings, a missing person poster, and detailed discourse of the disaster and story of victims to a well-designed webpage.²⁵

In the case of Wenchuan Earthquake, vernacular memorials came first as a natural response to the sense of loss felt by affected communities, including urban and rural residents and ethnic minorities such as the Qiang and Tibetan. A good case in point was the stone, in particular white stone, the symbol of Supreme Being worshiped by the Qiang and Jiarong Tibetan, widely used to commemorate the dead. The white stone bearing names of the deceased and the date of the tragedy was put on the top of the stones marking the roadside location of the missing bodies buried in the Niujian Valley near the epicenter of the 2008 tragedy. Yet the white stone with Chinese inscriptions, and sacrifices like yellow Chrysanthemums and wreaths, contradicted the funeral tradition of the ethnic groups inhabiting this region, suggesting a decline in ethnic identity, but nonetheless lead to an interesting mixed or hybrid ritual practice of the old and new.

As stated by the Royal Regulations, “the common people were encoffined on the third day of the death and interred in the third month”.²⁶ Rather than performing full-length burial rituals to encoffin the dead, it

²³ XINHUA: ‘Candlelight ceremony mourns the killed’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/16/content_6689553.htm [last accessed August 2019]; ‘Candle-lit vigil held for quake victims’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/citylife/2008-05/14/content_6684485.htm [last accessed August 2019]; M.D. HU & L. WANG: ‘Students plan a memorial for earthquake victims’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/regional/2009-05/14/content_7778545.htm [last accessed August 2019].

²⁴ XINHUA: ‘Paper cranes carry prayers for quake victims’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/21/content_6699795.htm [last accessed August 2019].

²⁵ XINHUA: ‘Virtual community mourns for quake victims’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/17/content_6691868.htm [last accessed August 2019].

²⁶ *The Wang Zhi* (王制): 庶人，三日而殓，三月而葬。

was precisely 72 hours or three days after the disaster that a simple and plain mourning ceremony was held in front of the collapsed building in Juyuan so as to deal with death and loss spiritually, religiously, and practically. As reported, parents burned symbolic paper money (The Hell Bank Note), lit candles, incense, and firecrackers at the death site to send their children to another world.²⁷ One interesting observation was that only family members used these traditional symbols of mourning, while then general public used Western ritual practices such as the candlelight vigils, yellow ribbons, and paper cranes.

Funeral and burial rituals are considered to be the most important expression of Confucian ethics, a measure of filial piety to the deceased family members, or as an expression of the faithfulness, righteousness, integrity, and reciprocity owed to lost friends.²⁸ On 14 May 2008 many people in Tongjia village came to the funeral of Guo Xiaochao who sacrificed his life while saving three trapped students.²⁹ They held a solemn vigil all night at his coffin and offered condolences to his weeping widow and family. As Mencius emphasized that “people should sacrifice their lives to gain justice”,³⁰ Guo fully exemplified himself as a ‘Confucian martyr’,³¹ while those attending his funeral embodied their Confucian ethics.

Traditional mourning rituals were practiced at different intervals like the third day and the hundredth following the death, along with annual commemorations and traditional Chinese festivals like the Spring Festival (the Lunar New Year), the Hungry Ghost Festival, and the Tomb-sweeping Festival.³² It was at these intervals in the first few years that the ruins of the Beichuan had been reopened accordingly.³³ Before the first annual com-

²⁷ K.L. BRAUN & R. NICHOLS: ‘Death and dying in four Asian-American cultures. A descriptive study’, in *Death Studies* 21 (1997) 327-359.

²⁸ J.L. WATSON & E.S. RAWSKI: *Death ritual in late imperial and modern China* (Berkeley 1988); the *Xiao* (孝); the *Zhong* (忠), the *Yi* (义) and the *Xin* (信) and the *Shu* (恕).

²⁹ HU, EILSSON & HU: *Unshakable Sichuan* 5.

³⁰ 舍生取义.

³¹ A. MCNAIR: *The Upright Brush. Yan Zhengqing’s calligraphy and song literati politics* (Honolulu 1998).

³² The *Chun Jie* (春节); the *Zhong Yuan Jie* (中元节); the *Qingmingjie* (清明节).

³³ ‘Residents mourn in disaster zones’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/17/content_6691878.htm [last accessed August 2019]; XINHUA: ‘China opens Beichuan county to mourners for anniversary’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009wenchuan/2009-05/11/content_7762099.htm [last accessed August 2019].

memoration began, mourning rituals were performed on 25 January 2009, the first Spring festival in the aftermath of the disaster. Apart from the annual commemoration on 12 May, perhaps the Tomb-sweeping Festival was the most appropriate festival for periodical grieving. Interestingly, the Hungry Ghost Festival from Taoism, the Obon in Japanese or Ulambana in Ancient India from Buddhism, and Ancestor Worship Day from Confucianism had evolved into a family reunion day to commemorate the deceased ancestors and other ghosts from the lower realm.³⁴ Each year many survivors have returned to the debris in Beichuan to mourn the dead. They put white paper flowers, photos of the deceased, and signs on the metal fences surrounding the ruins of their former residences and commemorated the dead buried collectively in a central location of the devastated county.³⁵ When presiding at the death-site was not available, the alternative way was to perform family rituals at a roadside or riverside nearby.

Confucian filial morality does provide guidance for modern Chinese.³⁶ As stated by the Analects, “filial children show true veneration in mourning and sacrificing”.³⁷ This principle was again emphasized by the meaning of sacrifices, as “all the living must die, and dying, return to the ground”, with these Gui (Ghosts) needing to be offered sacrifices “as if the deceased were still alive”.³⁸ That explains why sacrifices in early Chinese tombs were rich in monumentality.³⁹ For instance, the life-sized Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses were such grand sacrifices to Emperor Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty. To follow the law of sacrifices, survivors carried wreaths, bundles of white and yellow Chrysanthemums, and other sacrifices made of paper in the shape of the Jiuquan Mansion (The House in the nether world) that they thought might be useful to the dead in the afterlife.⁴⁰ Apart from all the symbolic offerings, ritualistic food like meat,

³⁴ *Qi Yue Ban* (七月半).

³⁵ XINHUA: ‘Mourn for the dead in Beichuan on quake anniversary’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-05/13/content_7772627.htm [last accessed August 2019].

³⁶ W. SIN: ‘Confucianism, rule-consequentialism, and the demands of filial obligations’, in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 47 (2019) 377-393; B. CHEN: ‘Coping with death and loss. Confucian perspectives and the use of rituals’, in *Pastoral Psychology* 61 (2012) 1037-1049.

³⁷ *Lunyu* (论语): “死，葬之以礼，祭之以礼。”

³⁸ *Jiyi* (祭义): “众生必死，死必归土，此之谓鬼；事死者如事生。”

³⁹ H. WU: *Monumentality in early Chinese art and architecture* (Stanford 1995).

⁴⁰ ‘Quake survivors mourn as anniversary nears’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-05/10/content_7761071.htm [last accessed August 2019]; XINHUA: ‘People mark 5th anniversary of Wenchuan Earthquake’, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/780843.shtml> [last accessed August 2019].

fruits, wine, and cakes were also included in family rituals, yet chanting of Buddhist or Taoist scriptures or floating lotus flower-shaped lanterns were not always the case. As observed, the offerings were a mixture of the old and new, implying the decline of the ritual tradition in China and the corresponding rise of Western mourning rituals. The symbolic gold ingots and foil, the Dongyi (The Winter Jacket), and the joss paper made from sheets of coarse bamboo were traditional offerings, while those in the shape of vehicles, mobile phone, and iPads were modern ones.

The traditional epitaph on a secular funerary monument was a short text, written to pay tribute to a deceased person and display the patrons. The black tombstones may carry a golden image of a dragon for males and phoenixes for females. The inscription – “Ruthless quake takes mother away, endless love lets her soul stay” – was the exemplary elegiac couplets, showing the sense of bereavement and the cause of the sudden death. Symbolically, the ending of the disaster mourning was marked by the gravestones three years after a person was buried, since Confucianism advocated the three years of mourning.⁴¹ According to the *Classic of Filial Piety*, “the prolonged mourning did not go beyond three years, because filial piety in mourning must have an end”.⁴² Contrary to this tradition, commemorations in Sichuan have continued beyond this limit. Remarkably, a mother continues to write three letters a year to her lost son, He Chuan. These she has printed on huge banners hung in front of the ruins of the Beichuan Middle School where her son died. One indication of how the memory of the disaster may be passed down to the next generation are the names some Chinese parents have given their newborns, names that allude to the earthquake and its aftermath.⁴³

6. CONCLUSION

The scope of the Wenchuan earthquake allows disaster ritual to be considered at several scales simultaneously. The responses at the national

⁴¹ Q.Y. GUO: ‘Filial piety, three years mourning and love’, in *Contemporary Chinese Thoughts* 42 (2011) 12-38; C.L.W. CHAN & A.Y.M. CHOW: *Death, dying and bereavement. The Hong Kong experience* (Hong Kong 2006).

⁴² 丧不过三年，示民有终也。

⁴³ ‘Quake memory etched in names’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2009-05/05/content_7742608.htm [last accessed August 2019]; Y.F. QIAN & H.Q. WANG: ‘Gratitude etched in name of newborn’, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/20/content_6696774.htm [last accessed August 2019].

and provincial levels paralleled trends in disaster ritual seen in other parts of the world, such as the moment of silence, candlelight vigil, and dedication of memorials. The speed with which they were enacted in the People's Republic of China demonstrates how such rituals have become part of a global repertoire. The active promotion of dark tourism following the earthquake was, however, quite different from what has happened after similar events in other places. Dark tourism usually grows slowly and is often discouraged following disasters; after the Wenchuan tragedy it was encouraged. Restoring Sichuan's tourism industry was an economic priority and, despite objections, promoting dark tourism was a means of reaching this objective.

The local expressions of loss and mourning that emerged in the aftermath of the disaster are equally important. These were new, hybrid rituals that were rooted in traditional, spiritual, and Confucian practices but included elements drawn from contemporary disaster rituals that appeared in other parts of the world. Whether ancient or modern, no single set of rituals revolving around filial piety, mourning, funeral, or burial practice seemed adequate to address the scope of the losses experienced in Sichuan, particularly the large number of children who were lost. The result was a mosaic of ritual practices that emerged from both traditional and contemporary practices and cross-cut cultural and religious traditions. Although it is difficult to generalize beyond the specifics of this particular case study, our work suggests the value of broad comparative study of other major disasters with an eye toward understanding how space, place, and locality are involved in the rituals that emerge from these events.

KE GARNE? (WHAT CAN ONE DO?):
 HOW PEOPLE ‘ON THE GROUND’ PERCEIVED
 THE INCOMPLETE IMPROVISED MORTUARY RITUALS
 AT PASHUPATINATH AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE
 IN NEPAL, 2015

ALBERTINA NUGTEREN, HANS HADDERS & ROJISHA POUDEL

1. INTRODUCTION

Nepal is a landlocked country encompassing both part of the Himalayan mountain range and part of the Indo-Gangetic plain.¹ Geologically, its defining processes started seventy-five million years ago when the Indo-Australian tectonic plate began its northeastward drift. Dual processes caused the Indian continental lithosphere to underthrust the Eurasian plate, pushing up the Himalayan mountain range. Since Nepal lies in this collision zone, and since the Indian plate continues to push upwards, Nepal is prone to tectonic tremors.²

In 2015, no one left had any living memory of ‘the great earthquake’ (the Bihar-Nepal earthquake, 15 January 1934),³ but seismologists had

¹ The first author was trained in classical Indology (South Asian languages and cultures) in the Netherlands and gradually developed as a specialist in religious and ritual studies. One of her topics is the ‘greening’ of funerary disposal practices. She was also one of the authors of the first two publications on Rituals after Disasters (POST et al. 2002 and 2003). The second author spent several years at Santiniketan (Visva-Bharati Academy) learning North Indian music. Trained in Social Anthropology and nursing, he now teaches at the University of Trondheim and writes on cremation practices among Hindus in Norway and at Pashupatinath in Kathmandu. The third author, who is a citizen of Kathmandu, wrote her master’s thesis (in sociology) on change and continuity of cremation practice in Nepal. She was this project’s research assistant from February to May 2019.

² This information is partly based on National Geographic’s TV documentary ‘Earthquake on Everest’, produced and directed by Dick BOWER, and first shown on the National Geographic Channel in May 2015. Geological data are mainly provided by the U.S. Geological Survey (www.usgs.gov).

³ For memories of the 1934 quake narrated by fifteen elderly people around the year 2000, see R.B. BHANDARI, N. OKADA & J.D. KNOTTNERUS: ‘Urban ritual events and

predicted that new massive quakes were highly probable.⁴ When that happened, however, on 25 April 2015, with a magnitude of 7.8, hardly anyone was adequately prepared. A series of aftershocks aggravated people's fear and material misery; a major one took place the next day (26 April, magnitude 6.9) as well as on 12 May (magnitude 7.3). The total count at the end of May that year was as follows: nearly 9,000 people had been killed, 17,000-22,000 injured, and more than 2.5 million displaced.⁵ Both the original quake and the tremors afterwards caused extensive damage to people's lives, properties, and action radius: terrifying avalanches on Mount Everest, disastrous landslides in the hills, blocked roads that became inaccessible to rescue teams or frantic relations seeking contact, national and international communication infrastructures breaking down, and livestock lying dead in the fields or beneath the rubble.

Thousands of houses, municipality buildings, and UNESCO World Heritage Sites were destroyed, including those situated at the iconic Durbar Squares of Kathmandu, Patan (Lalitpur), and Bhaktapur. Countless Hindu shrines, Buddhist *stūpas*⁶ (including the iconic Svayambhunath on a hill to the west), historic landmarks, and statues were reduced to dust and rubble or were severely damaged, such as some of the Hindu temples in the Pashupatinath complex and at Changu Narayan. But more than for the loss of their buildings, people grieved for the loss of any form of certainty and security: if they were still alive, they were often seriously injured and had no clue as to the whereabouts of close relatives. Huddling together under tarpaulins or in temporary camps, sometimes for months, even years; the makeshift nature of their living conditions,

coping with disaster risk. A case study of Lalitpur, Nepal', in *Journal of Applied Social Science* 5/2 (2011) 13-32. This article employs 'Structural Ritualization Theory' in studying ritual and social fabrics both before and after disaster.

⁴ See publications by the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET-Nepal: www.nset.org.np) and GeoHazards International, USA (www.geohaz.org).

⁵ The existing literature is not always clear: are these inclusive numbers (combining Nepal with its neighboring countries) or specifically for Nepal? In the summary given by the National Planning Commission of the Government of Nepal (2015) the following numbers are given for Nepal only: 9,000 killed, 23,000 injured, 160,000 houses totally destroyed, another 143,000 severely damaged (<http://www.nset.org.np>) [last accessed 16 September 2020].

⁶ A *stūpa* (in English popularly referred to as a pagoda) is a mound-like, hemispherical, or truncated pyramidal structure containing Buddhist relics. The most famous *stūpas* in Nepal are massive bell-shaped structures built on square elevations; they form highly visible marks in cityscapes because of their brilliantly white domes.



Figure 11.1: Preparing for a cremation at one of the Pashupati *ghāṭs* under normal conditions (Pashupati, Kathmandu, photograph: Hans Hadders).

often without drinking water, sanitation, and medicine at first; and the constant fear of what was to come next – all those situations made them despair and go into survival mode.⁷

2. THE CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

One of the conspicuous aspects of life in Nepal is the multitude of festivals and cycles of religious rituals, including pilgrimages, processions, annual fairs, animal sacrifices, devotional offerings, and ‘feeding’ services for dead ancestors. Nepal’s socioreligious life has often been presented as persisting in its time-honored ways, and rightly so; yet ethnographic research also indicates that there is a wide range of attitudes toward ultimate concerns in life, with family, community, prosperity, and codified morality still weighing heavily, on the one hand, and individual choices, preferences, and critiques in relatively peaceful co-existence with the cultural default position,

⁷ See S. PENTA, S. DE YOUNG, D. YODER-BONTRAGER & M. SUJI: ‘Trauma, victims, time, changing organizations and the Nepal 2015 earthquake’, in *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 34/3 (November 2016) 345-375.

on the other.⁸ Since Nepalese Hindus attach great value to ritually assisting the dying and deceased in their transition from physical individuality to established ancestors, traditional mortuary rituals are considered crucial. In distinct phases, these last at least two or three years. Violent untimely death especially is therefore fraught with inauspiciousness.

Triggered by ongoing debates about Hindu traditionalism and ritualism versus adaptation, attenuation and secularization, we estimated that studying ritual behavior in an extremely deprived situation such as in the hours, days, and months immediately after the disaster would teach us something fundamental about basic human needs, basic cultural skills, as well as basic ritual repertoire.⁹ We approached the research problem as follows. In traditionalist and ritualistic cultures, the triple occurrence of dying, death, and disposal of the body is closely associated with all kinds of codified behavior and ritual practices. What happens to such prescribed practices and ritual complexities under chaotic conditions like those immediately following the earthquake? And how do those who were closely involved in death rituals at that time look back now, four years later, on

⁸ Of the many cultural studies on Nepal, we mention as particularly relevant for our topic of ritual continuity and change the pioneering book by R. LEVY: *Mesocosm. Hinduism and the organization of a traditional Newar city in Nepal* (Berkeley 1990); a reflective article on Levy's book, praising its structured analysis and tracing back some of Levi's insights to the Vedic period without, however, arguing for the 'eternal', unchanging nature of Hinduism, by M. WITZEL: 'Macrocosm, mesocosm and microcosm. The persistent nature of "Hindu" beliefs and symbolical forms', in *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 1/3 (December 1997) 501-539; and, in another register, the fruitful collaboration between N. GUTSCHOW & A. MICHAELS on Nepal, especially on death rituals, such as *Handling death. The dynamics of death and ancestor rituals among the Newars of Bhaktapur, Nepal* (Wiesbaden 2005). Particularly relevant on continuity and change in this book is Part III, 'The dynamics of Newar death rituals'. A valuable conceptualizing study on traditional and contemporary religion in Nepal is G.P. GRIEVE: *Rethorizing religion in Nepal* (New York 2006).

⁹ In addition to most of Axel Michael's work on Nepal, which generally has a keen eye on ritual dynamics, we mention particularly the changes seen in the social organization of culture: N. DANGOL: *Sana Guthi and the Newars. Impacts of modernization on traditional social organizations* (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Tromsø University 2010), and A. VAIDYA: 'Influence of modernization in funeral guthi (a socio-religious organization). Case of Gubhaju and bare castes of Kathmandu city', in *Journal of International Development and Cooperation* 50 (2015) 1-7. A more general work is D.N. GELLNER, S.L. HAUSNER & C. LETIZIA (eds.): *Religion, secularism and ethnicity in contemporary Nepal* (London 2016).

the ways they improvised and truncated or even totally omitted the prescribed chains of rituals?¹⁰

We reasoned that the responses, to be collected through one-on-one interviews held four years later, guided by carefully worded scripts, would have to answer at least two of the central questions for this contribution:¹¹

1. If their ritual obligations to the deceased were not fulfilled or merely haphazardly and in incongruous places because of the deprived conditions at that time, do they agree that such ritual ‘impropriety’ should later be compensated by, for instance, the individual ritual ‘expiations’ provided by the manuals? Have they actually done so? And if so, how?
2. If our respondents did not resort to traditional compensatory rituals, did they perform other rituals, possibly collectively? And if they did so, how can their ‘coping style’ be characterized?

By interviewing descendants and cremation staff four years later, we envisaged getting a solid indication of how they had processed possible feelings of guilt or anxiety after having failed, forced by the circumstances, to fulfill their ritual obligations towards the dead. Based on such responses we would be able to form ideas of how people had actually coped – ritually and socially – with the immediate aftermath. By investigating how they now look back, retrospectively, on the improvised death rituals in those first chaotic days after the quake, we expected to find culture-specific clues to the ritual aspects of coping with disaster. And by combining an ethnographic approach with a selective study of traditional funerary practices we would be able to balance between ideal-type text-book ritual prescriptions and actual ‘on the ground’ practices after a disaster of this magnitude.

¹⁰ Although this time gap of almost four years was determined by various factors, our research design makes justified use of the passage of time: since the first three years after a relative’s death are most crucial and most densely filled with special rituals and restrictions, we argue that our questions would converge with the lived reality of the respondents only when this phase had formally come to an end.

¹¹ The interviews were held primarily at the Pashupati temple complex in Kathmandu (also known in academic literature as Paśūpatināth [i.e., Lord Śiva as a protector], Paśūpatikṣetra [i.e., the field of the god Paśūpati], and Deopatan [i.e., city of the gods]). Some additional interviews took place in the adjacent town of Bhaktapur, not only to balance the sample but also because traditional death rituals in Bhaktapur have been well documented by scholars. See also note 7 above.

3. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Although Nepal's time-honored status as a Hindu kingdom – in fact, the only one in the world – no longer existed in 2015, life in Nepal was (and still is) very much centered around lived religions and lived social traditions. After a period of political instability, also referred to as the Nepal Civil War (1996-2006), Maoist insurgence, and an unprecedented massacre (2001) in the Royal Palace, Nepal has officially become a secular state and a federal republic since 2007. The present constitution was promulgated on 20 September 2015, a few months after the earthquake. This new constitution replaced the interim constitution of 2007. Whatever the political changes and processes of modernization, secularization, and globalization may have altered in individuals' outlooks, in the 2011 census around 80% of the Nepalese people had self-identified as Hindus.¹² Although in the main part of this chapter we focus on Hindu funerary rituals, in many other ways we make no explicit distinctions between constituent ethnicities, religions, and languages.

The major 'sensitizing concepts' that informed both our desk research and ethnographic questioning are clustered around Hinduism as orthopraxy.¹³ Although many authors on Hinduism have remarked similarly, our point of departure is T.N. Madan's statement in his Encyclopedia entry 'Hindu Orthopraxy': "Hinduism is characterized more by what people do than by what they believe (...)". This generalizing statement is particularly relevant for our topic here because of what follows:

What people do is highly context-specific, depending on who the actor is and in what place and time he or she is placed. (...) Is it dawn or dusk, day or night, a normal time or an abnormal time (e.g., periods of personal ritual impurity or natural calamities)?¹⁴

¹² Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission Secretariat, unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/census/documents/Nepal/Nepal-Census-2011-VolI.pdf [last accessed 16 September 2020].

¹³ A. NUGTEREN: 'The earthquake in Nepal, 2015. A doubly disruptive force?' (paper presented at the 17th Annual Conference of the EASR, Tartu, Estonia, 25-29 June 2019). This presentation was partly based on T.N. Madan's statement on orthopraxy coupled with situational exceptions such as disasters.

¹⁴ T.N. MADAN: 'Hindu orthopraxy', in M. JURGENSMEYER & W.C. ROOF (eds.): *Encyclopedia of Global Religion* (London 2012) 518.



Figure 11.2: A triple icon of stability: the cosmic turtle (Kurma) on whose solid shell the cosmic serpent (Sesha, Naga) lies dormant and holds the cosmic pillar. A divine protection against earthquakes? (Bhaktapur, photograph: Albertina Nugteren).

One conceptual issue we need to nuance in a location- and culture-specific way is the pair ‘ritualism-traditionalism’ often applied to Hindu Nepal, rightly or wrongly. The other conceptual problem arises from the underlying Sanskrit tradition itself: the cluster of ideas attributed to untimely violent death and its ritual-soteriological consequences.

Images of open-air cremation and disposal of the ashes on the banks of the river Ganges in India or the Bagmati River in Nepal still perpetuate popular and possibly ‘orientalist’ perceptions of Hindu disposal: an ancient, exotic, and unchanging traditional practice. Such perceptions, however, obscure the empirical reality.¹⁵ Hindu funeral practices in

¹⁵ See, for instance, four recent online entries by L. ONDRAČKA in P. JAIN, R.D. SHERMA & M. KHANNA (eds.): *Hinduism and tribal religions* (Encyclopedia of Indian Religions) (Dordrecht 2020): ‘Death, Hinduism’; ‘*Srāddhā*’; ‘Burial (Hinduism)’ and ‘*Antyeṣṭī*’ (available through cuni.academia.edu/LubomirOndracka) [last accessed 15 September 2020].

South Asia have been in constant flux.¹⁶ Borrowing insights from actor-network-theory, we utilize the term ‘cremation practice’ to cover the multiple ‘doings’ related to cremation as they manifest themselves in relational networks between *actors* and *actants*: human and non-human, such as personnel, cremation equipment, and procedural manuals.¹⁷ Following this approach, we argue that death (and particularly cremation practice) in Nepal is a complex affair, embedded in material, social, legal, ethical, aesthetic, environmental, and economic practice – at both the collective and the individual levels. Our focus here is on rituals and rationales as they hover (as norms, models, ideals and imaginaries) over the ritual realities: the (far from ideal and serene) adaptations, shortcuts, and hurried improvisations in the first days after the earthquake. It may be that in the late-modern urban setting, death tends to become more secularized and individualized even in Nepal, but in the situation our respondents were in directly after the quake, individual preferences were a luxury hardly anyone could afford.

The second conceptual cluster that needs explaining in order to nuance and sensitize customary death rituals and the underlying Hindu ontologies and soteriologies¹⁸ is the contrast between a ‘good death’ and a ‘bad death’. Not surprisingly, much of the content of Sanskrit textbooks and vernacular manuals on death practices portray an ideal, ordered world. A good death, in such texts, is a death after a fulfilled life, of which, preferably, the last years were spent in relative peace and quiet, both physically and spiritually. Rituals accompanying processes of dying, death, and disposal are accordingly directed at a gradual and harmonious transition to the afterlife. But the compilers of such texts were realistic enough to also cover less than ideal situations. Violent (crime-related) and premature death (particularly as a child, a virgin, or without progeny), as well as death resulting from accidents

¹⁶ Two of the topics worth mentioning here are ‘greening’ Hindu death practices (A. NUGTEREN: ‘Wood, water and waste. Material aspects of mortuary practices in South Asia’, in F. FABRIZIO & T. DÄHNHARDT (eds.): *Roots of wisdom, branches of devotion. Plant life in South Asian traditions* (London 2016) 118-141) and the electric crematorium (H. HADDERS: ‘Establishment of electric crematorium in Nepal. Continuity, changes and challenges’, in *Mortality* 23/1 (2017) 19-34 and R. POUDEL: *A gyst on traditional and modern cremation ceremony in Nepal* (Einbeck 2018)).

¹⁷ B. LATOUR: *Reassembling the social. An introduction to actor-network-theory* (Oxford 2005).

¹⁸ One of the popular classics in this field is J.P. PARRY: *Death in Banaras* (New York 1994).

(work, traffic, snakebite) and visible diseases (leprosy), are seen as bad deaths. The general textual terms for ‘untimely death’ are *vikāl mṛtyu* and *akāl mṛtyu*. It is striking that both intentional and unintentional ‘breaches’ – irruptions of the less than ideal into the ordered world of ritual – are accommodated in all kinds of ways. There are countless compensations for various types of ‘sin’ (*pāp*); in a ritual context this could be anything one has botched, omitted, or shortened. Extending ‘inauspicious circumstances’ (another interpretation of *pāp*, with ritual synonyms such as *doṣ*/*doṣa*) to the situations in which people have died ‘an abnormal death’ during a disaster, we find that much of the ritual ‘guilt’ lies on the shoulders of the closest relatives. In the days directly after the earthquake there was ‘bad death’ everywhere.¹⁹ Moreover, on those who had to hurriedly carry a victim through the streets, barely covered with a torn sheet, on a battered door salvaged from the rubble, and had to wait endlessly in the line at the cremation *ghāṭ*s (stepped river banks with cremation platforms) and subsequently see the body being cremated at an incongruous place and its half-burnt remains being swept into the river – indeed, the overload of inauspiciousness and ritual inadequacy weighed heavily. To clear up such inauspiciousness and the weight it exerts on the closest relatives, Hindu ritual tradition offers a variety of compensations (*prāyaścitta*). Using such ‘mechanics of repair’ as a second sensitizing concept that potentially relativizes Hinduism’s alleged orthopraxy (referred to as the first concept), we investigated the ritual-related coping styles of our respondents.

4. HINDU DEATH RITUALS

According to brahmanic ritual understanding, as expressed in the authoritative text the *Garuḍapurāṇa*,²⁰ death is a central event: it should be ritually anticipated as a gradual transformation throughout one’s life. In various stages, marked by the sixteen *samskāras* (life-cycle rituals), a person is gradually ‘perfected’ (*samskṛta*) through the various phases of his life, in anticipation of the final rite (*antyeṣṭi*), i.e., death. Death rituals comprise

¹⁹ According to PENTA [et al.]: ‘Trauma, victims, time’ 354 (field-data collected directly after the earthquake): “Some conversations with people on the street indicated a sense of frustration, anger, and sadness over the bodies remaining in the rubble. This may have prevented individuals and communities from engaging in proper mourning rituals (...).”

²⁰ *The Garuḍa-Purāṇa*, 3 vols. (= Ancient Indian tradition and mythology 12-14) (Delhi 1978-1980).

the final ‘perfection’, consisting of a chain of (1) minor and major ritualized moments around the death bed of the dying person; through (2) a densely prescribed course of disposal rites, purification rites and ‘reestablishment’ of the dead, lasting thirteen or even forty-five days; followed by (3) a long-drawn-out series of other post-death rites, with special emphasis on monthly and yearly memorial rites (*śrāddha*) for the ancestors. In addition, (4) there are special days in the lunar calendar when both the newly deceased and the established ancestors receive ritual attention in the form of *mantras* and prayers, as well as gifts of water, special food (*pinḍa*), and other ritual offerings such as *kuśa* grass, basil leaves, flowers, and incense.

One of the underlying ideas is that ‘those who have departed’ (*preta*) need the continued services and ritual attention of the descendants. They have to be coaxed or even ‘tricked’ into properly leaving the world of the living and find their way to the forefathers and from there to the world of the gods and rebirth. What is sometimes inappropriately referred to as ‘ancestor worship’ is, in fact, an extended – even over generations – obligation of ritual care for the dead. In ideal situations and when dealing with a ‘normal death’, there is a strong family obligation toward the newly deceased as well as the three generations of ancestors: one’s grandparents, one’s great-grandparents, and one’s great-great-grandparents. In order to support this pathway of the dead towards the gods and onwards to a new birth, close relatives should, from generation to generation, ritually maintain the family line in an unbroken chain of ritual services.

It is clear that this is an ideal, privileged brahmanic picture of both life and death. Just as one’s life cycle consists of a series of ritually marked steps, so does death. In actual life, however, many cannot afford the time and the money for such ritual complexities. In today’s Kathmandu Valley, there are still brahmanic families that follow quasi-medieval practices more or less, but in other layers of society (differentiated not only by class, caste, and community but also by ethnicity, level of urbanization, education, and possibly individual tendencies towards devotionism or anti-ritualism) rituals are no longer the self-evident solution to life’s contingencies. Ethnographic studies indicate both continuity and change.²¹

²¹ In this regard we merely list some articles written about the plans for and objections to the electric crematorium at Pashupati over the years: J. JOLLY: ‘Cremations go electric in Nepal’, 25 April 2009, https://news-bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8189660.stm; S. PANDEY: ‘Switching on’, 5-11 July 2013, archive.nepalitimes.com/article/nation/Nation-switching-on,539; S. PANDEY: ‘Solving a burning problem’, 14-20 November 2014, archive.nepalitimes.com/article/nation/delayed-electric-crematorium-nepal,1802; L. YU



Figure 11.3: A brahmanic priest performing one of the ancestor rituals under normal conditions (Pashupati, Kathmandu, photograph: Albertina Nugteren).

Before we present our field data on truncated death rituals in post-earthquake days in the next section, we will merely specify three aspects of ritual dynamics in Nepalese Hindu death rituals relevant to our case study. These have been noted by various authors in other contexts: (1) the ongoing insistence on traditional cremation on an open pyre versus (or in coexistence with) the inauguration of the first electric crematorium in Kathmandu in January 2016;²² (2) the tendency toward memorializing individual life stories as contrasted with the systematic deindividualization (‘deification’) in traditional death rites;²³ and (3) the lack – but increasingly articulated need – of palliative care and bereavement support in contemporary Nepali urban health care.²⁴ We will keep these indications of ongoing ritual change in mind when we analyze the

WEI: ‘It’s cheaper, faster, cleaner...so why aren’t more families choosing electric cremation?’, 15-21 April 2016, <http://nepalitimes.com/article/nation/changing-traditions,2977> [last accessed 15 September 2020].

²² See note 16 above (HADDERS: ‘Establishment of electric crematorium in Nepal’; POUDEL: *A gyst on traditional and modern cremation ceremony in Nepal*).

²³ See especially GUTSCHOW & MICHAELS: ‘*Handling death*’ 191-192.

²⁴ In Nepal, matters of mental health, including issues of stigma around mental disorders and depression, are complex. See D. BAHADUR BISTA: *Fatalism and development. Nepal’s struggle for modernization* (Hyderabad 1991) and PENTA [et al.]: ‘Trauma, victims, time’. Some acute observations are found in A. SEALE-FELDMAN and N. UPADAHAYA’s 2015 article ‘Mental health after the earthquake. Building Nepal’s mental health system in times of emergency’, a contribution to *Hot Spots, Cultural Anthropology*, <http://www>.

remarks made by our respondents in light of orthopraxy as well as tendencies already underway before the chaotic situations of the first days after the earthquake forced every actor in the cremation drama to drastic adaptations.

5. DESCENDANTS COPING WITH RITUAL INADEQUACIES

We used an interview script dividing the respondents into three categories: (A) descendants of the victims; (B) cremation site workers (*adhikāri*), cremation site staff, and priests; (C) government and municipal authorities, medical forensics, and rescue volunteers. Even after several attempts, however, we were unable to actually interview respondents from category C, but through access to disaster management protocols, public reports, and even published diaries we have interwoven political and managerial perspectives throughout the chapter.²⁵

It is worth emphasizing that the descendants, cremation site authorities, and cremation workers faced a multitude of grave challenges during the first days after the earthquake. Inadequate compliance with ritual propriety may seem less significant among such challenges. Why should anyone bother about minute details during a humanitarian disaster? It is important to understand, however, why ritual details would be crucial for relatives as they had to handle inauspicious, untimely, and violent death. Hindu cremation practices cannot be isolated from the wider ontological, eschatological, and soteriological context of Hindu cosmology. Generally, death causes considerable contagion and is fraught with potential danger. The main purpose of cremation is to purify and free the soul from the body to secure the soul's transition to another realm, first as a *preta* ('departed one') and subsequently as an ancestor. It is the family's obligation to facilitate a safe journey and to turn the deceased into a benign ancestor instead of a haunting ghost. It is partly the belief in evil spirits and the fear of potentially malignant ghosts that motivate mourners to comply with demands posed by ritual specialists. Also, the performance of

culanth.org/fieldsights/736-mental-health-after-the-earthquake-building-nepal-s-mental-health-system-in-times-of-emergency [last accessed 14 September 2020].

²⁵ At a later stage (November 2019), co-author Hans Hadders managed to meet with Jenash Acharya, the main author of J. ACHARYA [et al.]: 'When protocols become fairy tales and gods remain buried under. Excerpts from the diary of forensic experts at Ground Zero during the mega quake that hit Nepal', in *American Journal of Forensic and Medical Pathology* 38/1 (March 2017) 5-8.

intricately phased post-cremation rituals is crucial for the mourners to regain ritual purity and to be reintegrated into the Hindu community.²⁶

The main ritual inadequacies reported by our informants were tied to lack of proper places (the designated platforms) and adequate time slots for cremation, lack of cremation attendants and workers, lack of ritual specialists and even of the proper person among relatives to perform the ritual ignition of the funeral pyre. Mourners had to compromise considerably in their performance of cremation rituals. Usually, at least the minimal requirements, such as giving blessed water to the deceased from the Bagmati River, circumambulation of the body with the firebrand, and ritual ignition (*dāgbati*) at the mouth were performed.

We classified the most salient remarks under the headers ‘place’, ‘time’, ‘costs’, ‘ritual specialists’ and ‘fear’, and added two special rubrics: ‘electric crematorium’ and ‘pacification rituals’

5.1. On place

At Pashupati, in those first days after the quake, cremations were conducted round the clock. There were long waiting lines for obligatory registration and for access to one of the twelve cremation platforms (*chitta*). As a consequence, any alternative open space by the river was used haphazardly. Nevertheless, one informant told us:

[I]t was easier for us because we chose to conduct the rituals on the banks of the river and didn’t wait for the platform; there was a large crowd in the cremation platform area and people were waiting for their turn to cremate at the platforms. But we opted for the banks of rivers; since it was summer and not the rainy season, it was easy for us to conduct the rituals. We reached there at around 7:30 p.m., while cremation started at 8:45 p.m., and it went on until 3:00 a.m. early in the morning.²⁷

5.2. On time

One informant told us: “We were not able to conduct all the rituals as per our culture, that following day we cremated somehow, it was all a hassle and a rush (...)”.²⁸

²⁶ NUGTEREN: ‘Wood, water and waste’ 121. See also A. MICHAELS: *Homo Ritualis. Hindu ritual and its significance for ritual theory* (Oxford 2016), particularly pages 198-210.

²⁷ Interview 15, driver.

²⁸ Interview 21, contractor.

Many informants corroborated this by relating that “many parts of the bodies were left unburned and disposed of in the river”.²⁹ Those who opted for alternative spots instead of waiting for a designated platform at Pashupatinath may have been able to properly complete the chain of cremation rituals in a fair number of hours (six to eight hours per cremation), as did respondent 15.³⁰ It is striking that by acting independently this family also managed to begin the cremation at the ideal transitional moment: either at the hours of dusk or at dawn.

5.3. On costs

In those first days after the quake, cremations were conducted round the clock. In most cases, the main materials prescribed for preparing the body for cremation were available, such as white and orange linen, *kuśa* grass, turmeric powder, flowers, *tulsi* leaves, a newly made bamboo ladder. These and similar items were procured, albeit at a higher price due to increased demand, from the local Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) shops. PADT waived the cremation charge and wood for cremation was distributed for free to earthquake victims. Nevertheless, in several instances wood was scarce, and mourners utilized any wood they could get hold of. In some instances, a neighborhood community (such as a *siguṭhī samasthān*) supported the mourners financially:

[T]here is a *guthī* here, initiated by our ancestors since 2028 B.S. (1971 A.D.) So, our father collected Nrs 2/- per house per month in the beginning; so, there are 35 houses and we collected Nrs 700/- per house per month now. In any incident or if any [ritual] function takes place, Nrs 35,000/- is given to the needy household. For cremation also we provide for the needy for cremating adults Nrs 35,000/- and for children it's different.³¹

5.4. On lack of staff and ritual specialists

Many of the cremations were performed without any ritual specialist or priest; often mourners (among them some women) performed

²⁹ Interview 23, shop owner.

³⁰ Interview 15, driver.

³¹ Interview 15, driver.

the basic rudimentary rituals themselves without any assistance or guidance.

People somehow managed; in some cases, people just laid the body on the ground and did the cremation. In that time the families burnt the body themselves, they didn't know how to do it and what fuel material to use. Thus, many parts of the bodies were left unburned and disposed of in the river (...).³²

Only fifteen of the twenty-five cremation workers who normally cremate the dead at Pashupati were on duty during the days following the earthquake.³³ These cremation workers worked tirelessly to handle the massive influx of bodies. The numbers peaked on the second day after the earthquake: according to them 154 bodies were cremated there. Also, one of the cleaners reported that there was a dearth of professional cremation workers at Pashupati. One cremation worker sometimes had to cremate several bodies at the same time. Relatives often had to cremate their loved ones as best as they could, and those who had no family available were cremated by anyone who volunteered to help.³⁴

The staff at Pashupati worked under considerable stress and duress. Since the earthquake happened on a Saturday, a public holiday, the office was closed, no support was available from the head office, and the few staff present had to manage on their own. There was no disaster plan, nor any written instructions on how to handle the situation. One PADT official related:

It was Saturday, there was no formal direction, we were all scared and shattered (...). [A]s far as I know, there are no written instructions; as we are working here for a long time, we would know about it. Well, this is the weakness of our office, this part is very neglected, there is no kind of planned process here, [it is much needed] as it might take place any time in future as well (...). [W]e have never been in this kind of situation, so it was difficult for us to cope with it, but at that point of time we were very busy and preoccupied, when we look back we are amazed with ourselves for having done such [good] work (...).³⁵

³² Interview 23, shop owner.

³³ Interview 9, PADT official staff.

³⁴ Interview 10, PADT cleaner.

³⁵ Interview 19, PADT official staff.

5.5. On fear related to ritual inadequacies

Most informants also reported their experience of fear. They described the horrible chaotic conditions at the cremation grounds, the frightening impact of the large amount of deceased bodies, and the fear they experienced at the time of cremation. One informant admitted: “I still get goosebumps when I think about that time.”³⁶

In Nepal, under normal conditions, people love to tell stories of scary beings: ghosts (*pret*), vampires (*betāl*, *baitāl*), evil spirits (*bhūt*), flesh-eating demons (*pachisi*, *pichacha*), and other phantom-like appearances. Strongly associated with the ‘hungry dead’ or ‘the avenging dead’, however, such stories arouse cold fear when linked to violent and untimely deaths. After the royal massacre in 2001, a special genre even arose: ‘royal ghost stories’. There is a strong belief, especially in rural areas, that girls who die before marriage are apt to become hungry ghosts (*kichkandī*, *kichkanyā*). Even more relevant to our topic is the general fear that people whose corpses had not been burned completely or for whom post-death rituals had not been performed properly would return as ghosts. It should be noted that the general word for the deceased (*preta*, ‘the departed one’) is the same as that for ghost (*pret* or *bhūt pret*). When fear (‘goosebumps’, ‘terrified’, ‘scary’) was expressed, particularly as related to the visual impressions they had of the massive cremations, we have to keep this shadow world in mind.³⁷

5.6. On the (not yet operating) electric crematorium

Ever since the PADT had conceived the idea of an indoor electric crematorium, they had tried to accommodate varying religious sentiments, traditional values, and specific Hindu needs as much as possible.³⁸ Initially, there had been conflicts between the traditional (ritually cleansing) open-pyre cremation practice and the modern (environmentally cleaner) electric cremation. Hindus and Buddhists in Nepal are willing, however, to accept electric cremations and to adapt their rituals. Since it became

³⁶ Interview 15, driver.

³⁷ Confirmed by an internet search covering May and June 2015 and by D. TORRI: ‘The persistence of shadows. Nepalese ghost stories from classical texts and folklore to the social media’ (paper presented at the 17th Annual Conference of the EASR in Tartu, Estonia, 25-29 June 2019).

³⁸ HADDERS: ‘Establishment of electric crematorium in Nepal’.

operative in January 2016, most of the traditional cremation practices and related rituals are accommodated somehow. In hindsight, if it had been functioning at the time of the earthquake, with the two furnaces operating at full capacity, it would have considerably straightened things out. One informant remarked:

During the earthquake, if there had been an electric crematorium, then I am sure the situation would not have been so dreadful. Many people would benefit from it, I feel that the electric crematorium is best in times of disaster and an additional machine [furnace] needs to be added (...).³⁹

Another informant reflected:

At that time there was no electric crematorium; if it had been operating, then we would have cremated there. But even if the electric crematorium had been in operation, I don't think low status people like us would have had a chance to cremate there, as people in power always take advantage (...).⁴⁰

5.7. On collective and individual pacificatory rituals

Some of the respondents reported that their families had indeed conducted the customary rituals after thirteen days and after one year. It is striking that one respondent adds: “For our own peace of mind.” This remark had a special meaning since it was his young daughter who had been cremated; no *śrāddha* (customary chain of post-death rituals) is required for girls before puberty.⁴¹ That the parents nevertheless performed the post-cremation rituals for her might indicate that there is more to the long trajectory of ‘feeding’ and ‘pacifying’ the dead than one-sided ritual obligations.

One respondent reported that “Everyone in combined way [i.e., collectively] conducted ‘shraddha’ for the deceased at Ghat”⁴² and adds, “Yes from that day on, we conduct the ‘shraddha’ annually.”

The respondent of interview 15 admits that cremations were “not executed properly” but reports that the [consecutive] rituals were performed “properly for two years”. Additionally, according to him (but it is not clear to whom this applies) the annual rituals honoring the dead

³⁹ Interview 23, shop owner.

⁴⁰ Interview 15, driver.

⁴¹ Interview 15, driver.

⁴² Interview 21, contractor. He appears to refer to the collective service at Pashupati on 7 May 2015.

and asking protection during *Gai Jatra* (a festive procession in honor of cows) were properly performed;⁴³ the same was true during festivals celebrating goddesses such as Brāhmaṇī Devī and Chhyāma. Although the latter occasions are public (and in most respects collective) events, participants traditionally tend to honor their own newly deceased in partly individual ways as well. One respondent explicitly referred to *Chhyāmapūjā* (devotional service in honor of the goddess Chhyāma) as a “collective function for all families”.⁴⁴ Another respondent referred to “a collective *śraddha* at the Ghat after 20-25 days”.⁴⁵

We thus see a mixture of individual and collective events. For many, there may have been much ritual inadequacy and improvisation right after the earthquake, but it seems that most at least tried to perform the one-year ritual for the dead and the other annual rituals after that. It is striking that no respondent refers to traditional (brahmanic) scriptural expiations for ritual failure: no one used the general term *prāyaścitta* or the specific term *nārāyaṇabali*.⁴⁶ The most explicit reference to a massive earthquake-related collective function was made by a *paṇḍit* (traditional religious specialist). He refers to it as a *pūjā* rather than a *homa*:

a collective programme by all Brahmins; done for free by twenty-four Brahmins; dedicated to all deceased souls; to ensure the peaceful end of the deceased soul as on the thirteenth day.⁴⁷

⁴³ *Gai Jatra* is a popular cow parade. Local folklore indicates that at the first day of this festival Yama, the god of death, opens the gates of judgment. Newars believe that the ghost of the deceased often has to wander through hazards, accompanied by a cow. The deceased should firmly hold on to the cow’s tail. Traditionally, during the funeral, a cow (or cow’s hide) may have been present for this purpose. On the opening day of *Gai Jatra* families who have suffered a death in the previous year may parade a cow or a cow effigy (made of papier-mâché) through the streets, attended by musicians blowing horns, clashing cymbals, and beating drums. The cow is considered a ticket straight to heaven: being a deity she walks straight past Yama. Those of the wandering deceased who cling to a cow’s tail likewise can enter. Descendants may tie a previously blessed yellow string to the tail of a parading cow, hoping that the deceased will thus pass through the gates of judgment.

⁴⁴ Interview 21, contractor. The ‘dark-blue’ goddess *Chhyāmā* (or *Śyāmā*) may be viewed as connected with death, but she is also revered as protecting and pacifying.

⁴⁵ Interview 16, migrant laborer. This may be a case of confused memory because the large collective ritual event took place exactly thirteen days after the quake, on Thursday, 7 May 2015.

⁴⁶ Naturally, this does not imply they did not take place. It is obvious that our sample is mostly limited to the persons available at Pashupati.

⁴⁷ Interview 17, Brahmin.

Two aspects are particularly interesting in these words: (1) the way he uses “as on the thirteenth day”, designating this collective service almost in terms of a function to compensate any failed rituals or at least a collective replacement of the crucial ‘closure’ on day 13; (2) his emphasis on a “peaceful end of the deceased”. Instead of all kinds of priestly ritual complexities, this particular collective gathering offered, among other inspirational quotes and relatively simple pacification rites, devotional recitations from the *Bhagavadgītā*. Anguish and worry about the fate of the dead were thus pacified in a different mode: collective consolation, a devotional mood of surrender to God, inner peace, and trust in the deceased’s final liberation (*mokṣa*).

6. CONCLUSIONS AND BRIEF REFLECTION

Returning to our initial research questions we now offer some tentative conclusions. They are tentative because we are aware that our data set has considerable limitations. Moreover, respondents tended to have already made a psychological closure. Some even referred us to the documentaries produced in the weeks after the quake or on later memorial days.⁴⁸ That we wanted their own subjective perspective on their own particular cases was not always clear to them. None of the more sophisticated priests with the ability to discuss textual-ritual intricacies was readily available for an interview.⁴⁹ Yet the data set is rich enough to provide at least some clues. Our starting point was the acknowledgement of ritual dynamics even in the relatively self-contained traditionalist Kathmandu Valley. We asked questions that might lead to answers indicating what was considered so essential that people would minimally adhere to that, even in the chaos and deprivation after a disaster. Being aware of the intricacies and complexities of the Newar tradition, we had indeed expected shortcuts, surrogates, and postponed priestly services. Such expectations were corroborated, both by the remarks of the respondents and by additional sources

⁴⁸ See NUGTEREN’s related contribution on media in Part III of this volume.

⁴⁹ There were no priests among the contacts that were established in Bhaktapur. That genres of expiatory or reparatory rituals for the dead are occasionally performed there is deduced from, for instance, J. BUSS: ‘The sixteenth *piṇḍa* as a hidden insurance against ritual failure’, in U. HÜSKEN (ed.): *When rituals go wrong. Mistakes, failure, and the dynamics of ritual* (Leiden/Boston 2007) 167-182. Today, religious entrepreneurs offer compensatory rituals such as *nārāyaṇabali* and *piṭṭi-doṣ-śānti-pūjās* even on the internet. For another type of ‘forgiveness ritual’, see note 52 below.

such as news items and documentaries, as well as a host of academic articles that have appeared since then.⁵⁰ But one crucial thing we learned from our lasting involvement is that people ‘on the ground’ tended to be rather pragmatic about their tradition, thus corroborating the earlier quote from T.N. Madan about natural calamities providing legitimate occasions for ritual absence or ritual deviation. In theory, death rituals are a precarious matter that should be attended to meticulously, but in times of stress and duress (*āpad*), the ritual traditions are elastic enough to provide inbuilt ‘ways out’ of the temporary predicament. What remained were a few basics: individual open-pyre cremation anywhere near flowing water (even if some families used remoter terrains of the Pashupati temple compound); a sip of *Gaṅgā-jal* (even if the ‘sacred’ water came from the heavily polluted local river); a threefold circumambulation of the pyre (although there was much confusion about who should do this, and when); and igniting the corpse by first lighting the combustible material that had been put at the deceased’s mouth (although many lacked the knowledge about who could act as a ‘stand-in’). Ashes and bones were swept into or scattered over the river, even if bodies were only partially burned due to time constraints.

But what remained partly invisible to us, even after probing, is what happened next, especially in the first ten to thirteen or even forty-five days after cremation, normally the time period full of ritual activities for the benefit of the newly deceased.⁵¹ What could they do under the circumstances? They might not have a roof over their head, they might be injured, they might live in constant fear of aftershocks, they might have lacked any form of money, and even if they had had some, priests were hardly available. Other reports indicate that suicide increased⁵² and

⁵⁰ It is worth noticing that both local and international media picked up the sense of urgency about funerary rites in the days directly preceding the earthquake (see NUGTEREN’s related contribution on media in Part III of this volume), whereas hardly any of the later articles covers the topic of rituals after disasters.

⁵¹ A sympathetic scholarly reference to the anticipated first anniversary – a crucial moment for Hindus – was made by A.MICHAELS in a blog on the OUP website, 24 December 2015: “Since four months, many locals are still living in tents or makeshift shelters (...). After another half of the year the one-year death rituals for those who have been killed in the earthquake will have to be performed (...)”. <https://blog.oup.com/2015/12/nepal-earthquake-temples-destroyed> [last accessed 14 September 2020].

⁵² M. GAUTNAM: ‘Significant rise in suicide after earthquake’, in *The Kathmandu Post*, 12 September 2015, kathmandupost.com/miscellaneous/2015/09/12/significant-rise-in-suicide-after-earthquake.html [last accessed 14 September 2020].

‘ghost stories’ flourished. Measures to lighten this general mood of anguish and anxiety were found in free group rituals rather than in individual recourse to traditional compensatory or postponed ritual for individuals. There were candlelight vigils in the streets; various massively attended *homās* (votive fire rituals, both Hindu and Buddhist) were performed without charge by a number of priests; there were devotional gatherings (*pūjās*) where the *Bhagavadgītā* was recited; and neighborhood meetings, organized by *guthīs*, were not merely meant to collectively remember the dead but were deliberately geared to the positive mood of restoration, construction work, and other forms of life-affirming activities.

Our data collection of twenty-five interviews may be limited, and our sampling may lack the voices of scripturally sophisticated priests. But the fact that the ‘death specialists’ who were contacted by us had, at least to our knowledge, not pressed their clients to make the scripturally sanctioned detour of later *prāyaścitta* or *nārāyaṇabali* rituals to compensate for what had been omitted during the first weeks and months and even years after the earthquake is a testimony to ritual elasticity.⁵³ This situational adaptation comprises not merely degradation and decrease but also devotions and dynamics. Costly and incomprehensible ritual complexities required by tradition were partly replaced by civic rituals of commemoration, devotional gatherings, and community restoration. There may even be a tendency to see the present electric crematorium – it had not yet been operative at the time of the earthquake – as one of the welcome solutions to help smooth a transition (from an ancient open-air burning practice to a much ‘cleaner’ electric version) that had already set in before the earthquake.

In reflecting on the answers given to our questions regarding ritual inadequacies and ritual-related coping styles, we thus found that some local survivors ‘on the ground’ had rather resiliently learned to accept the ‘broken world’ related to disaster. After four years they appeared to have restored a certain degree of ‘making do’ condition of normality. Faced with the collapse of their everyday world along with their ritual

⁵³ It is interesting that some people spontaneously performed simple pacification rites (*kṣema-pūjā*, literally ‘worship seeking forgiveness’) when statues of deities had become shelterless, such as the statue of the Fourfold *Viṣṇu* in Patan. This simple ritual was organized by local people who covered the sanctum with a cloth and thus built a temporary shelter.

world order, they had not frantically attempted to repair and compensate for the precarious state of incomplete or even absent ritual. Rather, they had partly accepted the fundamental awkwardness related to death, although in some respondents a sense of fear about lasting inauspiciousness and the 'avenging dead' still lingered. In other words, death ritual, too, particularly after a disaster, is no more than *jagād*, a 'making do'.⁵⁴ In its own way, this may well be an effective coping style.

⁵⁴ *Jagād* is a South Asian colloquial term for making do, improvisation, a simple work-around, a solution that bends the rules. It has even penetrated management and engineering jargon, indicating frugal innovation or thinking outside the box. It may also be used to describe a vehicle that is not roadworthy yet 'must do' as 'good enough'. It is more or less parallel to the laconic everyday Nepali acceptance of a downpour or a traffic jam: *ke garne* (what can one do?) referred to in the title of this chapter.

GERMAN CENTRAL COMMEMORATION
OF THE GERMANWINGS AIR CRASH 2015

BRIGITTE BENZ

After a disaster such as the Germanwings air crash, normally a central commemoration ceremony would be performed in Germany. One can find such disaster rituals in most Western countries. However, the design of these rituals varies considerably. On earlier occasions in the Netherlands, for example, a variation of religious and secular elements within the ceremony could be observed,¹ while in Norway, it was mostly a matter of church service, in which the addresses of politicians or representatives of the royal house were integrated. Such ceremonies were held for the whole community and not just for the relatives of the victims alone. Following a brief introduction about the air crash (1), this chapter looks at the first reactions in Germany (2), then the German way of commemoration shall be explained in this case (3), and finally, a short analysis will be given (4).

1. WHAT HAPPENED

On 24 March 2015, a German plane crashed on its way from Barcelona to Düsseldorf in the French Alps. All 150 people on board, most of them from Spain and Germany, lost their lives. The plane was flying under the auspices of Germanwings, a subsidiary of Lufthansa, and so Lufthansa was included in the investigations and the first relief efforts for the relatives of the passengers and crew members at the site of the accident as well as in the home countries of the victims.²

¹ To the design of disaster rituals in the Netherlands and other countries before 2003: P. POST: *Disaster ritual. Explorations of an emerging ritual repertoire* (Leuven 2003).

² M. HOFFMANN: 'Trauern und Erinnern – Über die Gedenkfeiern anlässlich des Absturzes des Fluges 4U9525. Ein Interview mit Markus Hoffmann, Pilot und Theologe', in: B. BENZ & B. KRANEMANN (eds.): *Deutschland trauert. Trauerfeiern nach Großkatastrophen als gesellschaftliche Herausforderung* (Würzburg 2019) 47-54.

In the first few days, most people thought that it was a ‘normal’ accident, but during the investigation, it became obvious that this was not the case. After finding the flight recorder, the investigators figured out the following: Thirty minutes after takeoff, the aircraft had reached its cruising altitude, and the captain left the cockpit. The co-pilot, then, locked the door from the inside and began a controlled, but very fast descent. Ten minutes later the plane crashed into a mountain slope.³ Investigators in Germany were able to figure out that the co-pilot was not well: “On the day of the accident, the [co-]pilot was still suffering from a psychiatric disorder, which was possibly a psychotic depressive episode and was taking psychotropic medication. This made him unfit to fly.”⁴ The final BEA-Report also clarified: “The collision with the ground was due to the deliberate and planned action of the co-pilot who decided to commit suicide while alone in the cockpit.”⁵

Five days after the crash, a French prosecutor told reporters, “The priority is to recover the bodies (...) by the end of the coming week. After that, we can move on in a second stage to recovering the parts of the plane that are indispensable to getting at the truth.”⁶ After six weeks, all collected bodily remains of the victims were identified by DNA techniques and sent to their families for their respective funerals. The final BEA-report was published in March 2016 – one year after the crash.

2. FIRST REACTIONS OF MOURNING

Out of the 150 people on board, 72 were from Germany. Among them were 16 schoolchildren and two teachers from the Joseph-König-Gymnasium in Haltern am See (Western Germany). In front of this school, at the Düsseldorf Airport, and other airports, many people placed flowers and candles. A book of condolences was displayed in the town hall in

³ BEA (Bureau d’Enquêtes et d’Analyses pour la sécurité de l’aviation civile): Final Report. Accident on 24 March 2015 at Prads-Haute-Bléone (Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, France) to the Airbus A320-211 registered D-AIPX operated by Germanwings, March 2016, p. 12ff. Online: https://www.bea.aero/uploads/tx_elydrapports/BEA2015-0125.en-LR.pdf [last accessed 19 October 2016].

⁴ BEA: Final Report 85.

⁵ BEA: Final Report 96.

⁶ DEUTSCHE WELLE: ‘Work continues to recover bodies from Germanwings crash site’, 29 March 2015. Online: <https://www.dw.com/en/work-continues-to-recover-bodies-from-germanwings-crash-site/a-18348591-0> [last accessed 20 February 2021].

Düsseldorf. Furthermore, there were many other ways for people to express their compassion – for example via social media like Twitter and Facebook, where different airlines and many people changed their profile pictures, e.g., to the Germanwings-logo in black, the color of mourning.

The German Federal Cabinet started its work on 25 March with a minute of silence, and it was ordered that the flags in front of all federal government buildings would be at half-mast from 25 to 27 March. Also in front of the town hall in Düsseldorf and many other institutions, like universities, flags were lowered. On the next day, North Rhine-Westphalia honored the memory of the victims with a minute of silence and the members of the German Bundestag also commemorated the victims; following a short speech by the President of the Bundestag, a moment of silence was held.

Only two more events should be mentioned here before the central commemoration ceremony will be discussed. Three days after the crash, there was a private ecumenical service held in a church in Haltern for the school community and their families only; however, Federal President Joachim Gauck and the Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia Hannelore Kraft were there as well. On 6 April, in 2015 this was the Monday following Easter and a national holiday in Germany, a private ecumenical service for and with relatives of the victims was held near the crash site. A representative of Lufthansa, a Benedictine, and an evangelic pastor who could speak Spanish were involved in the organization and realization of this service.

The central commemoration ceremony for all victims was held on 17 April in Cologne Cathedral. At this time, the guilt of the co-pilot was more or less certain. It will be explained later what kind of problems might be caused by these circumstances.

3. THE COMMEMORATION CEREMONY

Since 2002, after a school shooting in Erfurt, for Germany, the typical form of central commemoration is a combination of an ecumenical service and a governmental ceremony. A live broadcast on public television is also common. In most cases, except Erfurt,⁷ the ceremony was

⁷ The fact that in Erfurt not a church but the largest square was chosen as the location for the service was partly because the organizers wanted to allow as many people as possible to take part. A second possible reason is that Erfurt is a highly secularized city and a public square is therefore easier to accept for the majority of citizens.

held in a church, beginning with the ecumenical service followed by a governmental ceremony.

Considering the separation between state and church in Germany, this combination is surprising, especially when one knows that an ecumenical service was demanded by government agencies. In Germany separation means that the state should have no preference for any religion, not that state and religion could not cooperate. This is regulated by the Basic Law (especially art. 4 and 140) and, in more detail, by the constitutional law on religion. With the decision for a Christian service, the required neutrality of the state towards religions seems to have been violated. In Christian areas, it could be justified, but in strongly secularized areas, such as Erfurt,⁸ or in the case of victims who belong to other religions, as in Munich 2016,⁹ it can be questioned. One example of questioning this practice is a statement by the Party Bündnis 90/Die Grünen: “We are advocating a review of the public culture of commemoration and mourning, which has so far often been delegated to the two large Christian churches. We want to initiate a public debate on how the concerns of other religious and ideological communities and the concerns of people who are free of religious or ideological communities can be taken into account (p. 5).”¹⁰

In the case of Cologne, the whole ceremony took place at the invitation of Prime Minister Hannelore Kraft. The Cologne Cathedral, as the location for the event, was also initially named by the government, even if the churches immediately agreed with this decision.

The design of the ecumenical service was the responsibility of the churches. The service was followed by the State-Act, which included speeches of various state representatives (the Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, the German Federal President, the Spanish Minister

⁸ There, nearly 80% of the inhabitants are non-religious.

⁹ In July 2016, there was a mass shooting in Munich with nine victims; seven of the deceased were Muslims.

¹⁰ “Wir setzen uns dafür ein, die öffentliche Gedenk – und Trauerkultur zu überprüfen, die bisher oft an die beiden großen christlichen Kirchen delegiert wird. Wir wollen eine öffentliche Debatte darüber anstoßen, wie die Belange anderer religiöser und weltanschaulicher Gemeinschaften und die Belange religions- oder weltanschauungsgemeinschaftsfreier Menschen berücksichtigt werden können.” (Translation BB), BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN 40. Ordentliche Bundesdelegiertenkonferenz Münster, 11-13 November 2016: Beschluss Religions- und Weltanschauungsfreiheit in der offenen Gesellschaft, https://cms.gruene.de/uploads/documents/RW-01_Religions-_und_Weltanschauungsfreiheit.pdf [last accessed 27 February 2021].

of the Interior, and the French State-Secretary for Transport and Maritime Affairs). This part was organized by the State Chancellery.¹¹ Formally, there was a clear separation between the service and government part. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, from an external point of view, it appeared to be one unified continuous event.¹²

Inside Cologne Cathedral about 1400 people attended the ceremony. In addition to the relatives of the victims, representatives of German politics and from Spain and France were in attendance. In addition, people were representing the emergency pastoral care, the rescue services, and representatives from different airlines, with the latter not in their uniforms.¹³

On the steps of the chancel, 150 white candles were placed in two blocks, so that all those who wanted to enter the chancel had to pass between them. It is remarkable that there was also a candle for the co-pilot, as the causer, not only for the other 149 people who died in the crash. In a discussion with emergency pastoral workers in Berlin, one of them, who was involved in the Germanwings case, said that some relatives found their way to give meaning to this 150th candle.¹⁴ Some referred to this candle as ‘a candle for the family of the co-pilot’, another as ‘one for an unborn child’ (one victim was pregnant).

Before the ceremony began, Prime Minister Hannelore Kraft, as hostess of the state ceremony, welcomed the guests from Germany, Spain, and France on the steps of the Cologne Cathedral. After their arrival, the ecumenical service started with the mournful ringing of the Cathedral bells.

To the sound of Gabriel Fauré’s *Requiem aeternam*, performed by organ, orchestra, and choir, the liturgists and two emergency chaplains came in. Robert Kleine, dean of the cathedral, welcomed the present

¹¹ The State Chancellery is, in a sense, the ‘ministry’ of the Prime Minister. Their tasks include, e.g., planning and coordinating the work of the government as well as organizing protocol matters and press and public relations work for the state government.

¹² A. SABERSCHINSKY: ‘Gottesdienst im Spannungsfeld von kirchlicher und staatlicher Feier. Ein Blick in die Werkstatt mit liturgietheologischem Erkenntnisinteresse’, in BENZ & KRANEMANN: *Deutschland trauert* 95-110.

¹³ The following description of the whole ceremony is based on the television broadcast.

¹⁴ Emergency pastoral workers are called to accompany victims in the event of sudden deaths, serious injuries of children, accidents, fires, suicide, or violent crimes, also delivering news of the death (together with the police). In the first time after the event, they try to help eyewitnesses, victims, relatives, survivors, and perpetrators.

community, explicitly the representatives of other countries, churches, and faith communities as well as the helpers, and named the occasion of the mourning ceremony. Following the liturgical opening by Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cologne, Rainer Maria Cardinal Woelki, there was an extended Kyrie. Praeses Annette Kurschus of the Lutheran Church of Westphalia¹⁵ spoke five verses from psalm 77, each one followed by a prayer by Cardinal Woelki and a Taizé-Kyrie. Then the Prayer of the Day was spoken by the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Germany, Augustinos. After the first lecture, from the Biblical Book of Revelation 21:1.3-5a, Praeses Kurschus spoke in her sermon about the incomprehensibility of what had happened, but also about the incomprehensibility of the experienced encouragement and the promise heard in the reading, that God would make everything new. She also spoke about cried and uncried tears to be gathered by God. Between this sermon and the second lesson, Colossians 3:1-4, the community sang 'Ich steh vor dir mit leeren Händen Herr' (original: *Ik sta voor U in leegte en gemis* by Huub Oosterhuis; music by Bernard Huijbers). Then Cardinal Woelki preached that even though words are too weak to bring consolation, being together can do it. It is remarkable, because it is so unusual, that he used statements like "if you believe in God at all" or "I have no theoretical answer for you to the terrible misfortune [but] I can point to the answer in which I believe myself", with which he took into consideration the different faith convictions of all people who were participating in the service. Following Gabriel Fauré's *Pie Jesu*, sung by a soloist of the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, who had lost two of her colleagues, small wooden angels were given to different persons: a female relative of one of the victims, the Spanish Minister of the Interior Jorge Fernández Díaz, the German Federal President Joachim Gauck, the French Minister of State for Transport Alain Vidalies, the Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia Hannelore Kraft, and the Germanwings Chief Executive Thomas Winkelmann. The last one was not named as representative of Germanwings, but as "Mr. Winkelmann", to which the angel was given "on behalf of the employees of all airlines". This ritual was introduced by two emergency pastoral workers, who explained the meaning of the angels. They then handed

¹⁵ This church is not led by a bishop but by a regional synod with a presidium of fifteen elected members with the praeses as chairperson. In this respect, a praeses can be compared to a bishop and is named as a Praeses in analogy to a Bishop (e.g., Praeses Kurschus and Cardinal Woelki).

these over, while Cardinal Woelki and Praeses Kurschus addressed the person in question and explained why they received it. The ritual was finished with Mozart's *Adagio in G minor*.

Among those who spoke one of the six subsequent intercessions was a woman who lost a relative, a female Muslim emergency pastoral worker, and a Jew. This was the first time that representatives of other religious communities were visibly involved in such a Christian service. The closing prayer was said by Cardinal Woelki after the *Our Father*. Before the final blessing, given jointly by Praeses and the Cardinal, the community sang 'Bewahre uns, Gott, behüte uns, Gott'. The ecumenical service ended with Johann Sebastian Bach's closing choir of the John Passion, 'Ach Herr, lass dein lieb Engelein', performed by the choir while the liturgists were recessing.

During a short intermission, the liturgists came back into the church and took a seat in the transept. Now followed the part for which the government was responsible.

First, Prime Minister Hannelore Kraft addressed the audience. She expressed that all "are concerned, helpless, and angry" and that there is one question: Why? The only helpful answer will be compassion and solace – which were given by many people after the disaster. She said: "I wish so much, that you feel the great compassion, that it sustains your strength in these difficult times." She thanked all the people who helped – with the examinations of the disaster, retrieval of the victims, and supporting the relatives in their grief. And she ended her speech with the words "I know, our compassion, our support, our solace cannot take away the pain, they don't fill the emptiness, but I want you to know: Our heart is and will be with you."¹⁶ Before the next speech was held by Federal President Gauck, an ensemble from the Haltern gymnasium, consisting of two teachers and one member of the parents' association, played a theme from the film *Schindler's List*. In his address, President Gauck also spoke about grief and pain, compassion and solace. He said that there was a "bond of togetherness", "of shared suffering and mourning" and that this is what will help in the time that grief and pain need to heal. Trust, however, was the central theme in the speech. We cannot live without trust, we need it

¹⁶ Speech by Minister President Kraft at the memorial service in Cologne Cathedral. Available online at <https://www.land.nrw.de/offizielle-trauerfeierlichkeiten-zum-gedenken-die-opfer-von-flug-4u9525> [last accessed 20 February 2021].

everywhere, especially wherever people are “responsible for the lives of many other people. (...) And if trust is abused in this sensitive area, it shocks us to the core.” Then he explained that even the co-pilot’s family and friends have “lost a person they loved”, in a senseless way too. And that “the senselessness of what happened” is most shocking. Like Ms. Kraft, he concluded that people are “capable of doing well”, and that “at times like this, we look at one another”. At the end, he especially expressed his profound gratitude to all helpers and authorities in France. In remembering the biblical story about the ‘Three Wise Man from the East’¹⁷, he finished with the words “My hope is that we will all find a star to guide us safely and brightly through the darkness of our lives, a star that will accompany us and tell us that we are not alone.”¹⁸ After the Bach chorale ‘Gott ist und bleibt getreu’, performed by a brass ensemble, the representatives from Spain and France held their addresses. Jorge Fernández Díaz, the Spanish Minister of the Interior, said that the people in Cologne Cathedral have come together with the relatives of the victims to show them solidarity and compassion and, in the name of the Spanish royal family and the Spanish Government, he would like to offer their deepest condolences to them.

The French State-Secretary for Transport, Alain Vidalies, spoke of the European solidarity that was experienced during these hard times. He also expressed his compassion with the relatives in the name of the French government and the French people.

Finally, Gabriel Fauré’s *In paradisum* was performed by organ, orchestra, and choir.

4. SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Regardless of the kind of disaster – whether it’s a school shooting, an air crash, or a natural disaster like a Tsunami – people nowadays are faster informed than in earlier times. Probably because of the immediate

¹⁷ He said: “From time immemorial, the Three Wise Men from the East have been worshipped here in Cologne Cathedral. The Bible writes about them. No one knows their nationality or the religion of their home countries. All we are told is that they followed a star that led them through the dark to a great destination.”

¹⁸ Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck at the memorial service for the victims of the aeroplane crash in the French Alps on 17 April 2015 in Cologne Cathedral. Available online at <https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/JoachimGauck/Reden/2015/150417-Flugzeugabsturz-Trauerfeier-Koeln.html> [last accessed 20 February 2021].

perception of details and pictures, the great dismay in wide parts of the society is resulting. It belongs to traumatic experiences, which are to be handled for a return to everyday life. And so, the memorial services should express not only grief and pain but also compassion and hope, at least in an effort to cope with the disaster.

Based on the case presented here, some considerations can be made regarding the German way of commemoration since the school shooting in Erfurt in 2002. Who should invite people to such a ceremony and where could it take place? What is or could be the purpose of the ceremony? Might an ecumenical service, as part of the central commemoration ceremony, be problematic in the future? Should and could representatives from other religious communities be involved in a Christian service? Which language would be appropriate – in lectures, prayers, sermons, and addresses? Who are the protagonists within the service and the government part – the same or completely different people? Is it imaginable that the whole ceremony would start with the government part with the ecumenical service to follow? So far, there hasn't been an extensive discussion about these ceremonies in Germany and, at the moment, there is no empirical material about the reactions in Germany. The questions posed here arose within a research project at the University of Erfurt,¹⁹ which for the first time in Germany investigated such disaster rituals. Two conferences took place within this project. The first one discussed the theological and sociological aspects of disaster rituals;²⁰ within the second, the focus was on their societal challenge.²¹ In December 2020 the German Bishops' Conference (DBK) published a paper about memorial services after disasters. With this, it wants to advise on future ceremonies.²²

In most cases that we are familiar with, the churches were asked or commissioned to participate in the memorial ceremony with an ecumenical service. The fact that it is explicitly the state that decides whether the

¹⁹ 'Trauer- und Gedenkfeiern nach Großkatastrophen in säkularer Gesellschaft unter kirchlicher Beteiligung'. More information is available at <https://www.uni-erfurt.de/en/research/researching/research-projects/trauer-und-gedenkfeiern-nach-grosskatastrophen> [last accessed 19 February 2021].

²⁰ Conference documentation in B. KRANEMANN & B. BENZ (eds.): *Trauerfeiern nach Großkatastrophen. Theologische und sozialwissenschaftliche Zugänge* (Neukirchen-Vluyn/Würzburg 2016).

²¹ Conference documentation in BENZ & KRANEMANN: *Deutschland trauert*.

²² Deutsche Bischofskonferenz – DBK (ed.): 'Trauerfeiern und Gottesdienste nach Katastrophen', *Arbeitshilfen* Nr. 317, Kevelaer 2020.

ceremony should take place in a particular church and who then should be invited to the ceremony (and welcome the guests like Prime Minister Hannelore Kraft at Cologne) could be seen as problematic from the perspective of the churches. Are the churches ‘masters in their own house’ or ‘executive organs of the state’? Even if some churches in Germany, due to their national importance, are suitable places for central commemoration services, such as Cologne Cathedral or Berlin Cathedral, this question should be considered. Here, more communication in advance, and then a common invitation to the ceremony, might be better.²³

In the last twenty years, most memorial services in Germany took place in a church.²⁴ Firstly, a church offers a protected space, but secondly, the number of participants is limited. In Cologne Cathedral, where about 1400 people, most of them (about 1100) invited representatives of various groups who had given help and support, politicians from several countries, and relatives of the victims. Furthermore, a church is prepared for liturgy. However, a church, and also the service itself, can raise positive expectations *and* rejection. One expectation might be that the belief in the resurrection will be clearly expressed in the service. But the same expression of belief might create a rejection: for example, on account of the question “Where was God – *if* he exists – in the disaster?” and of the idea that the belief in the resurrection is just an empty promise. For this reason, it is especially important which language will be used. In their paper, the DBK explained that “texts, signs and processes should be designed so openly that even without religious socialization or religious confession they can be received”.²⁵ Concerning the choice of a place, the council asks, “Does it [the place] exclude people or make them feel insecure? Can the choice of location give the impression of affronting a group of mourners?”²⁶

The disaster aroused consternation in wider parts of society, and so, a public square, like the Domplatz in Erfurt, could be more reasonable for collective mourning. More people might take part than in a church. With this option there are again advantages and disadvantages. This means, firstly, that there is no or only a less protected site for the persons

²³ See also SABERSCHINSKY: ‘Gottesdienst im Spannungsfeld’ 96-99.

²⁴ The only exception was the memorial service in Erfurt after a school shooting in 2002.

²⁵ DBK: ‘Trauerfeiern’ 13.

²⁶ DBK: ‘Trauerfeiern’ 20.

concerned. In a church or other buildings, it is easier to establish and enforce rules to protect their privacy. On the other hand, it could be more obvious to these that they are not alone. The feeling can be given that there are more than the invited people (e.g., political representatives) behind them and that want to offer encouragement. Besides, public places must be equipped for the liturgy, and the approach to the liturgy might be complicated by the fact that many people associate the public place in everyday life with other events. Following these thoughts, one can say that there are good reasons for a church as well as a public place. Thus, every case deserves special consideration.

In planning and celebrating the service, one should be aware that there will not be a community of Christians alone, but rather a group of members of different religions and non-religious persons. Especially the latter is a large group in East Germany, and increasingly everywhere in Germany. So, the common language used in the church is not generally intelligible. Statements with which Christian believes (for example the resurrection) are inappropriate, for they are simply assumed to be professed by all. Phrases such as “We believe, that the victims are now with God” monopolizes the “we”, even if not everyone present shares the faith. How to speak then? Cardinal Woelki offers a good example. He used the following words in Cologne: “I have no theoretical answer for you on the awful disaster, but I can reveal at the answer in which I believe”. And with these words, he pointed at the cross.

Texts like prayers, lessons, and intercessions belong to the issue of the language in the service. These could, and maybe should, have a relation to the disaster. Especially with the intercessions, it is possible to show understanding for the victims, the relatives, all helpers, and the whole society. All these different groups can be prayed for, and representatives of the groups could read an intercession. In this way, all religious groups might be involved in the service – non-Christians as well. But how non-religious persons could be involved in the service – not only as recipients but as acting persons – is an open question. Also, the DBK-paper observed non-religious people not as acting persons but as people whose difficulties in understanding religious places and behaviors are to be considered. The full integration of non-religious people will be a challenge and a purpose for future ceremonies.

However, involving non-Christians as protagonists in a Christian service is not accepted by everyone. It is therefore necessary to discuss how different faith communities in Germany could be involved in one

ceremony. In Cologne, a Muslim and a Jew also spoke an intercession and the whole community answered with the hymn ‘Du sei bei uns in unsrer Mitte, höre du uns, Gott’. Could using the word *God*, and not *Christ* or *Jesus*, be acceptable for both to speak their intercession? Regarding the increasingly inhomogeneous religious situation in Germany, such integration seems appropriate or at least advisable. Sometimes, however, one finds an explicit rejection of such practices. For example, Winfried Haunerland, a German catholic liturgist, writes in his Erfurt conference paper that “in Christian services, unbaptized guests cannot perform explicit religious acts or assume acts of worship. They may not be allowed to say their own prayers or Christian prayers or read from the Bible or their holy scriptures”.²⁷ Today, we cannot say whether there will be a religious part within a central commemoration ceremony in Germany in the future and what this will look like. But intensive considerations seem advisable.

The separation between state and church in Germany makes it seem surprising that an ecumenical service is part of the ceremony; on the other hand, it is probably the reason for the strict distinction between the religious service and the commemoration of the state.²⁸ Although the representatives of the government are present in the service and return those of the church in the governmental part, they are only acting within their ‘area of responsibility’ – the politicians in the act of state and Christian authorities, like bishops, in the ecumenical service. It is important and will be expected that representatives like the Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia and the German Federal President hold an address, but not in a religious ceremony. A bishop should also not hold a sermon in an act of state. In Cologne, the whole ceremony, as with most other ceremonies, started with the ecumenical service and afterwards, when the liturgists have recessed, there was a moment of silence, followed by the governmental part. This silence was the only obvious signal if the final blessing of the service is not taken into account that a new and independent part is beginning. The speakers in this part also used the lectern as a reading desk and there was no state coat of arms or the like. However, there are possibilities to make the separation more

²⁷ W. HAUNERLAND: ‘Multireligiöse Feiern als Herausforderung für die Kirchen’, in BENZ & KRANEMANN: *Deutschland trauert* 125-140, p. 138. In this book one can find different views on this issue.

²⁸ See above: separation in Germany means that the state should have no preference for any religion, not that state and religion could not cooperate.

obvious. A simple way would be that the lectern in the service and the reading desk in the state act are not identical. Additionally, there might be a state coat of arms in front of the reading desk. Also using different instrumentation (e.g., no organ) in the act of state could be a gesture. Erfurt was the only exception, looking at the succession of ecumenical service and act of state. Here the ceremony began with the act of state, which was musically accompanied by an orchestra. The service had choir and organ music and a saxophone solo. The separation in act of state and ecumenical service was more obvious. After the governmental part was a moment of silence, after which the bells of the cathedral chimed for some minutes. Next, while the organ was playing, all acting persons of the service walked up the Cathedral steps. Furthermore, there were different places for the readings in the act of state and ecumenical service. One point, which one could speak for the Erfurt succession, is that with the final blessing and removing of the acting persons the end of the whole ceremony could be clearer to the attendees. Without a schedule or something similar, there could be uncertainty in an act of state: when is the last speech, the last piece of music over?

The central commemoration ceremony in Cologne Cathedral was a good example of the German way of mourning after a disaster. Some points, like one Muslim speaking an intercession, were perceived very positively by the public, but on the other hand also especially questioned. The 150th candle as a candle for the co-pilot was also not generally acceptable, if probably indispensable from a Christian point of view. For Germany, these ‘two in one’ is, so far as we know from reactions in newspapers,²⁹ accepted, but it is impossible to say which kind of modification or transformation we will see in the next years. What one can say is that there are some questions in connection with the whole ceremony that should be researched and reflected upon in the future.

²⁹ See, e.g., M. DROBINSKI: ‘Das Unfassbare bekommt eine Fassung’, in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 April 2015. He said “a church service with candles, prayers and hymns does not restore an intact world after the Germanwings disaster. (...) But it does give a ritual form for the mourning – and that is precisely why its value.”

WHEN PARADISE BECAME HELL:
THE 2002 BALI BOMBINGS AND THEIR POST-DISASTER
RITUAL PRACTICES AND REPERTOIRES

HERMAN L. BECK

1. INTRODUCTION

On the eve of the commemoration ceremony of the Bali bombings on Saturday, 12 October 2019, I visited the place where, seventeen years before, two explosions devastated Paddy's Bar and the Sari Club in Kuta, Bali, Indonesia, killing 202 people and wounding even more.¹ The fatal victims had twenty-three different nationalities, but, with eighty-eight fatalities, Australia was the hardest hit country. For the number of casualties, the enormous havoc, the unexpectedness of the event, its impact and the resulting social and economic disruption, it is justified to qualify this occurrence as a disaster.² It was a disaster caused by human beings because it soon turned out that the explosions were caused by bombs detonated by men belonging to the Indonesian terror group Jemaah Islamiyah, sympathizing with the international terror organization al-Qaeda. The explosions came to be known as the 2002 Bali bombings, not to be confused with the Bali bombings of 1 October 2005.

In remembrance of the attack and its victims, a permanent memorial called *Monumen Tragedi Kemanusiaan* (Monument of the Tragedy of Humanity) was erected on the bombing site and inaugurated on 12 October 2004 after the site had been cleansed in a Hindu Balinese purification ritual. The monument was built on an elevated site on a spot next to the place where Paddy's Bar had once stood. It consists of several parts, the two most important being the *kayon* (tree of life) with

¹ A third bomb was detonated near the American consulate in Denpasar, the capital of Bali, but caused only some minor material damage. It will play no role in this contribution.

² See P. POST, R.L. GRIMES, A. NUGTEREN, P. PETERSSON & H. ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual. Explorations of an emerging ritual repertoire* (Leuven 2003) 24-27.

a black marble plaque bearing the names of the 202 victims and the fountain. On each side of the *kayon* there are eleven flagpoles representing the twenty-three nationalities of the victims.³ When I arrived at the monument, the flags of the countries involved had already been hoisted to the mastheads. The elevated site is walled with a low wall of marble-clad brick and iron railings. People can gain access to the monument through two small entrance gates. The monument has become the center of an annual memorial service ever since and one of Kuta's main tourist attractions at the same time.⁴ In the words of Jeff Lewis et al., it "has become a tourism memento site for the majority of visitors".⁵

When I arrived at the monument along Jalan Legian (Legian street), it was about 11 p.m. on Friday, 11 October 2019. Some seventy people were present at the monument that was fancily illuminated with flashing varicolored lights. Some of the attendees seemed to have come to see the monument, to study the black marble plaque with the names of the 202 victims and to pay homage to them. Most visitors, however, seemed to be more interested in listening to the very loud live music by a rock band playing in Vi Ai Pi, a bar immediately next to the monument square and built after the bombings. The monument with its fountain offered them an excellent place to hang around and listen to the music free of charge. Meanwhile, heavy traffic threaded its way through the narrow streets on three sides of the monument, and a muddling crowd of tourists and locals were searching for fun or profit. There were no signs at all of the solemn ceremony that would take place the following day.

The next morning, I returned to the place at 8 a.m. There were only a dozen visitors at the monument, amongst them an elderly Australian couple whispering to each other "Very sad, very sad" and three Muslim women dressed in black clothes covering their heads and bodies and taking pictures. Two hours later, some twenty people were at the monument, most of them Australian tourists. Meanwhile, Balinese men and

³ I could not find an explanation for the fact that there are only twenty-two flagpoles for the twenty-three nationalities. Perhaps it is for symmetry or for the fact that the identity of the twenty-third nationality (namely, Irish) was discovered only after the monument had been designed and finished. However, there could also be a political motive behind it, as will be discussed hereafter.

⁴ See, e.g., '25 Best Things to Do in Kuta (Bali)', <https://www.thecrazytourist.com/25-best-things-kuta-bali/> [last accessed 30 October 2019].

⁵ J. LEWIS, B. LEWIS & I NYOMAN DARMA PUTRA: 'The Bali bombings monument. Ceremonial cosmopolis', in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72/1 (2013) 21-43, p. 34.



Figure 13.1: Preparations for the commemoration ceremony (photograph: Herman Beck).

women in traditional Hindu Balinese dress had started preparations for the commemoration ceremony later that day. A television crew had arrived and put up its equipment for shooting and broadcasting the ceremony. Throughout the day, flowers and memorabilia were put next to the monument. Around 4:15 p.m., all traffic around the monument was blocked except for pedestrians. Some 350 primary and secondary school girls and boys dressed in blue shirts and brown skirts or shorts sat down on the street right before the monument. To the left of the monument, a covered platform had been erected to lodge the dignitaries and invited guests, amongst whom were survivors of the bombings and victims' relatives. To its right, some sixty Balinese men and women dressed in traditional Hindu Balinese clothes were sitting on the street. Tourists interested in what was about to happen were standing along the streets or sitting on the terraces of Vi Ai Pi and Station, two bars with excellent views of the monument.

The ceremony started at about 5 p.m. A Mistress of Ceremonies announced the program, which, as it turned out, would take up well over three hours. Perhaps the most salient items on the program were the inspection of the memorabilia and flowers at the monument by the four

attendant bereaved; the laying of seventeen elegantly arranged bouquets by the dignitaries – amongst them the representative of the governor of Bali, the *bupati* or regent of Badung,⁶ the Consuls-General of Australia, Great Britain, Japan, and the Netherlands – accompanied by one of the seventeen Balinese women in traditional Hindu Balinese dress who were responsible for the flowers; the lighting of seventeen candles; the burning of incense and the distribution of candles to the audience; the purification ritual by Hindu priests; and the bilingual speech by the highest attending Hindu priest, who used English and Indonesian alternately.



Figure 13.2: The Hindu priest is about to speech
(photograph: Herman Beck).

In his address, the Hindu priest recalled the tragedy and its 202 victims. He condemned terror and terrorism, but he also paid attention to its geo-political context. It soon became clear, however, that he wanted to focus on the theme of Bali as the island of love, compassion and celebration of life. Surprisingly, Elizabeth Gilbert's bestseller *Eat, pray, love. One woman's search for everything across Italy, India and Indonesia*

⁶ Kuta and its district are located within the regency of Badung.

(2006) played an important role in his speech to demonstrate that Bali remained the island of love, compassion, and celebration of life. By stressing this, the Hindu priest willy-nilly made a connection with the long-cherished image of Bali as one of the last paradises on earth, notwithstanding the disastrous attack of 12 October 2002.⁷

During the speech of the Hindu priest, the attention of the audience and especially that of the school children was suddenly drawn to an attraction called 5 GX Bali Reverse Bungee, which unexpectedly became visible above the roof of the Engine Room Super Club, a kind of entertainment bar some fifty meters removed from the memorial site. It caused great hilarity, and it took the Hindu priest some moments to win back the attendants' attention. Apart from that, it was striking that, with the exception of the area where the ceremony took place, all traffic – especially the ubiquitous motorcycles – and business activities continued as if nothing extra-ordinary was happening.

I was puzzled by the contrast between the relatively short time spent by the Hindu priest on commemorating the victims in his speech and his long-winded narrative about Bali as the island of love, compassion and celebration of life, and the apparent lack of attention or interest in the ceremony shown by the majority of the Kuta locals. Could I find an explanation for this contrast – perhaps even tension – and lack of interest by studying the origin and history of this commemoration ceremony?

2. RITUAL PRACTICES AND REPERTOIRES AFTER THE BALI BOMBINGS OF 12 OCTOBER 2002

2.1. Some preliminary methodological remarks

The Bali bombings of 12 October 2002 disrupted public life in Kuta completely for some time. While rescue workers and emergency services were still busy helping and saving as many people as possible in chaotic circumstances, however, the first signs of ritual practices and repertoires already became visible near the place of the disaster. During the following days, weeks, months, and years, a plethora of acts and activities took

⁷ For the image of Bali as 'paradise', see, e.g., A. VICKERS: *Bali. A paradise created* (Berkeley 1989) 77-130, especially p. 98; M. PICARD: *Bali, cultural tourism and touristic culture* (Singapore 1996) 27; J. COUTEAU: 'After the Kuta bombing. In search of the Balinese soul', in *Antropologi Indonesia* 70 (2003) 41-59, p. 44.

place that, in one way or another, could be considered as ritual/ritualization practices and repertoires connected with the Bali bombing disaster. The fact that twenty-three nationalities and a number of different cultures, religions, and philosophies of life were involved, complicated this case study even further. In order to thrash out the problems of this case study and to answer my question, I used Catherine Bell's characterization of ritualization, Paul Post's definition of ritual, and three 'heuristic perspectives' to structure the available data of this case study of post-disaster ritual practices and repertoires. Ritualization in this contribution is what Bell characterized as more or less 'ritual-like activities'.⁸ As far as the definition of ritual is concerned and for the sake of the coherency of this handbook, I used the definition given by Paul Post in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*:

Ritual is a more or less repeatable sequence of action units which take on a symbolic dimension through formalization, stylization, and their situation in place and time. On the one hand, individuals and groups express their ideas and ideals, their mentalities and identities through these rituals. On the other hand the ritual actions shape, foster, and transform these ideas, mentalities, and identities.⁹

My first 'heuristic perspective' was a combination of Anne Eyre's finding that the "main forms of post-disaster ritual occur in a chronological sequence; spontaneous, unplanned expression in the first hours and days are followed by funerals, official memorial services and anniversary events"¹⁰ with the conclusion of Post and his co-authors, based on many case studies of disaster rituals in the Netherlands, that a "settled, coherent and orderly repertoire" consists of "four fixed pillars (...) the silent procession, the collective service of remembrance, a monument, and annual commemoration".¹¹ My second 'heuristic perspective' was founded on the idea that a distinction should be made between ritual practices and repertoires as activities started, organized,

⁸ C. BELL: *Ritual. Perspectives and dimensions* (New York/Oxford 1997) 138-169.

⁹ P. POST: 'Ritual Studies', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York/Oxford 2015); also in P. POST & M. HOONDEERT: 'Introduction', in P. POST & M. HOONDEERT (eds.): *Absent ritual. Exploring the ambivalence and dynamics of ritual* (Durham, NC 2019) 3-29, p. 8-9.

¹⁰ A. EYRE: 'In remembrance. Post disaster rituals and symbols', in *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 14/3 (Spring 1999) 23-29, p. 23.

¹¹ POST [et al.]: *Disaster ritual* 246.

and performed by individual, collective, organizational, or governmental initiative(s).¹² My third ‘heuristic perspective’ was the importance of locality as noted on the ‘religious research agenda’ ever since Kim Knott’s book *The Location of Religion*.¹³ Armed with these heuristic perspectives, I undertook the description and analysis of the available data. It soon turned out that the application of some of these heuristic perspectives was not fully feasible because their design rested on ‘Western’ case studies. However, these heuristic perspectives were still of use to structure this research.

2.2. Sources of written information

From the very beginning, the press and other media entered at length into the Bali bombings and its consequences. The Australian media in particular had more or less appropriated the reporting of the Bali bombings because Australia, with its eighty-eight casualties, was the country that was the hardest hit and because a rather large number of sportsmen were amongst the victims. The Kingsley Amateur Football Club from Perth, for example, lost seven of its players, and the Coogee Dolphins rugby league team from Coogee, a suburb of Randwick, close to Sydney, lost six of its members.¹⁴ Australian media, therefore, reported extensively on the attack that came to be seen as an “Australian disaster” and “as a threat to the Australian way of life”.¹⁵

The published diaries written by survivors or the bereaved and the personal reports by journalists are the second and very special source of information. While the media mostly reported on what was happening in the public domain on a community level, the diaries and personal reports give rare glimpses into the aftermath of the attack on an individual

¹² Here I was inspired by L. DANBOLT & H. STIFOSS-HANSEN: ‘Ritual and recovery. Traditions in disaster ritualizing’, in *Dialog. A journal of theology* 56/4 (2017) 352-360, p. 352 and 358. They distinguish between community or social and individuals or personal.

¹³ K. KNOTT: *The location of religion. A spatial analysis* (London/Oakville 2005).

¹⁴ G. BROOKES, J.A. POOLEY & J. ERNEST: *Terrorism, trauma and psychology. A multilevel victim perspective of the Bali bombings* (London/New York 2015) 184; B. WEST: *Re-enchanting nationalisms. Rituals and remembrances in a postmodern age* (New York 2015) 99.

¹⁵ B. WEST: ‘Collective memory and crisis. The 2002 Bali bombing and the counter-narrative of cosmopolitan nationalism’, in *Journal of Sociology* 44/4 (2008) 337-353, p. 342; WEST: *Re-enchanting nationalisms* 85.

level. Both media and diaries provided photographic materials, sometimes containing information that was to be found nowhere else.

Non-specialist and scholarly publications on the Bali bombings are a third source of information. A non-specialist book was written by the Balinese author I Made Sujaya, who gives a reasonably comprehensive overview of some aspects of the aftermath of the 2002 Bali bombings from a Kuta perspective.¹⁶ Most ‘Western’ scholarly works on the Bali bombings focus on their terrorist aspects, their consequences for tourism and the tourist industry, or the therapeutic possibilities of rituals to cope with the traumas caused by this disaster.¹⁷ One of the finest and most in-depth studies dealing with the ritual aspects of the Bali bombings is the 2011 article by Huub de Jonge, who visited the site of the bombings in May 2003 and March 2009.¹⁸

2.3. A chronological, descriptive, and interpretative narrative of the ritual/ritualizing practices and repertoires after the 2002 Bali bombings

The area where the bombs were detonated was cordoned off by the police with yellow tape after the first day and was officially not accessible to the public.¹⁹ An exception was made for President Megawati Sukarnoputri, who visited the site on the very first day after the bombings.²⁰ It is questionable whether or not such a visit of the country’s leader should be considered a ritual or a ritual activity. However, the Hindu

¹⁶ I MADE SUJAYA: *Sepotong nurani Kuta. Catatan seputar sikap warga Kuta dalam tragedi 12 Oktober 2002* (Kuta 2004).

¹⁷ To mention only four examples: BROOKES, POOLEY & ERNEST: *Terrorism, trauma and psychology*; M. HITCHCOCK & I NYOMAN DARMA PUTRA: *Tourism, development and terrorism in Bali* (Ashgate 2007); A. KUHNERT: *Remembering international terrorist attacks. A case study of the Bali bombings* (Norderstedt 2014); B. WEST: ‘Dialogical history in a time of crisis. Tourist logics and the 2002 Bali bombings’, in WEST: *Re-enchanting nationalisms* 81-112.

¹⁸ H. DE JONGE: ‘Purification and remembrance. Eastern and Western ways of dealing with the Bali bombings’, in P.J. MARGRY & C. SÁNCHEZ-CARRETERO (eds.): *Grassroots memorials. The politics of memorializing traumatic death* (= Remapping Cultural History 12) (New York/Oxford 2011) 262-281.

¹⁹ A. ATKINSON: *Three weeks in Bali. A personal account of the Bali bombing* (Sydney 2002) 57.

²⁰ DE JONGE: ‘Purification and remembrance’ 265.

Balinese as a religious community noticeably started to perform rituals almost immediately.

2.3.1. *The first Hindu Balinese purification rituals*

The day after the attack, on 13 October 2002, the Hindu Balinese already performed their first rituals (Indonesian: *upacara*) called *Guru Piduka* and *Bendu Piduka* on the site of the explosions.²¹ These should not be considered ‘spontaneous’ rituals, but they belong to a kind of fixed ritual repertoire script that almost automatically comes into force after a disaster has taken place.²² This script is founded on the Hindu Balinese belief that there is the tangible, visible world, the world of the human beings (Balinese: *sekala*), and the intangible, invisible world, the world of the gods, ghosts, demons, and souls of the deceased (Balinese: *niskala*).²³ These two worlds should be in a harmonious balance by maintaining an equilibrium between humans and god(s), humans and nature, and humans amongst themselves (Balinese: *Tri Hita Karana*). The Hindu Balinese consider it their responsibility to maintain the cosmic balance between *sekala* and *niskala* by performing rituals and making offerings and sacrifices.²⁴

For the Hindu Balinese, now, the bombings were proof that an imbalance had come into being because they had not fulfilled their moral and ritual duties in the right way. They seemed to have fooled themselves with the material profit of tourism with its hedonistic search for pleasure and indulgence in excesses. Consequently, the Hindu Balinese had neglected their ritual duties, had forgotten their spirituality, had given up their morality, and had thus disrupted the cosmic balance.²⁵ The bombings were their punishment, and they had begun to restore the

²¹ SUJAYA: *Seopotong nurani Kuta* 109.

²² See P.J. MARGRY & C. SÁNCHEZ-CARRETERO: ‘Rethinking memorialization. The concept of grassroots memorials’, in P.J. MARGRY & C. SÁNCHEZ-CARRETERO (eds.): *Grassroots memorials* 1-48.

²³ See, e.g., F.B. EISEMAN: *Bali. Sekala & Niskala* 1 (Berkeley/Singapore 1989).

²⁴ See F. BRINKGRAVE: *Offerings. The ritual art of Bali* (photographed by David Stuart-Fox) (Singapore 1992) 99.

²⁵ See L. HOWE: *The changing world of Bali. Religion, society and tourism* (London/New York 2005) 4; HITCHCOCK & DARMA PUTRA: *Tourism* 19; M. PICARD: ‘From ‘Kebalian’ to ‘Ajeg Bali’. Tourism and Balinese identity’, in M. HITCHCOCK, V.T. KING & M. PARNWELL (eds.): *Tourism in Southeast Asia. Challenges and new directions* (Copenhagen 2008) 99-133, p. 100.

cosmic balance by performing the purification rituals of *Guru Piduka* and *Bendu Piduka*. These two rituals are in fact only the first stage of a complex and complicated ritual repertoire that is needed to restore the balance. By way of purification rituals, the invisible world had to be reconciled with the visible world, which was stained with the victims' blood.

The *Guru Piduka* and *Bendu Piduka* rituals are only the beginning of a whole repertoire of purification rituals and can be seen as the announcement of the bigger and more important rituals still to come: the *Pemelebbeh Prayascitta Durmangala* ritual and the *Pemarisudha Karipubhaya* ritual. It was an established custom that the *Pemelebbeh Prayascitta Durmangala* ritual should take place within eight days after a disastrous event had taken place. The performance of the *Pemarisudha Karipubhaya* ritual, the final and most important purification ritual for disasters like these bomb attacks, was set on 15 November 2002 after consultations with the Governor of Bali, the most authoritative religious Hindu Balinese specialists and the best experts on the local Balinese customs and traditions (Indonesian: *adat*).²⁶ They also decided that all Hindu Balinese should participate in this ritual and that its actual performance would take place on the site of the explosions in Kuta and on the Kuta – Legian beach.²⁷

2.3.2. *Erecting a monument mentioned for the first time*

On Sunday, 13 October 2002, Luh Ketut Suryani, a famous Balinese psychiatrist and professor at the Udayana University in Denpasar, remarked “that the site be made a spot for a monument. That way there would always be a reminder of the tragic event.” As a psychiatrist, she was concerned about the fact that the Balinese habit of tending “to forget unpleasant events” would harm their spiritual and physical well-being. Moreover, she also called upon her fellow Hindu Balinese to perform their rituals and prayers in order to restore the balance of the visible and invisible worlds.²⁸

²⁶ SUJAYA: *Sepotong nurani Kuta* 109.

²⁷ See A.J. ROBINSON & J. MEATON: ‘Bali beyond the bomb. Disparate discourses and implications for sustainability’, in *Sustainable Development* 13 (2005) 69-78, p. 72.

²⁸ D. ANGGRANI: *Who did this to our Bali?* (Briar Hill, Victoria 2003) 79-85. See also HOWE: *The changing world of Bali* 4.

2.3.3. *Spontaneous rituals, grassroots memorials, and governmental initiatives*

During the days following the bombings, all kinds of so-called ‘spontaneous’ rituals and ‘grassroots memorials’ could be seen both in Kuta and in several other places on Bali, and abroad, especially in Australia. A full registration of all the rituals and ritualization that actually took place has not yet been established, but a rough impression of the richness and variety of the performed rituals and ritualization will be given here.

An example of a spontaneous ritual or ritualization is the gathering of people on the Petitenget beach of Kuta on Monday evening, 14 October 2002. They sat on the sand, lit candles, and prayed together.²⁹ Nowadays, lighting candles seems to be one of the most common forms of ritualization and ‘spontaneous ritual’ after a disaster. After the Bali bombings, you came across this activity on several occasions, in several places, and at different times, not only at Kuta’s beach side, but also near the place of the disaster, as a photo by Dean Lewins testifies: “Grieving relatives of Bali bombing victims light candles at a memorial service in Bali, October 17, 2002.”³⁰

Another example of a spontaneous ritual that took place around 9:40 a.m. on Tuesday, 15 October 2002 was recorded by Alan Atkinson, an Australian journalist who happened to be on holiday in Bali:

Suddenly everyone goes quiet. A group of young women dressed in black come towards the barrier. (...) They’re staff from a surf shop just across the road. One of their colleagues was killed. They are carrying lilies. They stand in a line and then one woman moves to the front. With her eyes closed she begins to sing “Ave Maria.” (...) Then the girls, one by one, lay their lilies down on the street and walk slowly back to their shop.³¹

Apparently, more such small choirs performed spontaneously on this third day after the explosion of the bombs, as testified by a picture in Totty Ellwood’s diary. She lost her brother Jonathan in the disaster and came to Bali to collect his body to bring him back to his homeland England for his funeral and burial in the soil of the graveyard of the

²⁹ See the picture of this event by Oka Budhi available at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/bali-remembered/2012-10-11/bali-bombing-remembered-10-years-on/4304834> [last accessed 30 October 2019].

³⁰ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/bali-remembered/2012-10-11/bali-bombing-remembered-10-years-on/4304834> [last accessed 30 October 2019].

³¹ ATKINSON: *Three weeks in Bali* 74-75.

St. John the Baptist Church in Aldbury, the little village where Jonathan and his siblings grew up. Waiting for the identification and release of her brother's body, she took the picture and commented: "Three days after the bomb, a Balinese choir sings outside the wreckage of the Sari Club and Paddy's Bar."³² Perhaps these two activities should be seen as a kind of silent procession, but choir singing does not fit into the 'Western' category of a silent procession. It would appear to be more justified, therefore, to include this in the category of 'spontaneous ritual'. Unfortunately, I could not collect more information about the choir singing "Ave Maria": were the members Roman Catholics or was the victim a Roman Catholic?

Spontaneous rituals were performed not only by individuals and small collectives in Kuta, on Bali, or abroad, but also on the initiative of governments both on Bali and abroad. A picture by Mark Baker shows "The Australian and News [!] South Wales flags fly at halfmast atop Sydney Harbour Bridge in a mark of respect for those killed in a Bali bomb blast, October 15, 2002."³³ On the same day, the Australian government had organized a memorial service near the Australian Consulate in Denpasar that was attended by the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs. From all over Bali, individuals and organizations had sent large wreaths to show their sympathy with the victims in general and the Australians in particular.³⁴ That day, the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs together with his colleague the Australian Minister for Justice also participated in the laying of wreaths in Kuta together with the leaders of the five officially recognized religions of Indonesia.³⁵ Two days later, on 17 October, another memorial service was organized by the Australian consulate in Denpasar and attended by the Australian Prime Minister, the deputy Prime Minister, the opposition leader, relatives of the victims, and representatives of several religions.³⁶

Despite the fact that the area where the bombs had exploded, was closed off with yellow tape in the first days after the bombings, individuals

³² T. ELLWOOD: *The crystal spirit. My Bali Diary* (Great Glemham 2003), picture in between p. 40 and p. 41.

³³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/bali-remembered/2012-10-11/bali-bombing-remembered-10-years-on/4304834> [accessed 30 October 2019].

³⁴ ATKINSON: *Three weeks in Bali* 72-79.

³⁵ DE JONGE: 'Purification and remembrance' 266.

³⁶ ATKINSON: *Three weeks in Bali* 89; DE JONGE: 'Purification and remembrance' 266.

and small groups had almost immediately begun to place flowers, memorabilia, or other signs of sympathy along both sides of Jalan Legian, the road passing the place of the disaster. Totty Ellwood wrote in her diary on 18 October 2002:

As we approach we see hundreds upon hundreds of floral tributes that have been placed along both sides of the road. Large white sheets are hanging stretched out between tall posts, all covered with writing: commiserations, condolences and heartfelt comments.³⁷

A picture taken by Dean Lewins on the same day witnessed: “Flowers and shoes act as a makeshift memorial to the Bali bombing victims at the site of the bombing at Kuta, October 18, 2002.”³⁸

2.3.4. *The next cycle of Hindu Balinese purification rituals*

On Friday, 18 October 2002, another cycle of the Hindu Balinese purification rituals started at 4:30 p.m. The *Pemelebbeh Prayascitta Durgamangala* purification ritual was performed at the ruins of Paddy’s Bar and the Sari Club.³⁹ The priest of Kuta’s main temple, assisted by eighteen other Hindu priests, conducted the ritual consisting of offerings, prayers, the singing of hymns, and the sprinkling of holy water (Balinese: *Tirtha*) to purify the places where so much blood had been spilled by the bomb explosions. The holy water originated from three important Hindu temples: the Petitenget and Uluwatu temples on Bali and the Dalem Peed temple on Nusa Penida. The ritual was attended not only by Hindu Balinese, but also by many foreigners and adherents of other religions and philosophies of life. The non-Hindu participants in the ritual and prayers were allowed to pray according to the customs of their own faith.⁴⁰

³⁷ ELLWOOD: *The crystal spirit* 61.

³⁸ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/bali-remembered/2012-10-11/bali-bombing-remembered-10-years-on/4304834> [last accessed on 30 October 2019].

³⁹ DE JONGE: ‘Purification and remembrance’ 268, calls the ritual *Pemelebbeh Pemrayasita Dumanggala*.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., ‘Bali 121002 – Bali is wounded: Purification ceremony held at Sari Club, Kuta’, http://www.indo.com/bali121002_bekup/mourning7.html [last accessed 28 March 2019]. Compare ATKINSON: *Three weeks in Bali* 100-102, with slightly different information.

2.3.5. 'Hidden' Muslim rituals

A neglected aspect in the study of rituals after the Bali bombings is the fact that there were also Muslims amongst the victims of the attacks. Perhaps the silence with regard to the Muslim casualties was due to the fact that the Muslim bereaved maintained a self-imposed reticence because the perpetrators were Muslims. Before the bombings, moreover, there had already been growing tensions between the Hindu Balinese and the increasing number of migrants to Bali, mostly Muslims from Java and other parts of Indonesia.⁴¹ Muslim Balinese may have been afraid that performing their mourning rituals and other religious obligations in the public domain at that time might have contributed to the tensions, maybe even causing interreligious violence. The Muslim Balinese, therefore, seem to have kept a low profile when performing their rituals and religious obligations or to have kept a self-imposed strategic exile from public life for some time after the bombings.⁴²

Here, only three examples will be given of the self-imposed reticence of Muslim Balinese with regard to their rituals and religious obligations. On the seventh day after the bombings, the mortal remains of Hayati Eka Laksmi's husband were finally identified. She wrote a story about her loss for her two children, who would never see their father again. She described the prayers, the Muslim funeral and the solemn silent procession afterwards, joined by hundreds of Muslim fellow believers. Finally, she informed her children that their father was the tenth name of the thirty-eight Indonesian victims on the black marble plaque of the *Monumen Tragedi Kemanusiaan: Imawan Sardjono*.⁴³ The two other examples of self-imposed reticence are the temporary muffling of the sound of the Islamic call to prayer (*adhan*) in Denpasar and its surroundings⁴⁴ and the modest celebration of the festivities during the Islamic

⁴¹ HOWE: *The changing world of Bali* 1-4.

⁴² Perhaps these rituals can be labeled 'absent rituals', see POST & HOONDEERT: 'Introduction' 8.

⁴³ H.E. LAKSMI: 'Menolong diri dengan cara menolong orang', in I.B.M. DHARMA PLAGUNA (ed.): *Bom teroris dan "bom social." Narasi dari balik harmoni Bali. Perspektif korban dan relawan* (Den Pasar 2006) 63-77; L. LIVINGSTONE: 'The 2002 Bali bomb. Models of sustainable philanthropy', *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection 1442* (2012) 9-11, https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/1442/ [last accessed 12 September 2019].

⁴⁴ INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP: 'Impact of the Bali bombings', in *Indonesia Briefing* (Jakarta/Brussels 2002) 7.

holy month of Fasting, Ramadan – from Wednesday 6 November to Friday 6 December that year – by not celebrating them in the public areas but “restricting them to home or the mosque”.⁴⁵

2.3.6. *Hindu Balinese funeral rituals in ‘absence’*

Because of the long time it took to identify the victims of the bombings, this caused stress and uncertainty in relatives. Four Hindu Balinese women from Kepaon, a village south of Denpasar, whose husbands had not yet come home after one week, could not handle the uncertainty any longer and consulted a *balian*, a kind of shaman with knowledge of the occult.⁴⁶ After the *balian* had confirmed the death of their husbands, a symbolic funeral was held in the absence of the men’s bodies. Their photographs were carried around in a procession attended by more than one hundred participants. Afterwards, long pieces of sandalwood representing the bodies of the deceased were washed and put in caskets to be burnt later in the proper way in a *ngaben*, a Hindu Balinese cremation ceremony. The missing husbands were later found and identified, and their names are written on the black marble plaque of the *Monumen Tragedi Kemanusiaan: I Made Wija, I Ketut Nana Wijaya, I Nyoman Mawa, and I Ketut Cindra*.⁴⁷ For the victims who remained unidentified, however, a religious ceremony was held on 1 March 2003, during which their remains were cremated collectively in accordance with the Hindu Balinese funeral tradition.⁴⁸

2.3.7. *Ritualization: interreligious meetings*

It has already been mentioned that non-Hindus were invited to participate in the Hindu Balinese *Pemelebbeh Prayascitta Durmangala* ritual, thus making it an interreligious event. An interesting phenomenon after the Bali bombings was all the interreligious and interdenominational meetings that took place in Kuta and elsewhere, such as Denpasar and

⁴⁵ L. PEDERSEN: ‘Keeping Bali strong?’, in *Inside Indonesia* 95 (January-March 2009).

⁴⁶ The Australian film maker JOHN DARLING made the documentary *The Healing of Bali* after the 2002 Bali bombings, presenting a penetrating view of the way the Balinese deal with grieving and healing and offering a deeper insight into the important role these ‘paranormal’ persons are playing in the process of grieving and healing.

⁴⁷ ANGGRANI: *Who did this to our Bali?* 112-113.

⁴⁸ B. DEEGAN: *Remembering Josh. Bali, a father’s story* (Crows Nest 2004) 175.

Jakarta. De Jonge pointed out that these meetings were characterized by rituals and ritualization that were “a varied mix of Eastern and Western, national and international, and secular and religious elements of memorial services”. These meetings mostly consisted of more or less the same components, such as peace walks, peace prayers, communal prayers, lighting of candles, singing songs of “love, peace, and friendship”, and performing rituals each according to their own religion.⁴⁹

Many references to these kinds of meetings are made in the diaries and personal reports. To give only two examples: on 19 October 2002, an ‘interdenominational’ meeting was organized on the Kuta-Legian beach, culminating in people throwing roses into the ocean.⁵⁰ Two days later, on Monday, 21 October 2002, another interreligious meeting – attended by the Indonesian Minister of Religion, who was a Muslim – was organized in Denpasar “to promote interreligious harmony” by a “series of interfaith dialogues which included joint prayers” for world peace. These interfaith prayer meetings were organized “by the local and provincial authorities, some even by the Balinese Tourist Board” also in other places such as “the bomb site at Kuta Beach, at both football fields in Denpasar and in the most holy temple in Ubud”.⁵¹

Although these interreligious meetings and interfaith prayers ‘officially’ aimed to do justice to the victims, to further interreligious relations and to diminish interreligious tensions, De Jonge pointed to another motive behind them. He stressed the importance of these meetings for the Balinese tourist industry, which was hoping that “by showing compassion (...) Westerners would not turn their back on the island”.⁵²

2.3.8. *Rituals and ritualization ‘abroad’*

In the study of post-disaster rituals, attention generally focuses on the site of the calamity and the ‘bigger’ public rituals organized by local and national governments. Several examples already have been given, however, to show that in the case of the Bali bombings rituals and ritual activities were also performed in other locations than the place of disaster.

⁴⁹ DE JONGE: ‘Purification and remembrance’ 266-267.

⁵⁰ ATKINSON: *Three weeks in Bali* 105-108.

⁵¹ HITCHCOCK & I NYOMAN DARMA PUTRA: *Tourism* 127; DE JONGE: ‘Purification and remembrance’ 267.

⁵² DE JONGE: ‘Purification and remembrance’ 268.

This section is all about location and personal or individual preference. The funeral of Jonathan Ellwood, a British victim, in the cemetery of the village of his youth has already been mentioned. In the aftermath of the Bali bombings, rituals and ritual activities were especially abundant in Australia, such as the “candle-lit vigil (...) held at the Kingsley Football Club oval to support the families of those affected” a week after the bombings on Saturday, 19 October 2002. A “10,000-strong crowd” attended this vigil in Perth.⁵³

On the same Saturday, 19 October 2002, the funeral service of Josh Deegan was held in the St. Ignatius Church at Norwood, a suburb of Adelaide, at the other end of the continent. More than 1,200 people attended the funeral service, which was called “a celebration of his life”. However, Josh Deegan’s body was not yet available, and he could only be buried after he “was finally brought home”. Josh’s father told his story and the great pains he had taken because he wanted to ensure his son’s dignity.⁵⁴

In her diary, Melanie Framp, who lost her husband Tilly – an Australian friend of Jonathan Ellwood – in the Bali bombings, offered some insight into the richness of ritual activities organized by individuals and local communities. Under Sunday, 20 October 2002, she described the rituals and ritualization that took place at Danger Point, a headland at Coolangatta, on the border of New South Wales and Queensland on that day. It started with a morning service at 10 a.m. A choir was singing, a Hindu Balinese sung for the victims and their next of kin, a gong was sounded 180 times for the victims of the Bali bombings, flowers were thrown into the ocean, surfers formed a circle on the sea. After the morning service, there was a meeting at Kurrawa, a village close by, with a minute of silence. Finally, at 7 p.m. there was a candlelit service on the beach with speeches, prayers, three minutes of silence, and Hindu Balinese performing a ritual “of bringing the ocean spirits in and blessing them”. Surfers escorted the spirits back to the ocean. The service ended by the throwing of flowers into the ocean.⁵⁵ Under Friday, 1 November

⁵³ R. BRITTEN & M. QUEKETT: *Undefeated. The story of Bali bombing survivor Phil Britten* (Crawley 2012) 183.

⁵⁴ DEEGAN: *Remembering Josh* 57, 82, 135, 178.

⁵⁵ M.J. FRAMP: *Bee sting – My Bali diary* (No place, no year, no page numbers), under Sunday, 20 October. It is clear that the definite number of victims was not yet known at the time of these ritual practices for the gong was sounded 180 times instead of 202 times.

2002, the cremation service of Tilly in St. Michael's Church in Coolamon, New South Wales, is described, and Melanie receiving Tilly's ashes is recorded under Monday, 4 November. The ashes were divided between herself and her mother-in-law. Tilly's mother wanted to place her son's ashes in her neighborhood cemetery, while Melanie wanted to scatter part of her husband's ashes on the grounds of the Melbourne Demons, his favorite Australian Football Club, and part in Africa, the continent they both loved.

As a non-Australian example, the case of Sander Harskamp can be mentioned. The twenty-three-year-old student was one of the four Dutch casualties in the Bali bombings. He was buried in La Colle sur Loupe in France, near his parents' house, on 31 October 2002. Because many of his fellow students were unable to attend his funeral, Sander's parents organized a memorial service with speeches, songs, and music in the auditorium of the Academy Building of Leiden University on Sunday, 3 November 2002. Afterwards, everybody was invited to have a drink and share memories of Sander in the building of Minerva, his student society.⁵⁶ Moreover, four oaks in memory of the four Dutch victims of the Bali bombings were planted in 'the wood of the future' in Schuddebeurs in the Dutch province of Zeeland.⁵⁷

The cases mentioned in this section are just five examples of the enormous diversity of rituals and ritualization that have been performed after the Bali bombings on a personal-individual or 'small' collective level. It appears to be typical of post-disaster personal-individual or small collective rituals and ritualization that they have their own personal touch. Personal, family, organizational, local, regional, governmental, national, ethnic, and religious preferences clearly play an important part in coloring post-disaster rituals and ritualization.

2.3.9. *The final cycle of the Hindu Balinese purification rituals*

The most important post-Bali bombing disaster ritual from a Hindu Balinese perspective was the *Pemarisudha Karipubhaya* (lit.: purification of a disaster caused by an enemy) ritual.⁵⁸ This ritual started on Monday,

⁵⁶ *Mare* 9 (7 November 2002).

⁵⁷ *PZC Zeeland*, 10 October 2003, 15.

⁵⁸ This section is based on the information of SUJAYA: *Sepotong nurani Kuta* 108-115; compare also DE JONGE: 'Purification and remembrance' 291-292.

4 November 2002, and culminated in the rituals of Friday, 15 November 2002. Although the start and the end of this eleven-day cycle of rituals took place in Kuta and its beach, all Hindu Balinese were supposed to be involved in it and to participate. A nice example of the inclusion of all Hindu Balinese is the fact that the provincial government of Bali asked all inhabitants – wherever they lived on the island – to prepare a *penjor*⁵⁹ to be put in front of their house on Thursday, 14 November 2002, in preparation of the culmination of the ritual cycle on the following day.⁶⁰

Friday, 15 November 2002, was the apogee of all the purification rituals. Holy water was collected from thirty holy temples on Bali, Java, and Lombok. Although it was a completely Hindu Balinese cycle of rituals performed on the site of the bombings and on Kuta beach, adherents of other religions and philosophies of life were invited to attend the rituals with their large-scale offerings and sacrifices, which were broadcast nationally and internationally. The sacrifice of a multitude of animals both on the site of the bombings, on the beach, and at sea, however, caused abhorrence amongst many of the non-Hindu attendants and television viewers, who could not cope with the Hindu Balinese conviction that the spilling of the blood of sacrificial animals was necessary to purify the defiled sites, to propitiate the gods and demons, and to restore the balance between the visible and invisible worlds.

Another source of contestation was the absence of Megawati Sukarnoputri, the President of Indonesia, who had sent her husband to represent her because she was afraid that Muslims, a great majority in the Indonesian population, would disapprove of her attending a Hindu ritual. The Hindu Balinese were very disappointed by her non-attendance as she had a blood relationship with the island by way of her mother, who was a Hindu Balinese.

The *Pemarisudha Karipubhaya* ritual was the end of the ‘three cycles of purification rituals’. From the Hindu Balinese perspective, the balance between the visible and invisible worlds had now been restored. Finally,

⁵⁹ EISEMAN: *Bali* 362 describes *penjor* as follows: “An offering consisting of a bamboo pole with decorations; the arched top presents Gunung Agung, the body is a river that flows from the mountains to the sea, and along its route are the products of the harvest, tied to the pole; at the foot of the pole is a temporary shrine; *penjors* (...) are also commonly erected for many other important festivals.”

⁶⁰ I NYOMAN MANDA: *Our sorrow in Kuta* (Gianyar/Jakarta 2005) 74-76; SUJAYA: *Seotong nurani Kuta* 111.

the Hindu Balinese did “begin to feel a kind of relief” returning to their day-to-day worries, continuing their everyday life and even celebrating it.⁶¹

2.3.10. *Commemorative meetings*

The Bali bombings and their consequences were widely reported by the media. The Australian television program *60 Minutes*, however, discovered that the tragedy could also serve to boost its ratings and started to broadcast interviews with survivors of the disaster who were sometimes seriously hurt. When it discovered that these interviews were a hit television program, it organized a ‘six-month anniversary of the bombings’ commemoration for Australian survivors at Kuta beach in April 2003. Nicole McLean, surviving victim and one of the participants in this mediatized ceremony, described it in the following way:

a Balinese priest burned incense, chanted and banged a little wooden xylophone. When the priest had finished praying, a group of beautiful Balinese girls in traditional dress gave each of us a woven basket. They were made out of banana leaves, and they held flowers and incense. They were supposed to be peace offerings for the gods. We each had to walk into the water and let our little basket go, out into the ocean. It was attribute to all the people who didn’t make it.⁶²

The annual commemorative ceremonies of the Bali bombings in Kuta started on 12 October 2003. Only a few dignitaries – the Australian Prime Minister and his wife amongst them – were allowed to enter the site of the bombings, lay a wreath, and pray at the altar that served as a provisional memorial.⁶³ The first commemoration of the event, however, took place in the Garuda Wisnu Kencana Cultural Park in Jimbaran, a neighboring village, because the preliminary work for a monument at the site of the explosions in Kuta had just started on Monday, 8 September 2003, after a *ngurak* ritual (a ritual to start the work) had been performed. The Indonesian and Australian governments had jointly organized the Jimbaran memorial service. The commemoration ceremony in Jimbaran was attended by the Australian Prime Minister, several Australian and Indonesian dignitaries, survivors and their next of

⁶¹ ANGGRANI: *Who did this to our Bali?* 90.

⁶² N. MCLEAN WITH S. UBALDI: *Stronger now* (Sydney 2012) 178.

⁶³ SUJAYA: *Seotong nurani Kuta* 138.

kin, as well as a huge crowd of thousands of people. Speeches were given and the names of the victims were read aloud.⁶⁴ On Kuta beach in the afternoon after the memorial service, there was

a massive surfboard ceremony, Paddle for Peace. People on more than 50 surfboards carried dozens of wreaths into the ocean and, as it got closer to sunset, candles were lit along the beach in remembrance.⁶⁵

Ever since this memorial service in Jimbaran, annual commemorative ceremonies have been organized both in Kuta – once the *Monumen Tragedi Kemanusiaan* had been completed and inaugurated in 2004 – and in other places where memorials and monuments had been erected in remembrance of the victims of the 2002 Bali bombings. The five-yearly commemorative ceremonies, however, have always been celebrated in a more elaborate way, by reading the names of the victims aloud and with more dignitaries attending.

With regard to the preparation and celebration of the first anniversary commemoration of the 2002 Bali bombings in Kuta, several things are notable. Firstly, it took quite some time before a decision was taken about the erection of a memorial or monument in Kuta in remembrance of the victims, as will be discussed in the next section. Secondly, the Balinese government at first did not want to organize a memorial service but apparently gave in to the pressure of the Australian government in the end. Therefore, some Kuta citizens even accused the Balinese government of allowing the Australians to ‘own’ Bali. Thirdly, the flag of Taiwan, which had been hoisted up for the Taiwanese citizen who lost his life in the bombings, had to be lowered and replaced by the flag of the People’s Republic of China during the small remembrance meeting in front of the altar at the site of the bombings on 12 October 2003. After all, the Indonesian government officially only recognized the People’s Republic of China.⁶⁶ Fourthly, the Kuta Small Business Association had organized a candle-lit prayer meeting immediately followed by the Kuta Karnival, a new festival.⁶⁷ The Kuta Small Business Association invented the Kuta Karnival as a ‘celebration of life’ to counterbalance the negative consequences of the bombings and to represent Bali as an attractive

⁶⁴ BRITTEN: *Undefeated* 135-136.

⁶⁵ BRITTEN: *Undefeated* 137.

⁶⁶ SUJAYA: *Sepotong nurani Kuta* 138-139.

⁶⁷ SUJAYA: *Sepotong nurani Kuta* 136.

tourist destination. Kuta Karnival has been organized as a kind of mixture of the best Balinese tradition has to offer with the greatest attractions of the West, such as pop concerts and fashion shows. Kuta Karnival has been celebrated ever since 2003, starting some days before 12 October and lasting five to nine days, with the exception of the first Kuta Karnival, which lasted a month.⁶⁸

The four issues mentioned above make clear that, when studying the disaster rituals and ritual repertoires after the 2002 Bali bombings, one also should take into account the delicacies of politics, economy, and identity to understand the tensions involved in these rituals and ritual repertoires.

2.3.11. *Memorials and monuments*

In many locations, memorials and monuments were erected both by local, regional, or national governments and by individuals, (sports) clubs, and local societies in remembrance of the victims of the 2002 Bali bombings. For obvious reasons, most memorials and monuments are to be found in Australia, the best known being the ones in Perth (the memorial in Kings Park and the memorial rooms of the Kingsley Football Club), Melbourne (the memorial fountain with its eighty-eight jet streams), Gold Coast, Queensland (Allambe Memorial Park), Sydney (the Seed) and Canberra. However, memorials and monuments in Hong Kong, Singapore, Jakarta, and Ho Chi Minh also refer to the fact that citizens from these cities lost their lives in the disaster.⁶⁹

The design of each memorial and monument reflects how people have coped with the calamity, on the one hand, and the specific character of the victims and their relation with the locality of the memorial, on the other. Sometimes a monument reflects the effort of stressing its national character and of transcending it at the same time. The Bali Memorial in central London is an example of such an effort. It is a “1.5-meter marble globe covered in 202 doves, representing everyone who lost their lives”.⁷⁰ Behind the globe is a wall with the 202 names of the victims, with the

⁶⁸ M. AHMEDULLAH: ‘Bali bombing 2002, Tri Hita Karana and the Kuta Karnival. An incredible response to a massive terrorist attack’, <https://alochonaa.com/2014/04/08/bali-bombing-2002-tri-hita-karana-and-the-kuta-karnival-an-incredible-response-to-a-massive-terrorist-attack/> [last accessed 26 July 2019].

⁶⁹ See, e.g., <https://www.wowshack.com/12-memorials-around-the-world-that-commemorate-the-12-10-2002-bali-bombings/> [last accessed 20 July 2021].

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

names of the twenty-three British casualties being written right in the middle of the wall under the heading “In memory of the 202 innocent people killed by an act of terrorism in Kuta on the island of Bali Indonesia on the 12th of October 2002. The British citizens lost are here lovingly remembered.” The memorial was partly subsidized by the British government and unveiled on 12 October 2006.⁷¹

The *Monumen Tragedi Kemanusiaan* in Kuta deserves special attention. Although some Balinese proposed that a monument should be erected almost immediately after the bombings, it took almost a year before building started and another year before it was inaugurated on 12 October 2004.⁷² The decision-making process went hand in hand with fierce debates about the costs of the project. Some felt that the money should not be wasted on a memorial or monument but should be invested in the recovery of the local economy, which had almost been ruined by the bombings. Others claimed that there was not enough space for a memorial or monument and that the land needed for building it was much too expensive. There were also people fighting the idea of a memorial or monument with a pedestrian-only area for this, they felt, would damage economic activities of the Jalan Legian area. An often-heard and very strong voice insisted that a memorial or monument was incompatible with the Balinese view holding that, once the harmony of the visible and invisible worlds had been restored, the memory of a negative past should be buried. Besides, commemorating the dead is not a typical Balinese tradition. Under Australian pressure, however, it was finally accepted that a monument would be erected.⁷³

Once it had been decided that there should be a memorial, a heated debate broke out about its size. Some thought that a small *tugu* (pillar; monument) would suffice; others pleaded for a more grandiose memorial. Pending the final decision, a small temporary altar was erected on the site where the *Monumen Tragedi Kemanusiaan* was later built in the form of a *kayon*, the large ‘tree of life’. In the fountain of the monument “[t]he Balinese compass rose (...) orientates the memorial and the visitor toward the Mount Agung, the holiest landsite in Bali and the home of the gods”.

⁷¹ <https://statues.vanderkrogt.net/object.php?webpage=ST&record=gblo225> and <https://www.minube.net/place/memorial-of-balis-assault-a2140894> [last accessed 30 October 2019].

⁷² SUJAYA: *Sepotong nurani Kuta* 126-128.

⁷³ SUJAYA: *Sepotong nurani Kuta* 126-134; DE JONGE: ‘Purification and remembrance’ 274-275; LEWIS, LEWIS & DARMA PUTRA: ‘The Bali bombings monument’ 31.

According to the authorities who commissioned the monument, it should not only commemorate the victims but should also express “the Balinese notion of harmony-in-contention (...) focused on the spiritual interdependence of good and evil”. However, the architect also included Western elements in his design, such as the black marble plaque with the 202 names of the victims.⁷⁴



Figure 13.3: Parts of the plaque and the fountain
(photograph: Herman Beck).

Shortly after the bombings, a young Australian took the initiative to turn the ruins of the Sari Club into a ‘Peace Park’. When, after five years, this initiative was in danger of dying a quiet death, some fellow Australians established the Bali Peace Park Association Inc. in 2008 to breathe new life into it and to realize a museum and a spiritual garden on the site of the Sari Club. The garden should consist of “four contemplation corners for followers of four religions: Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians”.⁷⁵ So

⁷⁴ LEWIS, LEWIS & DARMA PUTRA: ‘The Bali bombings monument’ 22, 28-30.

⁷⁵ BRITTEN: *Undeclared* 177; DE JONGE: ‘Purification and remembrance’ 273-274. See also <http://www.balipeacepark.com.au/> [last accessed 26 September 2019].

far, however, the Association has not succeeded in buying the ground of the Sari Club because its purchase price is too high. Besides, Kuta locals are not keen to have yet another reference to the disaster. They would rather receive an economic stimulus and use the site for business purposes.

3. REFLECTIVE, CONCLUDING REMARKS

The chronological, descriptive, and interpretative narrative showed the complicated nature of the post-disaster rituals and ritual repertoires in the case of the Bali bombings. In studying a case like this one, special attention should be paid to the central role of diversity. Differences in nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, religions, and philosophies of life should be taken into account. One should be fully alive to the importance of localities. Furthermore, one should take stock of who is involved: individuals, groups, organizations, and governments. Did they initiate the post-disaster rituals spontaneously, in an organized way, or according to a fixed script? Time should also be an issue to be considered in the research.

The chronological, descriptive and interpretative narrative also unveiled the tension between the views of the Hindu Balinese and Westerners on coping with disasters. The Hindu Balinese performed their rituals according to a more or less fixed script. Westerners acted spontaneously and ad hoc, very often influenced by political motives.⁷⁶ The Hindu Balinese focused on performing rituals to restore the balance between *sekala* and *niskala*. Westerners wanted to highlight the dignity of the victims and the atrocity of the bombings. The Hindu Balinese interpreted the disaster in a religious way and they wanted to propitiate the inhabitants of the invisible world with offerings and sacrifices. Westerners saw the bombings as a secular deed by terrorists and wanted to show their resilience and firmness; they abhorred the violent slaughtering of the sacrificial animals during the Hindu Balinese rituals. For the Hindu Balinese, the cycle of purification rituals was sufficient; they focused on life again and did not want to dwell upon past negative events at any great length for that would arouse new negative events. Therefore, they did not need a memorial or monument. Westerners wanted to be able to commemorate the victims at fixed times at a solidified place. Therefore, they wanted to have a memorial or monument. The Hindu Balinese experienced the pressure of the Westerners – and

⁷⁶ LEWIS, LEWIS & DARMA PUTRA: 'The Bali bombings monument' 30.

especially the Australians – to get a memorial or monument as a kind of colonialism, as if Bali was owned by Australia. The Kuta locals wanted to prioritize their local economic interests, whereas the Australians felt that they were overcharged. The Kuta locals wanted to celebrate life to attract tourists by inventing the *Kuta Karnival*.

Once the *Monumen Tragedi Kemanusiaan* had been established, it became a ‘sacred’ place for Australian next of kin and visitors.⁷⁷ However, the Hindu Balinese did not share this view: for them, neither the site nor the annual commemoration had anything ‘sacred’. This became crystal-clear to me when I had a conversation with a Hindu Balinese taxi driver shortly after the commemoration service of 12 October 2019. He told me that he did not consider this service as a ‘real’ Hindu Balinese ritual. “Take, for example, the fact that there were no *penjors* anywhere. Therefore, this service should be considered as the responsibility of the local secular government of Kuta which wants to meet the needs of the tourists”, the taxi driver said.

The chronological, descriptive and interpretative narrative helped to answer my question: how to explain the relatively short time spent by the Hindu priest to the commemoration of the victims in his speech and his long-winded narrative about Bali as island of love, compassion, and celebration of life, and the apparent lack of interest in the ceremony of most Kuta locals. The Hindu Balinese had come to terms with their conscience by performing the obligatory purification rituals. The invisible world had been appeased with the visible world, and the balance of *sekala* and *niskala* had been restored. Dwelling on the disaster could lead to new disasters. Commemorating the dead is alien to the Balinese. Life should go on. The celebration of life – as the invention of the Kuta Karnival shows – could help to restore the economy and further prosperity. The way the Hindu Balinese were coping with the Bali bombings was at odds with the wishes and needs of the Australians, who set great store by commemorating the victims. The Hindu priest had to deal with this contrast. He wanted to show his respect and sympathy for the Westerners in his audience by devoting some words to the Bali bombings. However, he gave evidence of his Hindu Balinese worldview by dwelling at length on the celebration of life. The same was true for most Kuta locals, who considered the commemorative service as a concession of the local and provincial governments to the Australians and Western tourists for economic and political reasons.

⁷⁷ LEWIS, LEWIS & DARMA PUTRA: ‘The Bali bombings monument’ 37.

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS AND RITUALS:
THE CASE OF PARKLAND, FLORIDA IN 2018

BIRGIT PFEIFER & ANDRÉ MULDER

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we reflect on rituals after school shootings and on the ritual-like aspects of the act of school shootings itself. All sorts of rituals occur after a school shooting, but the planning, preparation, and modus operandi also contain ritual aspects. Rituals after a school shooting seem to fulfill several functions and serve various personal and social meanings. Restoration of the feeling of control may be dominant among these functions.¹ School shootings are socially disruptive, spreading anxiety, fear, and grief. Accordingly, post-disaster rituals aim at personal and social recovery.²

Furthermore, it will be argued that the ritual-like aspects of the planning, preparation, and modus operandi of school shootings are part of the meaning-giving function that these crimes fulfill for the perpetrators.³ The concept of ritual sheds light on details like time, place, and clothing and situates the act of a school shooting in a tradition that is meaningful to the shooter and to which he is committed.

Not every shooting that occurs at a school is a school shooting in the sense of the present chapter. The following definition of a school shooting is used here: “A school shooting is an armed attack on a school location by youths who have the aim to kill randomly school-related persons without a concern over the loss of their own lives.”⁴ This implies

¹ M.I. NORTON & F. GINO: ‘Rituals alleviate grieving for loved ones, lovers, and lotteries’, in *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 143/1 (2014) 266-272.

² L.J. DANBOLT & H. STIFOSS-HANSEN: ‘Ritual and recovery. Traditions in disaster ritualizing’, in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 56/4 (2017) 352-360.

³ B. PFEIFER: *School shootings. Existential concerns and implicit religion* (PhD Dissertation: Free University of Amsterdam 2017), <https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/school-shootings-existential-concerns-and-implicit-religion> [last accessed 27 January 2020].

⁴ PFEIFER: *School shootings* 29.

that the victims are attacked because of their school function (e.g., principal, teacher, student) and not out of personal or criminal motives. To describe concrete rituals after school shootings, we will examine the case of the Parkland, Florida shooting in 2018. The following is the case description from the official report:

On February 14, 2018, 14 students and three staff members at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida were fatally shot and 17 others were wounded in one of the deadliest school massacres in United States' history. The gunman Nikolas Cruz, age 19 at the time of the incident, was a former student of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Cruz was a troubled child and young adult who displayed aggressive and violent tendencies as early as 3 years old. Cruz struggled in academics and attended several schools. There are reports of behavioural issues at all of the schools he attended. He was under the care of mental health professionals from age 11 until he turned age 18 and refused further services.

At 2:19 p.m. on February 14, 2018, Cruz exited an Uber ride-sharing service at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School armed with a rifle and several hundred rounds of ammunition concealed in a rifle bag. He entered the school through an unstaffed gate that had been opened for school dismissal and made his way toward Building 12 on the north side of campus. He entered the east side of Building 12 through an unlocked and unstaffed door. He made his way through all three floors, firing into classrooms and hallways and killing or wounding 34 individuals. He exited Building 12 and ran across campus, blending in with students evacuating. Cruz was apprehended approximately 1 hour and 16 minutes after the first shots and charged with 17 counts of premeditated murder and 17 counts of attempted murder.⁵

2. THE RITUAL-LIKE NATURE OF A SCHOOL SHOOTING

Before discussing the Parkland shooting in more detail, we argue that school shootings in general meet the characteristics of ritual practice: they are carried out deliberately;⁶ are performative in nature;⁷ include

⁵ MSDHS PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION: *Initial report* (= Initial Report Submitted to the Governor, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Senate President) (2019) 7, <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/MSDHS/CommissionReport.pdf> [last accessed 27 January 2020].

⁶ T. SCHNELL: *Implizite Religiosität. Zur Psychologie des Lebenssinns* (Lengerich 2004) 34.

⁷ C. BELL: *Ritual. Perspectives and dimensions* (New York 1997) 159-169.

actions, words, and objects;⁸ and have a special (sacred) meaning to the shooters.⁹ The fact that most if not all school shooters plan their deed¹⁰ and in most cases leak (announce) their intentions in advance¹¹ suggests that the attack is carried out deliberately. With regard to the nature of the act, we contend that mass violence in real life can be regarded as fundamentally performative in nature. Violence is labeled as performative when it is carried out to create impact on an audience, which is the case with school shootings.¹² Words, gestures, and objects (weapons) can be found in videos, photos, diaries, manifestos, and on internet pages which the perpetrators produce prior to their deed.¹³

The ritualistic nature of school shootings should be considered because it helps us to understand the motives of the perpetrators. Notably, Birgit Pfeifer states that the ritualistic nature of school shootings, in combination with the fact that school shooters create a personal myth and express transcendent experiences, indicates that school shootings are a meaningful construct in response to feelings of an existential crisis in the lives of the perpetrators.¹⁴ In other words, the perpetrators feel that the school shooting makes the unbearable bearable.

To understand how a school shooting provides meaning to the perpetrator, Pfeifer uses Edward Bailey's concept of implicit religion.¹⁵ The term 'implicit religion' frames a secular phenomenon as a meaningful construct, a function that is traditionally assigned to religion. In line with Tatjana Schnell, we argue that one can only speak of implicit religion if myth, transcendent experiences, and rituals are present.¹⁶ Firstly, myth is an individually constructed narrative by a person. According to Schnell, the personal myth conveys an experience of being chosen; it

⁸ R.L. GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* (New York 2014) 231-293.

⁹ PFEIFER: *School shootings* 190-194.

¹⁰ B. VOSSEKUIL: *The final report and findings of the safe school initiative. Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States* (Washington 2004) 23.

¹¹ J.R. MELOY & M.E. O'TOOLE: 'The concept of leakage in threat assessment', in *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 29/4 (2011) 513-527.

¹² M. JUERGENSMEYER: 'Religious terrorism as performance violence', in M. JERRYSON, M. JUERGENSMEYER & M. KITTS (eds.): *The Oxford handbook of religion and violence* (Oxford 2013) 280-292.

¹³ T. KIILAKOSKI & A. OKSANEN: 'Soundtrack of the school shootings. Cultural script, music and male rage', in *Young* 19/3 (2011) 247-269.

¹⁴ PFEIFER: *School shootings* 169-194.

¹⁵ E.I. BAILEY: *Implicit religion in contemporary society* (Kampen/Weinheim 1997).

¹⁶ SCHNELL: *Implizite Religiosität* 39-40.

creates a sense of self-worth and identity, provides a coherent interpretation of the world and justifications for acts.¹⁷ Secondly, transcendent experiences in the context of implicit religion do not necessarily have to be associated with metaphysical power or a godly entity. Schnell suggests that “the term should be taken literally. *Transcendo* means ‘I go beyond,’ hence to pass a border, to go over a certain limit.”¹⁸ Transcendent thus means experiencing something bigger than oneself, and it can also mean experiencing a greater self. The third aspect of implicit religion is personal rituals. These symbolic acts are developed or chosen from existing rituals by an individual. Personal rituals do not necessarily have a social aspect, as rituals traditionally do. However, the commonality is the performative nature, including symbols and an ascribed significant meaning. Bailey describes these performative aspects of behavior as secular manifestations of religious behavior.¹⁹ In line with the terms used by Bell, we can call them ritualistic acts.²⁰

This implicit religious behavior by the perpetrator adopts what has been termed a ‘cultural script’.²¹ A cultural script is, in its simplest form, a toolkit for behavior. In this case, it contains such aspects as planning, an almost obsessive interest in mass shootings, weapons, ‘leaking’ (i.e., dropping hints of the intended act), random selection of victims, and/or specific clothing. Shooters adopt forms, motivations, and actions from other shootings. Within the cultural script of school shootings, male violence is an approved solution to all sorts of problems.

Cultural scripts are constructed by media coverage and other forms of cultural expressions like movies, novels, and songs.²² The ‘Columbine shooting’ that occurred at Columbine High School in 1999 is a landmark event for this cultural script of school shooting. The shooters provided vocabulary and rationale for future shootings.²³ The Columbine

¹⁷ SCHNELL: *Implizite Religiosität* 24-27.

¹⁸ T. SCHNELL: ‘A framework for the study of implicit religion. The psychological theory of implicit religion’, in *Implicit Religion* (April 2007) 91.

¹⁹ BAILEY: *Implicit religion*; E.I. BAILEY: ‘Implicit religion’, in P.B. CLARKE (ed.): *The sociology of religion* (Oxford 2009) 801-818.

²⁰ BELL: *Ritual* 138-169.

²¹ KIILAKOSKI & OKSANEN: ‘Soundtrack’.

²² G.E. ASH & J.M. SAUNDERS: ‘From “I Don’t Like Mondays” to “Pumped Up Kicks”’. Rampage school shootings in young adult fiction and young adult lives’, in *Children’s Literature in Education* 49 (2018) 34-46.

²³ R.W. LARKIN: ‘The Columbine legacy. Rampage shootings as political acts’, in *American Behavioral Scientist* 52/9 (2009) 1309-1326.

shooters made videos of themselves and posted them on the internet. They planned the shooting like a movie script and used elements of popular culture, such as music and video games, as part of their preparation. For example, a violent computer game entitled *Doom* is directly linked to the Columbine shooting, because the perpetrators played the game themselves and referred to the game's content in their videos. The clothes they wore during the shooting – which are similar to the outfit worn by the hero in the film *The Matrix* – have been mirrored in many school shootings since. Certain catchphrases used by the Columbine shooters, like 'natural selection', were cited by other shooters such as Eric-Pekka Auvinen, who titled his public announcement the 'Natural Selection Manifesto'.²⁴ The Columbine shooting has unfortunately been a source of inspiration to many. Langman gives several examples of shooters who hear the voice of the Columbine shooters saying them to hurt people.²⁵

Two additional aspects of the cultural script should also be considered: the time and the place of the crime. Firstly, the theme of ritual time has many aspects: duration, endurance, timing, phasing, regularity, frequency, recursivity, and cross-temporality.²⁶ There seems to be no set timing for school shootings in general, although the majority of school shootings take place in spring. Some moments may nevertheless be more appropriate than others from the perpetrators' perspective. The Columbine shooting, for example, took place on 20 April, which is also Adolf Hitler's birthday. Because the Columbine shooters Harris and Klebold showed a great interest in Hitler and the Nazis,²⁷ a number of researchers interpreted the date of the shooting as a Neo-Nazi statement by the shooters. In the diary found after the Columbine shooting the police discovered multiple references to Hitler's birthday. In addition, they planned their shooting months ahead, waiting for "the holy April morning of NBK"²⁸ (NBK or 'Natural Born Killers' was copied from one of their favorite movies). However, the fact that the attack took place on

²⁴ PFEIFER: *School Shootings* 121.

²⁵ P. LANGMAN: 'Different types of role model influence and fame seeking among mass killers and copycat offenders', in *American Behavioral Scientist* 62/2 (2018) 210-228.

²⁶ GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* 262-266.

²⁷ <https://allthatsinteresting.com/columbine-high-school-shooting> [last accessed 27 January 2020].

²⁸ J. BLOCK: 'Lessons from Columbine. Virtual and real rage', in *American Journal of Forensic Psychiatry* 28/2 (2007) 5-33.

Hitler's birthday could also be seen as a coincidence. The boys had decided on the 19 April, but the plan was pushed forward twenty-four hours because Harris, one of the shooters, wanted to buy more bullets from a friend.²⁹ As we can see, this aspect of the shooting relies heavily on the researchers' interpretation due to the lack of indisputable empirical evidence.

The second aspect we explore in our case is the ritual place. Rituals are always geographically situated. They sometimes take place at fixed locations, sometimes at random places. Ritual places can be pre-given or constructed, temporary, or eternal.³⁰ The school becomes a ritual space, not only because of the rituals that take place after the shooting – such as the construction of memorial sites, the erection of monuments, or the occurrence of memorial celebrations at the site – but by the very fact of the shooter's choice to perform his act precisely there. In other words, the shooter creates a temporary or sometimes permanent ritual space, and after the shooting the victims and mourners create their own ritual space at the same location. According to Glenn Muschert and Johanna Sumiala, school shootings are symbolic statements that refer “beyond the immediate target (school and/or victims)”.³¹ School shootings can be interpreted as an attack against organized society. As a place, school stands for the transmittal of societal and political values, and many shooters feel isolated and rejected by ‘the system’ or ‘society’, have experienced or are currently experiencing bullying, and have a history of disciplinary measures.

In their own minds, the cultural script helps perpetrators transform from ordinary boys to school shooters who will be remembered: the transformation from a loser into a hero, from a nobody into a martyr. Arguably, it could be compared with a rite of passage, a ceremonial event that marks a person's transition from one status to another. Jonathan Fast also interprets elements of the cultural script of school shootings as ‘ceremonial’: the planning/documenting and leaking, the clothing and the music.³² He also points to the ancient motive of playing a godlike role, in this case to act out the decision about whether a person lives or dies.

²⁹ <https://allthatsinteresting.com/columbine-high-school-shooting> [last accessed 27 January 2020].

³⁰ GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* 256-261.

³¹ G.W. MUSCHERT & J. SUMIALA (eds.): *School shootings. Mediatized violence in a global age* (= *Studies in Media and Communications* 7) (Bingley 2012) xvii.

³² J. FAST: *Ceremonial violence. A psychological explanation of school shootings* (Woodstock, NY 2008) 19.

Another characteristic of the *modus operandi* of school shootings can also be linked to religious ritual. There can be an interconnectedness between violence, ritual, and religion. Mark Juergensmeyer takes the performative character of violence as the unifying concept in interpreting religious violence.³³ In a related analysis, Ruud Ganzevoort argues that the performative aspects of a violent act resemble religious ritual and that religious violence is based on a metaphysical perspective on a war between good and evil, involving the death of martyrs.³⁴ In their ‘ego documents’, such as suicide notes or manifestos, school shooters often proclaim that they are fighting against evil or are warriors for the good. The idea of being a martyr can also be found in numerous expressions of school shooters prior to their deed.³⁵

Interpreting the motives of school shooters is a complex undertaking, because the perpetrators often do not reveal their reasoning in a clear manner. The majority of school shooters do not survive their crime or cannot be questioned by scholars because of their legal status as minors. Motives are often interpreted from an exclusively psychological or social perspective, but such a complex phenomenon should be studied from a multi-disciplinary point of view.³⁶ The interpretation of the shooting as a perpetrator’s act of meaning-giving is relatively new.³⁷

In summary, the act of a school shooting has ritualistic traits. Not only are there symbolic and repetitive elements of clothing, music, online announcements, or displays of firearms that can be connected to the image of an ‘epic warrior’, but shooters also have transcendent motives and intentions.³⁸ The personal myth of school shooters involves

³³ M. JUERGENSMEYER: ‘Religious terrorism as performance violence’, in M. JERRYSON, M. JUERGENSMEYER & M. KITTS (eds.): *The Oxford handbook of religion and violence* (Oxford 2013) 280-292.

³⁴ R.R. GANZEVOORT: ‘Violence, trauma, and religion’, a paper presented at the 2006 conference of the International Association for the Psychology of Religion, Leuven, 28-31 August 2006. http://www.ruardganzevoort.nl/pdf/2006_Violence_Trauma_and_Religion.pdf [last accessed 4 December 2019].

³⁵ B. PFEIFER & R.R. GANZEVOORT: ‘Tell me why? Existential concerns of school shooters’, in *Religious Education* 112/2 (2017) 123-135.

³⁶ N. BÖCKLER, T. SEEGER, P. SITZER & W. HEITMEYER: ‘School shootings. Conceptual framework and international empirical trends’, in N. BÖCKLER, T. SEEGER, P. SITZER & W. HEITMEYER (eds.): *School shootings. International research, case studies, and concepts for prevention* (New York 2013) 1-24.

³⁷ PFEIFER: *School shootings* 109-113.

³⁸ B.R. WARNICK, B.A. JOHNSON & S. ROCHA: ‘Tragedy and meaning of school shootings’, in *Educational Theory* 60/3 (2010) 371-390.

the idea that they will attain immortal fame, and some combine this with the idea of ritual sacrifice (martyr, suicide). Shooters take on a god-like role, making decisions about life and death, and use religious and apocalyptic language.³⁹ The presence of personal myth, expressions of transcendent experience, and use of personal rituals indicate that the shooting fulfills a meaning-giving function for the perpetrators.

3. RITUAL-LIKE ASPECTS OF THE PARKLAND SHOOTING

The ritual nature of the Parkland shooting will be discussed from three perspectives: the cultural script, as well as ritual place and ritual time, which are two important dimensions of the concept of ritual.

3.1. Cultural script

In many ways, the Parkland shooting adheres to the cultural script of school shootings as discussed above.

Planning: Cruz had been planning his attack for some time – in any case since September 2017, when he left a message in the comments section of a YouTube video (posted by a Mississippi bail bondsman) announcing that he would become a professional school shooter.⁴⁰ On 5 January 2018, a person close to Nikolas Cruz contacted the FBI's Public Access Line to report concerns about him. The caller provided information about Cruz's gun ownership, his desire to kill people, his erratic behavior, and his disturbing social media posts, as well as the potential risk that he would be involved in a school shooting.⁴¹

Almost obsessive interest in school shootings: Cruz searched online for other mass shootings. He also commented on a video about the 1966 sniper shooting at the University of Texas, declaring that he would commit a similar attack.

Weapons: Cruz collected weapons and posted pictures of the weapons on social media. The display of weapons and his comments that show veneration indicate that he viewed them as ritual objects.

³⁹ PFEIFER & GANZEVOORT: 'Tell me why?' 133.

⁴⁰ <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/summary-and-timeline-related-to-parkland-shooting-investigation> [last accessed 6 October 2019].

⁴¹ <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-statement-on-the-shooting-in-parkland-florida> [last accessed 6 October 2019].

Leaking: In September 2017, Cruz stated his intentions in the comments section of a YouTube video. He also posted photos on social media showing himself holding a gun. Shortly before the shooting, he announced his plans in video messages that were found on his cell phone.

Arguing that the Parkland shooting was following a cultural script frames it as ritualistic. Although Cruz did not choose suicide and did not become a martyr, which is one of the cultural images associated with such scripts, he ritualized his deeds following the script, while showing transcendent motives. He announced the killing on social media with these words: “Today is the day, the day that it all begins, the day of my massacre shall begin. All the kids of my school will run in fear and hide. From the wrath of my power they will know who I am.”⁴² These words echo prophetic or apocalyptic language, phrased as if the words could have come straight from the mouth of God. Shooters like Cruz are viewed as heroes by some, receiving a lot of fan mail and money from their devoted admirers. It is clear that Cruz positioned himself in a shooting tradition when he announced his deed on video and posted the announcement on YouTube. Speaking of his desire to kill a lot of people, Cruz echoed the words of Dylan Klebold, one of the Columbine perpetrators, who wanted to kill and injure as many of the students as possible and even specifically mentioned the number 250.⁴³ Earlier Cruz posted a picture with the text: “I wanna die Fighting killing shit ton of people” on Instagram.⁴⁴

3.2. Ritual place

In our analysis of the case, the school stands for the transmittal of societal and political values. Like many shooters before him, Cruz felt isolated. He experienced rejection from his peers and from a girl he was in love with. Being expelled from school strengthened his feelings of rejection. Cruz got into several fights at school and was suspended numerous times. In his announcement video, he explicitly explains his motivations for the deed by referencing this theme:

I am nothing, I am no one, my life is nothing and meaningless. Everything that I hold dear I let go beyond your half. Every day I see the world ending

⁴² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNMGzxxJgkM> [last accessed 27 January 2020].

⁴³ <http://forums.lostmediawiki.com/thread/506/columbine-basement-tapes-full-transcripts> [last accessed 27 January 2020].

⁴⁴ MSDHS PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION: *Initial Report* 246.

another day. I live a lone life, live in seclusion and solitude. I hate everyone and everything. With the power of my AR you will all know who I am. I had enough of being told what to do and when to do. I had enough of being – telling me that I’m an idiot and a dumb ass, when real life you’re all the dumb ass. You’re all stupid and brainwashed by these fucking political government programs. You will all see. You will all know who my name is.⁴⁵

In the context of education some scholars argue that school shootings are a ritual protest against divided communities. They identify them as a personal ritual response of students to the failure of communal school rituals to provide a clear identity:

There are no longer shared understandings about the nature and purpose of schools. There is no common identity to be formed among students. In response to this increasing specialization and instrumentalization (and, perhaps, greater emphasis on cultural and religious diversity) students construct their own rituals.⁴⁶

The word ‘brainwashed’ in the announcement recorded by Cruz indicates that he perceived school as a place where violence is performed. Strict rules, disciplinary systems, and surveillance cameras can be perceived as oppressive, although they may be intended to protect students. Shooters may therefore see schools as ‘the appropriate place for violence’, choosing this venue for their ritual-like act of protest.⁴⁷

3.3. Ritual time

Nikolas Cruz announced his act three months before Valentine’s Day on YouTube. He recorded three short announcement videos on his cell phone: one on 8 February and two on 11 February. Although he stated, “Today is the day that it all begins. The day of my massacre shall begin on February 11th”, he waited until 14 February to carry out his plan. In the same video, he stated, “My love for you will never go away. I hope to see you in the afterlife.”⁴⁸ The one and only person addressed in his announcement videos was his ex-girlfriend Angie. We believe that Cruz at that moment probably took into account that he might be killed. In one of his notes, found on his

⁴⁵ https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/Transcript_Cruz_Videos.pdf [last accessed 27 January 2020].

⁴⁶ WARNICK, JOHNSON & ROCHA: ‘Tragedy and meanings’ 379.

⁴⁷ WARNICK, JOHNSON & ROCHA: ‘Tragedy and meanings’ 385.

⁴⁸ MSDHS PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION: *Initial Report* 260-262.

cell phone, he seems to refer to his death, because he declares his will that everything he leaves behind, including the cash, should be divided in two equal parts, one for his brother and one for his ex-girlfriend.⁴⁹

On Valentine’s Day, love is celebrated all around the world, and people send each other messages that confirm or reveal their love. Between 2:00 and 2:19 p.m. (when Cruz arrived at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School), Cruz sent at least forty-three text messages, including a whole bunch of messages to his ex-girlfriend. On the morning of that day, he also had a short phone conversation with her, in which she told him to leave her alone. In the messages he sent in the last nineteen minutes before his repulsive act, he declared his love for her several times: “I love you”; “You will always know I love you”. And although the girl responded that Cruz knew she had a (new) boyfriend and chastised him for texting her so much, he replied, “Doesn’t matter anymore, I love you”. One of his last messages was: “You’re the love of my life (...) you’re the greatest person I have ever met”, and the last two messages were identical: “I love you”.⁵⁰

These texts may perhaps provide a window for interpretation of this shooting as a whole – was it a desperate act out of unrecognized or unrequited love? Cruz’s act could be interpreted as a demonstration of his excessive love for his ex-girlfriend over whom he fought at school with another boy when they were still dating. Did he see his act as the ultimate proof of his love for her? If any of this is the case, the day of the shooting takes on symbolic meaning: Valentine’s Day is all about love rituals, so that would mean that this day was not randomly chosen. It was in fact a ritual statement.

4. RITUALS AFTER THE SCHOOL SHOOTING

So far we have discussed school shootings as a personal meaningful ritual or ritual-like act of the perpetrator. Now we turn to all the diverse rituals that emerge after a shooting. These rituals are intended to help victims and the community cope with the disruptive event and its consequences.

4.1. Rituals immediately after shooting

Analyzing the media coverage shortly after numerous school shootings, we see a striking similarity between the images of different incidents: police

⁴⁹ MSDHS PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION: *Initial Report 250*.

⁵⁰ MSDHS PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION: *Initial Report 250*.

officers and other first responders lead survivors out of the school, their hands raised in fear or surrender; bodies are removed; shocked parents and students embrace each other in tears; when possible, the perpetrator is pursued. News media repeat images and interviews over and over again. Protocol, stylization, and repetition generate symbolic meanings. Therefore, these events might be viewed as ritual or ritual-like. The ritual-like aspects of the news broadcasting are obvious: the pictures of the grieving community symbolize the biggest fear for parents: losing their child in a shooting.

The first press conferences by the authorities also seems to follow a formula with predefined variables: describing the *modus operandi*, naming the perpetrator, specifying the number of casualties, and providing an exact timeline of events. There are always expressions of shock, condemnation of the act, a call for prayers, condolences, and words of assurance that the community will show its strength and be able to cope with this, accompanied by a call to help each other through a difficult time.

In terms of ritual function, it could be argued that the first press conference by the officials aims to diffuse or ward off evil. According to Paul Post, these ritualistic aspects have a prophylactic function: the officials are trying to convince the community that the situation is under control and that safety and balance in society will be restored.⁵¹

4.1.1. *Vigils and memorial sites*

More traditional rituals appear in the hours and days following the shooting. A day after the shooting, a sunset vigil was held at Pine Trail Park Amphitheatre. Candles were lit; flowers and teddy bears were carried along; students were crying and holding hands in a moment of silence. This coming together helps the survivors express their feelings and creates a sense of community: the ritual creates a communal feeling of connection that empowers the participants.

Some private memorial sites were created by friends and family members for individual victims, like Alyssa Alhadeff, captain of a soccer team. A tree was planted and named Alyssa, and a small memorial shrine was set up.⁵² Memorial sites are places where one can grieve and where people and events

⁵¹ P. POST, R.L. GRIMES, A. NUGTEREN, P. PETTERSON & H. ZONDAG, *Disaster ritual. Explorations of an emerging ritual repertoire* (Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA 2003) 41.

⁵² <https://time.com/parkland-high-school-shooting-vigil/> [last accessed 27 January 2020].

are remembered. They fulfill expressive functions because they channel all sorts of emotion (sorrow, pain, anger, respect, disbelief, dismay).

4.1.2. *Protest rituals*

A few days after the shooting, surviving students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School gathered to contemplate options for taking action. They concluded that gun violence had to be stopped and that, despite a growing number of mass shootings, politicians had not taken enough initiatives to make the country safer. The students built a website and launched a movement with chapters all over the country. Three months after the shooting, a protest meeting was organized in a grocery store (part of the Publix chain) in Coral Springs, Florida. The protesters, survivors of the Parkland shooting, criticized Publix for supporting a politician advocating pro-gun views in a ‘die-in’ on 25 May 2018. A die-in is a demonstration in which people lay on the floor as being dead. Publix changed its donation policy afterwards.⁵³

The students also organized dozens of rallies and marches throughout the United States, which attracted hundreds of thousands of sympathizers. These events themselves contain all sorts of ritual elements (chanting, holding signs with texts like ‘no NRA (National Rifle Association) money’ or the names of the deceased, speeches, marching, moments of silence).⁵⁴ In the slipstream of this new movement, supporting groups of parents (like MomsRising) were founded that endorsed the actions of the students.⁵⁵

These protest rituals generated a renewed political debate on the right to bear arms as well as school safety. They function as a channel to convey feelings of anxiety, concerns about school safety, and the will to change policies. Besides an expressive function, these rituals also fulfill an ethical function: they symbolize a different world, a world with less violence and more safety. The protesters hope that their actions will contribute to this more peaceful world. As Gerard Lukken contends: *lex orandi, lex agendi* (norms expressed in ritual can become norms for [political] action).⁵⁶

⁵³ <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/business/os-orlando-publix-die-in-20180525-story.html> [last accessed 31 January 2020].

⁵⁴ <https://marchforourlives.com> [last accessed 27 January 2020].

⁵⁵ <https://www.momsrising.org> [last accessed 27 January 2020].

⁵⁶ G. LUKKEN: *Rituelen in overvloed. Een kritische bezinning op de plaats en de gestalte van het christelijke ritueel in onze cultuur* (Baarn 1999) 67.

4.2. Rituals after a year

On the first anniversary of the Parkland shooting on 14 February 2019, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School ended classes earlier than usual, before 2:20 p.m. – the time the shooting began on the same day in 2018. It was a ‘non-academic’ day. At 10:17 p.m. a moment of silence was held in the whole district, and at all the schools in Florida, referring to the 17 victims who lost their lives. At 2:21 p.m. there was a moment of silence throughout the city of Parkland and in all the city buildings and facilities. A day of ‘service and love’ was announced by Robert W. Runcie, superintendent of the public schools in Broward County, for “community commemoration and healing”.⁵⁷

In Pine Trails Park, therapy dogs and counselors were present to help grieving students work through the pain. A moment of silence was observed. That evening, a public interfaith ceremony was held near the park. People wore T-shirts with the text “MSD Strong”. A synagogue opened its doors, several yoga and therapy studios offered free sessions and various other initiatives (moments of silence, planting trees, flags at half-mast) in surrounding neighborhoods, and cities demonstrated solidarity with the survivors and the victims’ families. The Coral Springs Museum of Art started a ‘Healing with Art Program’ to bring relaxation and healing to the deeply affected. There were *Relaxing Art Projects* such as Massage Chairs, Petting Zoo, K-9 Love and Hugs, Wishing Tree, Coral Springs Rocks – mementos to take and so on.⁵⁸

The ritual functions of these activities could be interpreted as expressing emotions in remembering the deceased as a community and empowering the community in the light of these tragic events, the consequences of which are still felt in the community.

It was also possible to volunteer for the Feed the Starving Children project. Students also had the opportunity to serve in a gardening project (green team) of the Sawgrass Nature Center. A third possibility to serve involved participating in a beach cleanup at Deerfield Beach Pier, honoring

⁵⁷ https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=289109958427114&id=29790827612; <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/broward/article226120690.html> [last accessed 20 November 2019].

⁵⁸ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/02/14/parkland-school-shooting-anniversary-remembers-17-lives-lost-florida/2877834002/> and <https://www.cityof-parkland.org/1224/MSD-Commemoration> [last accessed 20 November 2019].

one of the students, Alyssa Alhadeff.⁵⁹ These possibilities demonstrate the inversion of emotion: from negativity to positivity, from looking at the past to building a new future, from grief and mourning to contributing to a more beautiful world. Possibly these services gave the community a way to express feelings of gratitude: we are survivors, we are still here.

An artist, David Best, constructed a wooden temple in cooperation with victims, grieving families, and first responders. Those present had the chance to inscribe personal messages in this ‘Temple of Time’. The wooden temple was a temporary artwork where people could leave their pain. Best describes his work as “casting off the demons of pain, grief and sorrow.”⁶⁰ In a closing ritual, the temple was set on fire as a cathartic moment of letting go of pain and grief. The burning ceremony took place on 19 May 2019. The obvious intention of the maker was to provide room for the expressive functions of ritual. His hope was to create a space for healing. The ritual burning of the temple symbolizes closure: we leave our emotions behind and move on.

A flower garden, Project Grow Love, was planted just outside the school, symbolizing hope and new life. It was the result of an initiative by teacher Ronit Reoven, MSD student Gloria Gonzalez, and the Parkland tourism board. Once again, the perspective was on the future and on positivity.⁶¹

5. CONCLUSION

Rituals tend to restore feelings of control in challenging circumstances.⁶² By performing a ritual, the person is endeavoring to transcend from being a helpless victim to becoming an active agent in one’s own destiny. This thesis holds true for the perpetrator of a school shooting as well for the surviving community that has to cope with anxiety, feelings of insecurity, loss, and grief. The shooter transcends from a loner to a hero, at least in his own view. The community transcends from powerless victims to active agents who are grieving and protesting.

⁵⁹ <https://www.local10.com/news/2019/02/14/deerfield-beach-cleanup-held-in-honor-of-alyssa-alhadeff/> [last accessed 20 November 2019].

⁶⁰ <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/parkland/florida-school-shooting/fl-fea-temple-healing-parkland-artist-20190208-story.html> and <https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/david-best-is-a-burning-man/> [last accessed 27 January 2020].

⁶¹ <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/parkland/florida-school-shooting/fl-fea-memorial-garden-parkland-school-stoneman-douglas-20190114-story.html> and <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-47244098> [last accessed 20 November 2019].

⁶² NORTON & GINO: ‘Rituals alleviate grieving’.

Rituals provide a repertoire through which a person or group can cope with fear and uncertainty, trying to replace these negative sensations with inner peace. This coping function is dominant in the rituals following the Parkland shooting. Remembrance rituals like the vigil create a feeling of connectedness to a common and greater good, a sense of communion. They give people a way to express their feelings and empower the participants in their process. As Albertina Nugteren states, a dual layer of meaning can be discerned in these remembrance or memorial rituals: there is the public acknowledgment of what happened to the victims, in which a large group of sympathizers expresses sympathy with the small group of people directly involved.⁶³ It is a lamentation that shows the collective vulnerability. At the same time, looking at the protest rituals described above, as well as messages in cards and letters at the memorial sites, these rituals also express rebellion and resistance.

Putting the planning, preparation, and execution of school shootings into a ritual framework can shed light on the possible motives of these perpetrators. Like the rituals of remembrance and protest, the shooting itself is an enactment of meaning, following a traditional pattern and providing several ritual functions for the shooter.

The case of Parkland has been interpreted from the perspective of various theories, relying on data from an extensive web search. However, more research needs to be done, using bold yet careful empirical methods, to verify these interpretations. As we have seen in the Parkland case, ritual timing can be open to conflicting interpretations.

Clearly, we could not cover all the aspects of a shooting here. At least two more topics need further research. Firstly, we wonder whether the way media covers a school shooting (constant repetition, protocol, stylization) by which they provide an interpretation of the event contains patterns and details that could be seen as ritual-like. Secondly, it can be stated that school shootings generate an enormous amount of references in songs, movies, and literature, which come to the fore after every new case. We could ask if they receive ritual status and fulfill ritual functions. In any case, they give room to address feelings of anger and anxiety, and they give room for the eternal question: "Why?"

⁶³ POST [et al.]: *Disaster ritual* 145-156.

RITUALIZING AFTER THE TERROR ATTACKS IN NORWAY
ON 22 JULY 2011

LARS JOHAN DANBOLT & HANS STIFOSS-HANSSEN

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE DISASTER

On Friday, 22 July 2011 there were two terror attacks in a short space of time in and near Oslo. The thirty-two-year-old right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik first bombed the main government building in central Oslo at 3:25 p.m. He parked a van filled with homemade explosives at the main entrance. The explosion killed eight people, wounded around thirty, and caused serious damage to the building, including the Prime Minister's office. After this the terrorist drove thirty-eight km to Utøya, an island in Lake Tyrifjorden west of Oslo, owned by the Norwegian Labour Party's youth organization (AUF). The AUF regularly arrange their summer camps on this 120-acre island, where the participants stay in cabins or tents. A small ferry carries people the 550 metres between mainland and the island. The terrorist parked his car on the quay, and, disguised as a police officer and armed with a semi-automatic rifle and a pistol, he took the ferry to Utøya. At about 5:20 p.m. he started to kill the people at the summer camp. After seventy minutes he surrendered to the police. Sixty-nine people were killed, thirty-three of whom were under eighteen, while the two youngest victims were fourteen. More than two hundred were wounded. At that time there were 564 people on the island. Many of them hid outdoors, while many others swam over to the mainland or were rescued from the water by local people in pleasure boats. A medical and psycho-social rescue centre was established in a nearby hotel. Breivik was sentenced to the strictest punishment possible in Norway.¹ Many of the direct and indirect victims of

¹ A twenty-one-year sentence with detention, which means that the sentence can be extended after twenty-one years if he is still regarded as a threat, if necessary for the rest of his life.

the terror attack received long-term medical and psychological treatment and follow-up care.²

In this chapter, we will describe the substantial ritualizing that took place in Norway in the days following the terror attacks and discuss this from the perspectives of resilience and existential meaning making. Ritualizing refers to symbolic activities people engage in in order to make meaning, which are especially relevant in particularly challenging situations. Ritualizing is spontaneous for many people, but it is also related to symbols and traditions available in their cultural contexts, and often uses novel and creative ways to draw on different forms of subcultural expression, in this case related to Christian and social-democratic values.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE RITUAL PRACTICES AFTER THE TERROR ATTACKS IN OSLO AND UTØYA

The whole nation followed the drama in Oslo and Utøya on television. News channels started to broadcast images and messages about the events almost as soon as they started. In the evening, people started lighting candles in many places all over the country. Churches and other locations of symbolic value were opened to individual or collective ritualizing. During the following days, commemorations were arranged with candles and roses, silent marches and gatherings in public squares, churches and mosques. At noon the day after the killings, the government called for one minute's silence all over Norway in memory of the victims.

Political leaders and other leading figures in society took on roles of symbolic leadership for common values. These values were formulated as democracy, solidarity, openness and tolerance. The very first evening, on Friday 22 July, Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg spoke to the nation on television. He was the leader of the Labour Party and his office had also been bombed. His message was "No one can bomb us to silence, no one can shoot us to silence, no one can scare us from being Norway". The following day King Harald also spoke on television, emphasizing

² G. MÅNUM, M. LØVSTAD, K. WISLØFF-AASE, J. RAEDER, A.K. SCHANKE, I. LARSEN, G. DYB, Ø. EKEBERG & J.K. STANGHELE: 'Clinical characteristics and physical functioning in persons hospitalized following the Norwegian terror attacks in July 2011. A follow-up study', in *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine* 51/3 (2019) 225-233. Ø. SOLBERG, I. BLIX & T. HEIR: 'The aftermath of terrorism. Posttraumatic stress and functional impairment after the 2011 Oslo bombing', in *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (2015) 1156.

“we stand firm by our values”, which meant such values as a belief in freedom, an open democracy and a secure social life.

The following day, Sunday 24 July, most of the regular Sunday morning services in churches all over the country had ritual elements of commemoration. The service in Oslo Cathedral was adapted to become a television broadcast called “A Mass for Mourning and Hope”. The King, the government, members of parliament and representatives from various societal organizations were present. The Prime minister gave a speech, and the presiding bishop gave the sermon.³ The next day, Monday 25 July, about two hundred thousand people, many of them carrying a rose, gathered in the City Hall Square in Oslo. The Prime Minister and the Crown Prince gave speeches, and a large number of musicians and other artists performed.⁴ The Crown Prince’s phrase “tonight the streets are filled with love” was frequently quoted in contrast to the hateful acts of the terrorist. This outdoor spectacle was streamed on TV, and many thousands came together for local ritual gatherings in other towns.

A week after the attacks, on Friday 29 July, there was a memorial ceremony in one of the largest mosques in Oslo (Central Jamaat). The Prime Minister and the Church of Norway’s bishop of Oslo participated. In his address the bishop quoted a Norwegian poet: “Put your hand in my hand. Then we are strong together. Then we are weak together. Then we are together.” This was a typical way of underlining the value of being together across religious or other dividing lines in society. A strong ‘we’, togetherness and the common values of society were repeatedly expressed.

The day after, in the evening of Saturday 30 July, a memorial concert in Oslo Cathedral was broadcast on television; it included national leaders, religious leaders and various artists along with survivors, the bereaved and the general public. One month after the terror attacks, on Sunday 21 August, there was a ‘National Memorial Ceremony’ held in Oslo’s largest concert hall, Oslo Spektrum. A huge number of musicians, singers and actors participated. At this commemoration, prominent actors read the names of all seventy-seven victims while their pictures were shown on a large screen.⁵

³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNN2vuP2Nm0> [last accessed 20 July 2021; this goes for all Youtube links mentioned in this chapter].

⁴ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8ZwnNVXG6w>.

⁵ Recordings from the ceremony: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gvf8gd2kCDI>.

Also worthy of a mention here is the AUF memorial ceremony in Oslo Cathedral just before Christmas, on 22 December, five months after the terror attack. Well-known artists associated with the labour movement and a socialist choir participated.⁶ On this occasion, there were also speeches by the Prime Minister and a leading dean of the Church of Norway. There were readings from the Bible (1 Cor. 13) and songs from both church and Labour Party traditions. Labour leaders attended along with Utøya survivors and many other AUF members.

Oslo Cathedral became an important ritualizing space in the aftermath of 22 July as well as in the years to follow, as there were annual ceremonies involving national leaders, artists, clergy from the Church of Norway and representatives of other religions.⁷

2.1. Oslo Cathedral Square as a ritual space

Oslo Cathedral and its square became a main ritualizing place after the terror attack.⁸ The cathedral doors were open as early as Saturday 23 July for people who wanted to light candles, write small prayers or notes or just sit there in silence. About one hundred thousand people visited the cathedral during the first weekend. Within the month following the terror attacks, more than one million people had visited the cathedral, and an additional two to five hundred thousand came in the following months.⁹ The Cathedral Square turned into a sea of flowers with greetings in many of Norway's immigrant languages.

The existence of this square and other informal and easily accessible spaces across the country for immediate ritualizing obviously met a need in the population. For a long time after the attacks, but mostly in the first few weeks, individuals and groups came to the square, spent a few moments in solemn silence and laid down flowers, handwritten notes and sometimes teddy bears and then left. Some would also visit the Cathedral for more silence and to light candles. The sea of flowers and other memorial artefacts continued to increase to such an extent that Oslo City Council began carefully to reduce the amount. The 'sea of

⁶ Recording from the ceremony: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rGnhl6odQY>.

⁷ Recording from the ceremony: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-Ti1QBnc0I>.

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNcQeTetjIs>

⁹ <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kommentar/i/K3gO4/seremonimester-for-en-tung-tid> [last accessed 20 July 2021].

roses' in Oslo after 22 July 2011 functioned as a continuous and intense ritualization place, like a round-the-clock walk-through commemoration, open to anyone at any time. The rose is frequently used in Norway for greetings and celebrations, and it has a particular symbolic value as the symbol of the Labour Party, integrated in their logo.

A journalist in a leading Norwegian newspaper wrote in a later commentary: “When I came to the ‘Mass for Mourning and Hope’ on Sunday 24 July, there were thousands of people and a growing ocean of flowers outside the church. Inside was a weeping royal couple, a mourning government and exhausted AUF youth who spontaneously stood up to sing ‘*Til Ungdommen*’”.¹⁰ The song “*Til Ungdommen*” (“For the Youth”) was written by a Norwegian socialist poet during World War II, and the lyrics encourage fighting for freedom and democracy with human values as weapons. This song turned into a national 22 July hymn, and it was used in the ceremony on 24 July, in the National Memorial Ceremony on 21 August and in most of the other commemorations.¹¹

2.2. Who participated?

The sociologist of religion P.K. Botvar published a survey of the participants in the ritualizing and their characteristics.¹² The survey was conducted about four months after the events, and the results show that more than 60% of the population nationwide were involved in one or more ritual activity linked to the terror attacks.¹³ People were mobilized to take part through extensive news coverage, but for several of the

¹⁰ K.O. ÅMÅS: ‘Seremonimester for en tung tid’, in *Aftenposten*, 24 December 2011.

¹¹ The singer Sidsel Kyrkjebø performed “*Til Ungdommen*” at the National Memorial Ceremony one month after the terror attacks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKZa6hNFouw>.

¹² P.K. BOTVAR: ‘Folkets svar på terroren – sosiale, kulturelle og politiske aspekter ved massemonstringene’, in O. AAGEDAL, P.K. BOTVAR & I.M. Høeg (eds.): *Den offentlige sorgen. Markeringer, ritualer og religion etter 22 juli* (Oslo 2013) 26–46.

¹³ According to PETTERSSON: ‘The Estonia disaster (Sweden, 1994)’, in P. POST, R.L. GRIMES, A. NUGTEREN, P. PETTERSSON & H. ZONDAG (eds.): *Disaster ritual. Explorations of an emerging ritual repertoire* (Leuven 2003) 187–199), at least 27% of Swedes participated in ritualizing after the Estonia shipwreck in 1994, when 900 people died, 580 of whom were from Sweden. The difference in participation may be partly because of study methods, or a difference between the two countries, but one could also speculate whether the time lapse from 1994 to 2011 has seen an increase in popular disaster ritualization.

marches mobilization mainly took place via social media (Facebook). Much of the ritualizing had a semi-official or even spontaneous character.

The social distribution of the participants shows an interesting pattern, since it differs clearly from those who are normally active in civil society or voluntary work. It turned out that urban dwellers, low income groups, employees in the health and social sector, very young people (16-24 years old), and people over 60 were over-represented compared with the general population. The political profile of the participants was not representative either: those who voted for the Labour Party, the Liberal party and the Christian Democrats were overrepresented, whereas voters of the right-wing (anti-immigration) party and the Centre Party (Farmers' Party) were under-represented. In general, people with left-wing political sympathies were involved to a much greater extent than those with right-wing sympathies (market over state), and a similar pattern was seen with regard to attitudes to immigration. The fact that participants in ritualizations had a far more positive attitude to immigration than average can be seen as a negative mirroring of the aims of the terrorist, whose acts were explicitly intended as an attack on immigration policies.

Research has also revealed that there were individuals who did not feel that they were part of the collective mourning, that they were not emotionally affected by what had happened and declared that they were not engaged in rose marches and other ritual gatherings in squares or churches.¹⁴

2.3. The role of the clergy

Another aspect of the ritual practices was the involvement of clergy in various events. For example, in Bodø, a town in northern Norway, a huge number of young people were gathered for a national shooting competition. The leaders of this competition questioned whether it was appropriate for young people to compete in shooting right after so many young people had actually been shot to death. They consulted the local bishop, who then came to the opening ceremony of the shooting event and addressed the situation by encouraging the participants to take the opportunity to talk together. After this ritualistic way of opening the festival, the competitions could start.

¹⁴ L. GRØNSTAD: 'Atterhald ved minnemarkeringane. Når den offentlige sorga vert ekskluderande', in AAGEDAL, BØTVAR & HØEG: *Den Offentlige Sorgen*.

There was also an event in Molde in western Norway; here, the annual international jazz festival was taking place. According to the programme, there was to be a traditional jazz parade through the streets of the town on the last Saturday of the festival, which was the day after the terror attacks. The organizers found it problematic to have such a celebration in the middle of the national trauma, and the bishop was asked for advice. The solution was to turn the parade into a mourning jazz march through the streets. The bishop led the march accompanied by the festival leaders, and the march ended in the town cathedral where a concert was held and the bishop gave a speech. There are many other examples of how bishops or other clergy contributed and had symbolic ritual functions in different local and national events. Instead of cancelling events in culture, music and sports, the presence of the clergy helped the organizers go through with the event and at the same time pay their respect to the victims of the terror attacks.

2.4. The funeral ceremonies

The ritual context also includes all the funerals. They were naturally the subject of extensive media attention. Some of the funerals were cross-cultural events. One example is from Nesodden near Oslo, where an 18-year-old Utøya victim was buried. She was Norwegian but of Kurdish origin, and both a local priest from the (Lutheran) Church of Norway and an imam officiated. First there was a Christian ritual inside the church, and then a Muslim ritual in the cemetery. The funeral was held in Norwegian, Swedish, Kurdish and Arabic. On the coffin there was a Kurdish and a Norwegian flag. One of her friends who had survived the terror attack interpreted the ritualizing in this way: “It reflects multicultural Norway. At the same time, the two flags stood in opposition to the terrorist” (NRK/*Østlandssendingen*, 29 July 2011). The terrorist’s main aim was anti-multiculturalism.

The Norwegian Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities was contacted by the government as early as Saturday 23rd July for help in arranging a common memorial event across religious, life stance and cultural differences. The already mentioned rose commemoration in the City Hall Square on 25 July was such an inclusive event, as was the national memorial ceremony on 21 August.

The participants at the Utøya youth camp represented many different religions and worldviews, and terror ritualizing took place in many of

the minor religious communities, such as the Sikhs (who had two members who survived Utøya), the Buddhists (who lost one of their members in Utøya), the Baha'í society, the Jewish congregation, the Hindus, the Roman Catholics, the humanists and others. They sent their condolences to the AUF, commemorated the victims, and attended the more official public events.

3. RITUAL DYNAMICS: CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

As shown, the Church of Norway had a prominent ritual role after the terror attacks. 77% of the population belonged to this Lutheran church, which until 2017 was regarded by the Constitution as Norway's official religion (membership of the Church of Norway in 2019 was 70%). Other religions and life view organizations, such as Muslims, Catholics, Pentecostals, Buddhists and Humanists, count for about 1-3% each. However, the fastest growing group are the so-called 'nones', people who are not members of any registered religious or life stance community, counting more than 15%.

The Nordic countries are in many studies regarded as among the most secularized in the world.¹⁵ Nevertheless, a large majority of the Norwegian population has a rather strong sense of belonging to the Church of Norway or other religious institutions. Religion is more than a belief system and includes such elements as ritual practices, emotional experiences, values and functions. In this context, the increased collective and individual ritualizing following disasters and other deeply moving experiences is interesting. We understand this as an example of contemporary existential meaning making integrated in culture in ways that differ from past practices.¹⁶

¹⁵ That makes sense if the proof of secularity is the prevalence of regular religious attendance or reported faith in God. Only 15% of the Nordic population responded that they "know without any doubt that God exists" on the International Social Survey Programme 2008. However, when including responses on more open questions like "I believe in a higher power" or "I have some doubts, but still I feel like I believe in God", all together two-thirds of the Nordic populations are open to the existence of a supreme being. See P. LA COUR: 'Tro og alvorlig sykdom-om forskningen i nordisk kontekst', in DANBOLT [et al.]: *Religionspsykologi* (Oslo 2014) 315-326; U. SCHMIDT & P.K. BOTVAR (eds.): *Religion i dagens Norge. Mellom sekularisering og sakralisering* (Oslo 2010).

¹⁶ L.J. DANBOLT & H. STIFOSS-HANSEN: 'Ritual and recovery. Traditions in disaster ritualizing', in *Dialog* 56/4 (2017) 352-360.

If it is possible to talk about Nordic majority religiosity, we believe it can be regarded as event-related. For many people religion is not very prominent in their everyday lives, but when something deeply disturbing happens in life, an existential crisis might occur, making the need for meaning more intrusive. In a previous study of disaster ritualizing, a mother who had lost her teenage son in a van accident told us that before going to the scene of the accident, she went to the local church. She underlined that she was not religious, but nevertheless, she disclosed a strong need for existential ritualizing in the culturally sanctioned sanctuary for such practices.¹⁷

It can be argued that ritual meaning making does not contradict secularity. The sociologist Peter Berger regards religion as a human enterprise used for creating a holy cosmos in chaos.¹⁸ We find this to be a more fruitful approach than placing the sacred in opposition to the secular. People live their secular lives, and it is within the structures of secularity that there sometimes are intrusive needs of making sense of what happens and for establishing a holy cosmos in chaotic situations, as might be the case when disasters strike or life for other reasons takes an unexpected or undesired turn.

Further, the secular character of society, as we have seen, leads to secular public ritual practices. The commemoration in City Hall Square in Oslo on 25 July was staged as a huge cultural event with popular musicians and other artists as well as political and other leaders in society. However, both the typical secular and the more religious rituals shared common values and expressed an inclusive and comprehensive 'we'. Key political ideas such as democracy, freedom and openness went hand in hand with values from Christian traditions such as faith, hope and love. An understanding of the coming together and confirmation of our mutual humanity was also expressed and can be seen as a natural response to the inhuman terror. This was stated in many ways by leaders and commentators at different levels of society, as in the bishop's speech in the mosque referred to above. As a term to encompass various religious and secular ways of ritualizing, we understand this as 'existential

¹⁷ L.J. DANBOLT & H. STIFOSS-HANSEN: 'Public disaster ritual in the local community. A study of Norwegian cases', in *Journal of Ritual Studies* (2011) 25-36. DANBOLT & STIFOSS-HANSEN: 'Ritual and recovery'.

¹⁸ P.L. BERGER: *The sacred canopy. Elements of a sociological theory of religion* (Garden City, NY 1967).

ritualizing', which in this case means symbolic ways of making meaning and dealing with the impact of the terror attacks on individuals and society.

3.1. Meaning-making rituals

We understand ritualizing as symbolic activities that help us make meaning and order out of living.¹⁹ In the wake of a disastrous event such as the terror attacks in Norway in 2011, rituals and ritualizing activities help to contain and maintain our existence. In that perspective, rituals are of great significance for mental health and well-being. Valerie DeMarinis states: "To be deprived of these ritualizing activities is to experience a loss; if the deprivation continues and if new activities are not developed, mental distress occurs."²⁰ Ritualizing is existential and expresses meaning in relation to how life is experienced, how life should be, and fundamental values in the group concerned.²¹

As we have shown above, the ritualizing after 22 July had varied cultural references to Christianity, Islam, Humanism, the Labour Party and others, as well as to the nation as a whole. In the public ways of ritualizing, common values were central, and cultural expressions from different traditions that were found to harmonize well were used. Culture is represented in societies through institutions, artefacts and structures. On an individual level, culture includes such elements as beliefs, values, attitudes, systems of orientation and meaning making.²²

The ritualizing following the terror attacks had a strong impetus to maintain and sustain the basic values and structures of central ideas and institutions in society. In an interview, the bishops of the Church of Norway told us that they experienced what they called a "value congruence" in society during the first few weeks. Through their speeches, media interviews and participation in ritual practices, political and religious leaders expressed a strong 'we', based on common values and

¹⁹ V. DEMARINIS: 'Existential meaning-making and ritualizing for understanding mental health function in cultural context', in H. WESTERINK (ed.): *Constructs of meaning and religious transformation. Current issues in the psychology of religion* (Göttingen 2013) 207-221.

²⁰ DEMARINIS: 'Existential meaning-making and ritualizing' 211.

²¹ DEMARINIS: 'Existential meaning-making and ritualizing'.

²² A.J. MARSELLA: 'Culture and conflict. Understanding, negotiating, and reconciling conflicting constructions of reality', in *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29/6 (2005) 651-673.

ideas and maintained by a strong desire for mutual support and acceptance. ‘We’ are a small nation, the bishop of Oslo proclaimed at the opening of the service in the Cathedral on 24 July, and therefore “every fallen is a sibling and a friend”. Here he also referred to the nation’s most powerful history of trauma and resilience, World War 2. Many others spoke similar words, such as the Crown Prince’s phrase mentioned above: “Tonight the streets are filled with love”, meaning *our* streets, *our* love for each other, despite cultural or religious differences. This provided support to individuals, but also to the structures of society. One of the most famous popular songs in those days was “My little country” (“*Mitt lille land*”). The song’s message is that while there are not very many of us in our country, and our country is not very big, we belong to each other, and we stand together against all evil. In other words, the nation is a community where people are bound to each other, comforting and strengthening one another. This was very emotionally expressed through the extensive ritualizing during the first days after Utøya.

One may ask where the anger and hatred went in all these expressions of love and harmony. There was no articulated hatred of Breivik in the public rhetoric. However, the ideas of violent right-wing extremism were dispelled, and the core values and ideas of democracy and community were reinforced and clarified through the rhetoric and symbolic activities. Perhaps anger and hatred towards the perpetrator were expressed more indirectly by avoiding his name and trying to make him as small and insignificant, poor and invisible as possible. And perhaps the emotions towards Breivik and his crime were more like deep disgust and shame than actual anger and hatred. Such emotions are not often expressed ritually, and in Norway, following the 22 July killings, the focus of the ritualizing was on the victims, the bereaved and society at large. A statement typical of this was a message on Twitter that found its way into international media and a number of speeches the following days: “When one man could cause so much evil – think about how much love we can create together.”²³

When disastrous events occur, the strengths and sustainability of main cultures and subcultures are also tested, and values are negotiated and expressed in novel ways. The rituals that followed the 22 July terror attacks both expressed and helped to further develop basic values and meaning systems.

²³ Helle Hoås Gannestad on Twitter, 23 July 2011, 1:56 a.m.: <https://twitter.com/Uhellet/status/94556374469586944> [last accessed 20 July 2021].

3.2. Ritualizing as resilience

Although resilience was not explicitly measured in people involved in ritualizing after 22 July, it has been documented in medical research on the victims,²⁴ and we find it useful to understand the functional side of ritualizing in light of theories of resilience. The American Psychological Association has defined resilience as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of threat”.²⁵ Resilience can be understood as both process and result. Resilience as a result could, for example, be seen in an individual who recovers well and functions (more or less) symptom-free after a trauma where another possible result could have been post-traumatic stress disorder. A more process-oriented understanding of resilience emphasizes how a person adapts cognitively, emotionally, existentially and behaviourally to the stresses of adversity and trauma. Here, mental and other personal factors will determine the individual’s coping capacity.

However, resilience processes are also about the ability and opportunity to seek and receive social support, and about finding strength, hope and meaning in current or desired communities, structures and value systems. Ritual practices, such as those seen after 22 July, contain such traits of resilience.

A central human factor associated with resilience both as a process and as a result is the urge to seek meaning, which has been a major theme in religion, psychology and the human sciences. Based on the experience of concentration camps, Victor Frankl described the “will to meaning” as the most basic of human motives.²⁶ The relational, inter-connecting element is central to human formation of meaning.²⁷ Man seeks meaning, creates meaning and shares meaning in relational contexts, and central to this is trust and the need to belong. The sense that life is meaningful is thus a sense of connection and belonging, that life has meaning and that it is purposeful.

²⁴ M. LØVSTAD, G. MÅNUM, K. WISLØFF-AASE, G.S. HAFSTAD, J. RÆDER., I. LARSEN, J.K. STANGHELLE & A.K. SCHANKE: ‘Persons injured in the 2011 terror attacks in Norway. Relationship between post-traumatic stress symptoms, emotional distress, fatigue, sleep, and pain outcomes, and medical and psychosocial factors’, in *Disability and Rehabilitation* (2019) 1-9.

²⁵ AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION: *The road to resilience* (Washington, DC 2010).

²⁶ V.E. FRANKL: *Man’s search for meaning. The classic tribute to hope from the Holocaust* (London 2004). First published in English in 1956.

²⁷ R.F. BAUMEISTER: *Meanings of life* (New York 1991).

For many, a pervasive crisis or trauma experience will entail a breakdown of cognitive meaning structures. Many questions that arise may not find answers. However, in relationships and interaction structures, such as collective ritual events, an experience of meaning may still be possible, and resilience may be present. It may be helpful to be aware of elements and characteristics of rituals that are particularly relevant to the experience of meaning, and thus to resilience. The first days and weeks after the 22 July terror attacks were a period of liminality, which means that people's safe ground crumbled away; they were crossing an abyss, unsure if there was firm ground on the other side. A classic way of understanding rituals is to see them as helpful in making this transition.²⁸ In other words, one can see the time just after the disaster as chaos and the ritual as a means to meet the chaos and start a restoration of order, a cosmos, which for the ritual participants might be an important process of resilience.²⁹

3.3. Three examples of rituals after 22 July from functional perspectives

We will highlight three of the more formally conceived rituals following 22 July and examine how these memorial rituals can be said to contribute to individual and societal resilience: the Mass for Mourning and Hope in Oslo Cathedral on 24 July 2011, the National Memorial Ceremony in Oslo Spektrum on 21 August 2011, and the AUF Christmas ceremony in Oslo Cathedral on 22 December 2011.

How people who attended experienced these rituals has not been empirically investigated from a perspective of resilience. In the following we will reflect on the function of these rituals for the bereaved and survivors in light of knowledge about disaster ritualizing. Our data sources are video recordings, our own participation and media reports. The ceremonies in the Cathedral (24 July 2011) and in the concert hall (21 August 2011) were broadcast live on TV, and the media component of the ritualizing after 22 July is an important part of the collective ritualization. The media expanded the space and the function of rituals to include a television audience. Of course, there is a big difference between a ritual experience via media and being present, and the importance of these rituals for television viewers is an interesting field to be studied.

²⁸ V. TURNER: *The ritual process. Structure and anti-structure* (Chicago 1969).

²⁹ T. DRIVER: *Liberating rites. Understanding the transformative power of rituals* (New York 2006). BERGER: *The sacred canopy*.

Previous research in rituals after trauma and disasters points to the importance of giving those involved room for empathy, participation and meaning formation,³⁰ the value of visual and sensual content,³¹ and the significance of individualized remembrance activities such as lighting candles, reading names and performing symbolic actions.³²

A very important feature of the National Memorial Ceremony (21 August 2011) was the reading of the names of the deceased, performed by five professional actors, tightly directed. Research shows that name reading combined with lighting candles (or perhaps other symbolic activities) is considered very important by the bereaved.³³ None of the rituals had this combination of name reading and candle lighting. However, in both of his speeches in Oslo Cathedral, the prime minister mentioned some victims of the terror attacks by name, thus emphasizing some individuals and allowing them to represent the dead.

The structure of the two rituals in Oslo Cathedral (24 August and 22 December) allowed for individual activities for all those present, including informal and spontaneous interactions. During some of the ritual elements, people were allowed to walk around in the Cathedral, embrace each other and light candles. In the Mass in the Cathedral on 24 July many people also took Holy Communion. We consider such bodily ritual dimensions to be of great importance for coping.³⁴ Both ceremonies in the Cathedral contained many observable expressions of fellowship and community. The National Memorial Ceremony (21 August) had no opportunities for bodily participation or singing for those present. All roles were taken care of by professionals and national leaders. In another study we have conducted on disaster ritualizing, a bereaved person described the meaning of lighting candles as follows: "For me, to light a candle for someone is a positive act, a hope, something you want for someone."³⁵

³⁰ D.J. DAVIES: 'Health, morality and sacrifice. The sociology of disasters', in R.K. FENN (ed.): *The Blackwell companion to sociology of religion* (Oxford 2001) 404-417.

³¹ R.N. MCCAULEY & E.T. LAWSON: *Bringing ritual to mind. Psychological foundations of culture forms* (New York 2002).

³² R. GRIMES: *Deeply into the bone. Re-inventing rites of passage* (New York 2002). E.S. ZINNER & E.B. WILLIAMS: *When a community weeps. Case studies in group survivorship* (New York 1999). DANBOLT & STIFOSS-HANSEN: 'Public disaster ritual in the local community'.

³³ L.J. DANBOLT & H. STIFOSS-HANSEN: *Gråte min sang – minnegudstjenester etter store ulykker og katastrofer* (Kristiansand 2007).

³⁴ See, for example, GRIMES: *Deeply into the bone*.

³⁵ DANBOLT & STIFOSS-HANSEN: *Gråte min sang* 144.

An element of participation also includes the roles of persons who represented those present, such as survivors, the bereaved and members of the Labour Party. In both of the ceremonies in the Cathedral, an Utøya survivor read a text or had other ritualistic roles.

All the rituals contained beautiful impressions for the senses, something to look at and listen to. Visually, this was taken care of in the Cathedral by the interior being filled with art and symbolic artefacts, and in Oslo Spektrum through visual instruments in light and scenography. All the rituals also contained elaborate musical expressions, drawing on several cultural traditions. The phrase ‘sensory pageantry’ by Robert McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson seems to fit well: it denotes the rituals for the great or dramatic, as well as the rare, occasions.³⁶ These occasions require more of visual and motor elements; the ritual purpose must be expressed with much more than words in order to function. This is also confirmed in other studies we have conducted on disaster ritualizing where many participants mainly remember sensory impressions and actions such as lighting of candles and reading of names of the deceased, and they attach significant effects on resilience to these rituals.³⁷

These examples show the importance of active involvement on the part of those present, the value of not merely being spectators to a ritual, but being involved bodily, emotionally and cognitively. In other words, rituals are most fruitful when they allow the affected person to experience being an actor, and preferably also helping to design the ritual expression or giving it a personal touch. Most of the ritualizing after 22 July did not just turn those present into spectators, such as at a regular theatre performance or concert. This might suggest that those involved in ritualizing experienced emotional coping and existential meaning making and felt strengthened, which are significant features of resilience processes.

There is good reason to refer to bodily participation, which corresponds to the bodily experience of trauma. The physicality of the ritualizing can probably to some extent accommodate this.³⁸ Millions of candles were lit by people in Norway after 22 July. However, one cultural context that most Norwegians are familiar with is lighting candles in

³⁶ MCCAULEY & LAWSON: *Bringing ritual to mind*.

³⁷ DANBOLT & STIFOSS-HANSEN: *Gråte min sang*; DANBOLT & STIFOSS-HANSEN: ‘Ritual and recovery’.

³⁸ STIFOSS-HANSEN & DANBOLT: ‘The dead and the numb body. Disaster and ritual memory’, in A. MICHAELS & M. BERGUNDER (eds.): *Ritual dynamics and the science of ritual. Body, performance, agency, and experience 2* (Wiesbaden 2010).

serious life contexts, such as on a grave. This is a ritual practice that has been increasing in Norway in recent decades.³⁹

3.4. Existential ritualizing

Ritual resilience is found in both individuals and communities and is an existential and emotional process, which is energized by the interaction between personal experiences and collective expressions, traditions and values. The powerful ritualizing after 22 July 2011 demonstrates how different traditions and subcultures provide emotional support and existential meaning making for individuals, society and different groups deeply affected by the terror events.

In terms of the substantial ritualizing as a meaning-making process, it seemed useful and important to the individuals involved to maintain their well-being and to uphold the psychosocial structure of the cultural context.⁴⁰ Such activities seem decisive for people to cope after trauma. We have tried to show how meaning making has been affected, but also how ritualizing has helped to mobilize resources to address mental pain. Valerie DeMarinis points out the risk of how secularization, to the extent that it even includes the loss of the capacity to ritualize, may leave people vulnerable to mental distress. Our examples from the ritualizing following the killings in Oslo and Utøya in 2011 may indicate that people's abilities and motivation to ritualize do not necessarily follow the common parameters of secularization, but continue to operate in cultural knowledge and artefacts.

³⁹ H. STIFOSS-HANSEN: 'Norge. Det religiøse kartet og religionspsykologiens bidrag', in *Religionspsykologi* (2014) 33-41.

⁴⁰ DEMARINIS: 'Existential meaning-making and ritualizing'.

‘REFUGEE RITUAL’: RITUAL PRACTICES IN CONNECTION WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN REFUGEE CRISIS

PAUL POST

1. CONTEXT

The global refugee crisis is a striking illustration of the changing views on what constitutes a disaster, as discussed in the introduction to this handbook.¹ Parameters that previously seemed to have a rather distinctive value (e.g., a sudden event and its large societal impact, nature or man-made) have now faded. People flee countries because of man-made tragedies (e.g., war, violence, persecution), natural factors (disasters, drought, and hunger), or a combination of the two. The refugee crisis is also a layered crisis; it is a slow disaster of a general and global nature that simultaneously consists of a series of tragic specific events with specific impact. The refugee crisis is an example of an ongoing tragedy in terms of rituals during, rather than after, disasters. In this chapter, I focus on the crisis in the Mediterranean region that refugees, mostly from Africa, are trying to reach.

Since 1985, the Schengen Convention has guaranteed open borders within the European Union, but keeps the external borders closed, prompting the term ‘Fortress Europe’. For decades, refugees, predominantly African, have been trying to enter this fort. There are a number of inflow routes that are popular via rumors or depending on political, economic, and military circumstances. There is the western route to Spain, often from Morocco. There is the route from Libya to Italy via

¹ This chapter is based on my longstanding research project ‘The Lampedusa Project’ on refugee rituals. This chapter includes parts of earlier publications on refugee rituals, esp. P. POST: ‘The Lampedusa tragedy. Chronicles of absent and emerging ritual repertoires’, in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek/Yearbook for Liturgical and Ritual Studies* 31 (2015) 19-43; P. POST: ‘Refugee rituals. Exploring ritual repertoire of victimhood’, in M. HOONDEERT, P. MUTSAERS & W. ARFMAN (eds.): *Cultural practices of victimhood* (London/New York 2018[2019]) (Series: Victims, Culture and Society) 55-80. Elements of refugee rituals are separately addressed in my chapter on relics in Part III of this handbook.

the tiny island of Lampedusa under Sicily, an important hub that symbolizes the tragedies that take place in the Mediterranean on overcrowded boats. In the east, there is the route via Greece and the Balkans, and also via Turkey, although that route is now largely blocked as a result of the so-called ‘Turkey deal’ from 2016. Notorious are the overcrowded Greek camps, especially on the island of Lesbos.

On these routes we see a continuous flow of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, East African countries such as Ethiopia and Eritrea, and, increasingly, West African countries like Mali. It has been documented that the routes are largely in the hands of criminals and trafficking organizations that earn a lot of money. Figures collected by the UN/ UNHCR, IOM (International Organization for Migration), the EU, and various aid organizations provide a general picture of the number of refugee victims, but are nevertheless estimations.² Many shipwrecks and drownings remained undocumented. According to UNHCR data, drownings have increased in recent decades – more than 30,000 since 1993.³

With respect to refugee terminology, I do not use strict, carefully defined descriptions but employ the general terms ‘refugees’ and ‘migrants’. I thereby do not include all kinds of formal, legal, political, or statistical (i.e., who counts as a refugee and who does not) aspects of various labels given to this group (cf. terms like illegal immigrants, illegalized refugee/immigrant,⁴ economic/undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons [IDPs], stateless people, forced migration, forced displacement, etc.). When it comes to the Mediterranean border area, I also employ ‘boat refugees’ and ‘border deaths’ (to describe victims).⁵

² Cf. the statistics of the UNHCR, <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>> [accessed March 2019], especially the Missing Migrants Project of the IOM (International Organization for Migration): <<https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean>> [accessed August 2019] as well as the monthly update by the IOM: <<https://migration.iom.int/europe?type=arrivals>>. On counting and documenting refugees (victims), see our contribution in Part III.

³ Cf. <https://helprefugees.org/refugees-statistics/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIzMOnhc7f5AIVQ5nVCh24HAbOEAAAYAiAAEgLvOPD_BwE> [accessed September 2019].

⁴ Cf. H. BAUDER: ‘Why we should use the term ‘Illegalized’ refugee or immigrant. A commentary’, in *International Journal of Refugee Law* 26/3 (2014) 327-332.

⁵ For various definitions, see <<http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/campaigns/refugee-campaign/working-with-the-list-of-deaths/>>; <<http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview>> [both accessed May 2015]. Cf. <<https://migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/europe>> [accessed September 2019].

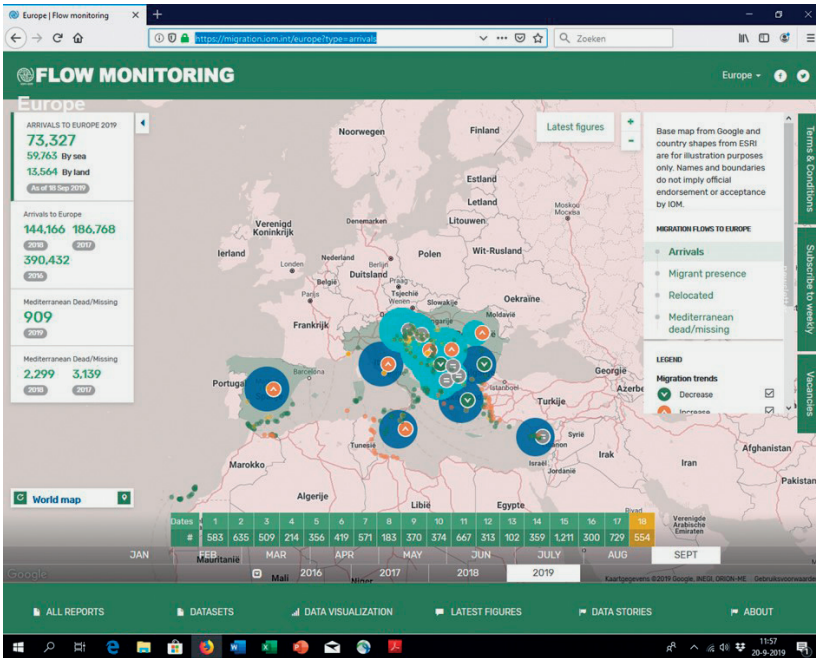


Figure 16.1: Screenshot monthly overview refugees flows in Europe by the IOM (September 2019).

In this chapter, I explore rituals connected to the refugee flow in Europe (with the aforementioned focus on the Mediterranean) from a Dutch perspective. However, the repertoire of the rituals, as we will see, always has an international dimension.

We can distinguish two categories of refugee rituals: rituals *of* refugees and *for* refugees. The first category is directly connected with the individual refugee or group; the flight; the journey, its departure and arrival – in any form whatsoever. That journey often ends abruptly with a shipwreck or detention in a camp. Sometimes there are death rites and a grave, but often these are lacking, and that gap is filled with vicarious or replacement ritual, a memorial, or a small monument. A second category of rituals concerns collective rituals for refugees in a general sense. These aim to commemorate dead refugees at large or draw attention to the overall refugee crisis itself. This is a ritual for refugees in which refugees sometimes participate; in that respect, a ritual for refugees is also a ritual of refugees.

Numerous dimensions are involved in this twofold repertoire of refugee rituals: there are individual rituals (see the first category) or more collective rituals (predominant in the second category). The rituals express salvation, coping, hope, protest, anger, shame, and commemoration. As a general framework for the presentation of these refugee rituals, I use the time factor – the moment that forms the occasion and basis for ritual action. With rituals *of* refugees, it is the course of the flight/the journey, and with rituals for refugees, the moments that raise ritual attention to the refugee crisis: dramatic events that make an impression through the media or certain moments on the annual calendar.

In refugee ritual tensions, conflicts and contestations play a major role and have a direct or indirect impact on the rituals. The refugee crisis has been highly politicized. ‘Politicized’ is a designation that, in the case of the Mediterranean, is overly concerned with only the specific European context of asylum procedures, illegality, and debates on migration and multiculturalism; in short, the region of arrival and not the context of the home region from which the flight started.⁶

2. RITUALS OF REFUGEES: RITUAL ON THE RUN⁷

Through all sorts of indirect and direct sources (reports, conversations, interviews by and with refugees), we can get a picture of the rituals *en route*, the practices during the long flight under harsh conditions. The departure is often dramatized with all kinds of ritual actions: saying goodbye to family/neighbors/the community, salvation and blessings in many forms, wishes for a good journey.⁸ Gifts for the journey may include food and drink, money, photos, books, amulets, mascots, jewelry, a Bible, or a Quran. Yet that is often an idealized image because the departure is kept secret in many cases. Young people or fathers with or without children leave without saying goodbye (from fear of being discovered by authorities).

⁶ L. POLMAN: *Niemand wil ze hebben. Europa en zijn vluchtelingen* (Amsterdam 2019); on the politicization of the immigration debate in the Netherlands and the framing role assumed by the media, see N. VAN HAREN, I. WIERSTRA & T. VAN MEIJL: ‘The politicization of the immigration debate in the Netherlands. Boat refugees and the possible solution of border control’, in *Anthropos* 114/1 (2019) 157-168.

⁷ See the cycle described in POST: ‘Refugee rituals’.

⁸ Cf. B. GROEN: *Streifzüge und Reisesegen* (Graz 2018).

Next there is what we can call travel ritual. This sub-repertoire consists of small daily routines to cope with being away from home and family and to find support during hardships along the way. We are also aware of rituals in which refugees are not the actors but the victims. Boat refugees, in particular, are confronted with ‘magical’ sacrificial practices, called ‘voodoo rituals’, which traffickers use to counter setbacks. Women in particular are thrown into the sea to please evil spirits. Such practices are widely documented by survivors but rarely or never followed by prosecutions, let alone convictions.⁹

The most important and most dangerous route to Fortress Europe is by sea. From Libya, but also Turkey, Egypt, and Morocco, people often travel guided by ferocious traffickers in rubber boats. That trip, where the small island of Lampedusa is an important hub, often ends with a shipwreck and drowning. Many of those disasters remain unknown and undocumented. Sometimes such a disaster may attract media attention, especially in the case of a large death toll.

In October 2013, a crowded boat capsized just off the coast of Lampedusa. 366 bodies were brought ashore by the coast guard. This disaster made a big impression in Italy and Europe.¹⁰ A daily practice suddenly became visible through 366 coffins, including small white ones, numbered with no names, containing the bodies of children and babies. There was a plan for a national funeral, but it turned out to be an empty promise by the national Italian authorities; there was a memorial service in Agrigento without survivors; and the dead, mostly from Eritrea and Ethiopia, were buried under numbers across Sicily. This could be considered a form of absent ritual for the collective of dead refugees. Parades and commemorations for the victims occurred on Lampedusa itself and with candle vigils in many cities in Europe where refugees have settled. These were mainly rituals of compassion and protest.

Another striking moment was the shipwreck of the boat known as *Barca Nostra*.¹¹ On 18 April 2015, this boat sank around 700 refugees off the Libyan coast after a collision with a large ship. In this case, the Italian Navy localized the wreck and decided to salvage the boat. That

⁹ See POST: ‘The Lampedusa tragedy’ 43, note 64; POST: ‘Refugee rituals’, 61s.; A. DOLS GARCÍA: *Voodoo, witchcraft and human trafficking in Europe* (= New issues in refugee research, research paper no. 263) (UNHCR Geneva October 2013).

¹⁰ See the description in POST: ‘The Lampedusa tragedy’ sub 2.3 and 2.4, 27-30.

¹¹ POST: ‘Refugee rituals’, 64. See also the contribution on Relics in Part III.

became a very expensive operation. 675 bodies were counted in and around the ship, which was transported to the naval base in Augusta, Sicily. People tried to identify the bodies using DNA. Eventually these bodies too were buried mainly in Sicily. The wreck figured as an art object at the 2019 Venice Biennale.

Later that year, the drowned refugee was given a face through the photo of the little boy Alan Kurdi from Kurdish Kobani. His dead body in a red shirt and blue shorts washed ashore on the beach at Bodrun on 2 September 2015. It made a deep impression worldwide and gave rise to global outrage, protest, and memorial rites.¹² Alan's dead body returned to his birthplace and was buried in Kobani with his brother and mother.

Along the coasts of Europe, the bodies of refugees regularly wash ashore due to sea currents. Sometimes they are commemorated and buried with rituals or a monument is erected. In southern Tunisia near the city of Zarzis, the bodies are buried by volunteers in a former landfill outside of the city. Local citizens would like to do more (e.g., identify the bodies through DNA or set up a worthy burial ground) but they lack resources and the support of local authorities.¹³

These dramatic events mainly show absent ritual; the dead are not surrounded with death rites and receive an anonymous grave often under a number.¹⁴ Sometimes locals organize a ritual farewell, but the journey usually ends in the silence of absent rites. However, iconic events such as the aforementioned two disasters and Alan Kurdi washed ashore prompted a collective ritual of commemoration and protest. We will discuss that ritual in the second category of refugee rituals.

We now complete the first type of refugee rituals. The journey can take many forms and may end in drowning and death, but many reach Europe. People often end up in a camp for a period of time – a long one in Greece, for example, where the present circumstances are very bad (Medio 2020). One can end up in an asylum procedure and be eligible for admission to a European country or be sent back, usually not to the country of origin but a refugee camp in a transit country such as Turkey

¹² Cf. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Alan_Kurdi> [accessed November 2018]; in the media the child is often erroneously named Aylan, a Turkish name similar to the Kurdish Alan.

¹³ See the efforts of the Foundation Drowned Migrant Cemetery, <<https://www.stichting-dmc.nl/en/about>> [accessed September 2019].

¹⁴ P. POST & M. HOONDEERT (eds.): *Absent ritual. Exploring the ambivalence and dynamics of rituals* (= Ritual Studies Monographs) (Durham NC 2019).

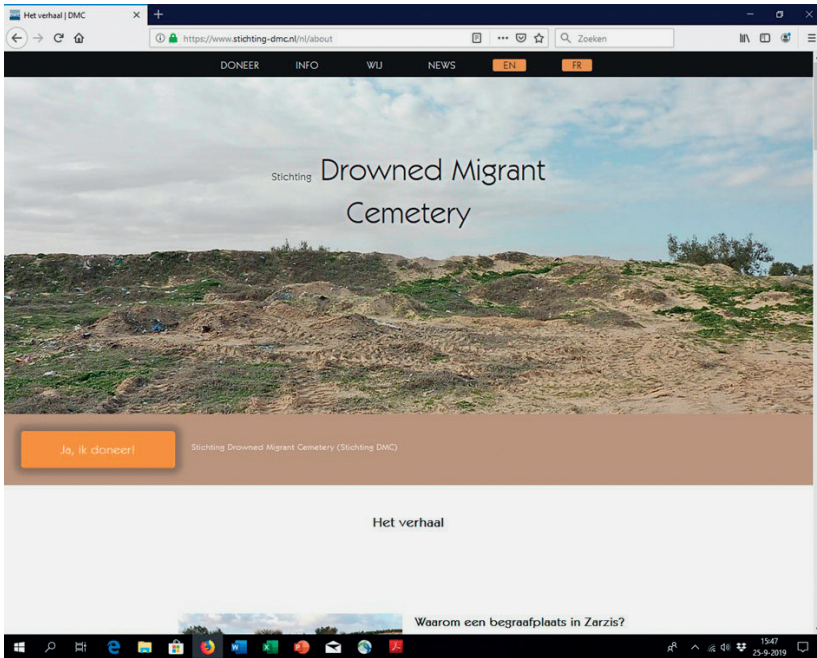


Figure 16.2: Screen shot Foundation Drowned Migrant Cemetery in Zarzis, Tunisia, September 2019).

or Libya. In other cases, the refugee travels illegally on his own to a large city in Europe where family and friends have already found a place. Many camp on the French or Belgian coast hoping to illegally grasp the opportunity to cross the Channel to reach England. The despair of the refugees is evident in the fact that some people try to do that on a small boat or even by swimming. The busy shipping route and strong current definitely make that an impossible mission.

All these variants of arrival and transit have their own rituals. Life in a refugee camp has been described as a ritual, a liminal stay.¹⁵ Isabella Alexander's concept of 'borderland' is of analytical value as well.¹⁶

¹⁵ Cf. the theater project by Zlatko ČOŠIĆ: *Liminal Rituals of Refugees* <<https://www.com/161774183>> (seen June 2017).

¹⁶ I. ALEXANDER: *'Burning' at the EU borders. Liminality, belonging, and Morocco's new migrant class* (PhD diss., Emory University 2016) <<http://www.theburning.org/TEAM.php>> [accessed June 2017]; cf. POST: 'Refugee rituals' 74.

Remarkably, religious ritual also seeks its own visible place in these situations. The 'Jungle' at Calais, a provisional illegal camp of refugees (that existed at varying locations and to varying extents from 2002 to 2016) had several 'churches'. Daniela Stauffacher wrote an interesting study about space, ritual, and religion in the 'Jungle'.¹⁷ In cities, refugees connect with existing migrant churches, are welcomed by local congregations offering ritual hospitality, or set up temporary places for ritual meetings in which they often have online contact with celebrations in their country of origin. These ritual places and gatherings are extremely fluid; they come and go.

The situation of the refugee who has arrived in Europe can in many cases become hopeless. Obtaining asylum and a residence permit is a long journey with many bureaucratic procedures. A long stay in a series of reception centers can lead to deep hopelessness and despair without family, the prospect of work, or a proper home. This is sometimes a catalyst for self-immolation, an act with a ritual dimension.¹⁸ In April 2011, when 36-year-old Iranian refugee Kambiz Roustayi heard that his asylum application had been rejected in the Netherlands and he was in danger of expulsion, he set himself on fire in Dam Square in Amsterdam and died. This was one migrant's act in a long series of self-immolations around the world.¹⁹ Self-immolation has a long tradition as an act of despair and protest in the public domain that is also religiously and ritually rooted. The Asian context, India in particular, is often mentioned, but we also see many European examples. Iconic was the 1969 self-immolation of the student Jan Palach in Prague when Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Warsaw pact troops after the Prague Spring of 1968. Self-immolation as ritual suicide has a long and complex history. Following a tradition of devotion and imitation (e.g., the suffering and death of Christ), this is an act in which martyrdom (refer to the sacrificial connotation of the English term *immolation*) is united with an expression of despair and protest.

¹⁷ D. STAUFFACHER: *'In this place we are very far away from God.'* *Raum und Religion im Jungle von Calais* (CULTuREL 8 Zürich 2018).

¹⁸ See the overview in <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-immolation>>. Cf. the list of self-immolations at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_self-immolations> [accessed September 2019].

¹⁹ Without much effort I was able to find self-immolations by refugees and migrants in the Netherlands in 2003, 2011, 2013, 2016.

A final component of a ritual focused on the individual refugee is its therapeutic potential. Many refugees are traumatized by the situation they fled and the journey ahead of them. From ca. 1980 onwards, mourning rituals have been used to treat trauma.²⁰

3. RITUALS FOR REFUGEES

A second category of collective refugee rituals are focused on and performed for refugees as an act of commemoration and compassion. Here we can distinguish between event-related and calendar-related practices.

3.1. Event-related practices

In direct connection with the examples of events outlined above (shipping disasters, bodies washed ashore, self-immolation), we see international collective rituals to express a variety of emotions: compassion, anger, and protest linked to the need not to forget these refugees. We often see grassroots rituals with a dominant memorial character such as the well-known silent procession or candle vigil. For example, after the aforementioned shipwreck at Lampedusa in 2013, the Eritrean communities organized candlelight services in Örebro, Jöngköping, Bergen, Lund, Copenhagen, Älmhult, Trondheim, Malmö, Gothenburg, Kassel, Hamburg, Manchester, Toronto, Tel Aviv, Giessen, and many other cities in the UK, Germany, Scandinavia, Israel, the USA, Italy, France, and Egypt.

These event-related memorial rituals are then detached from the tragic events and develop into more general refugee memorials. The performances are very diverse. In ritual practices, evocative material culture and the remains of the refugee and her/his journey often play an important role. I will return to this in the chapter on ‘relics’.²¹ Here I only address the shipwrecks, clothing and life jackets, objects left behind, and the search for documentation about the dead.

We see forms of commemorative ritual all throughout the Mediterranean to overcome the absence of rites and names while enabling collective expression of compassion and protest. In liturgical material

²⁰ POST: ‘Refugee rituals’ 77 with lit.

²¹ See Part III.



Figure 16.3: “To remember all migrants lost in the Evros border”, memorial fountain in the village of Provatonas in the Evros region, Greece, in August 2011 (photograph: CCME/GECCA/ProAsyl).



Figure 16.4: Cemetery of illegal immigrants, Evros region Greece (photograph: CCME/GECCA/ProAsyl).



Figure 16.5: The fence of an informal cemetery at the Greek-Turkish border. An unknown number of nameless victims who died in the river Evros that marks the border are buried here (photograph: CCME/GECCA/ProAsyl).

presented by churches to celebrate World Refugee Day, we see photos of various grassroots memorials.²² Small monuments may be provisional and temporary or permanent.

On Lampedusa there is a large gate, in the tradition of triumphal arches and city gates, that adorns the coast as ‘the gateway to Europe’. The gate is a work by Mimmo Paladino called *Porta di Lampedusa – Porta d’Europa*. The remains of various possessions of migrants are fastened to the ceramic material on the gate.²³ Another ritual is the founding of a garden and the planting of trees. After both the 2013 and 2015 maritime disasters, there were plans for a *Giardino della memoria*. One actually opened in Lampedusa in 2013, and there is still a plan for another in Augusta, Sicily.²⁴ Similar memorial gardens are also in other locations, such as Westouter (Belgium).²⁵

²² Cf. the brochure as PDF via Kirchenasyl.de: *Day of intercession in memory of those who have lost their lives at the borders of the EU. Information, Intercessions and Ideas* (2016) published by Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum [accessed December 2019].

²³ POST: ‘The Lampedusa tragedy’ 30.

²⁴ POST: ‘The Lampedusa tragedy’ 30 with literature on memorial trees, forests, and gardens in note 30.

²⁵ <www.11novtuin.org> [accessed December 2019].

These memorial rituals often involve art projects with a strong dimension of action, in which refugees themselves are personally involved. For examples, I refer again to the contribution about relics and briefly mention photo and film projects, literature, and the visual arts.²⁶

3.2. Calendar-related practices

Another set of rituals for victims of the refugee crisis is independent of dramatic events but connected to existing memorial moments on the annual calendar. In the cycle of the year, there is a series of special moments to give refugees special attention and commemorate victims:

3.3. Special days for refugees and migrants

The oldest is the *World Day of Migrants and Refugees* established in 1914 by Pope Pius X. It was usually situated on the second Sunday after Epiphany in January. In 2018, Pope Francis moved the date to the last Sunday of September. The Roman Catholic Church pays attention to migrants and refugees in the liturgy and through all kinds of actions outside the church. The refugee situation in the Mediterranean region has been a topical theme for this Day for years. Pope Francis calls attention to the refugee crisis on many occasions. For example, he made a special ‘pilgrimage’ to Lampedusa in 2013 to demonstrate his solidarity with refugees.²⁷

18 December, since 1997, is the *International Migrants Day*. This day is focused on migrant workers and their families. *World Refugee Day*, 20 June, was set in 2000 by the General Assembly of the UN. The UNHCR designates a theme for the Day. In 2001 it was ‘Respect’, and in 2019, ‘Take a step on World Refugee Day’. Its aim is to organize worldwide events “in order to draw public attention to the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide who have been forced to flee their homes due to war, conflict, and persecution”.²⁸ This Day was internationally widely implemented, especially in liturgical material in multiple languages by church organizations such as the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Churches’ Commission for Migrants in

²⁶ See the overview in POST: ‘The Lampedusa tragedy’ 31-33.

²⁷ See the report in POST: ‘The Lampedusa tragedy’ 77.

²⁸ Cf. <<https://www.unhcr.org/refugeeday/>> (accessed September 2019).

Europe (CCME).²⁹ In the Netherlands, this Day is rooted through initiatives by all kinds of groups and organizations – local, regional, and national. Some initiatives return annually, others are ad hoc. For example, in 2019 there was a nationwide campaign “have a cup of coffee together” (*samen een bakkie doen*), in which refugees offered cups of coffee to passersby in the street to start a conversation and call attention to nearby refugees. The annual Night of the Refugee is a recurring, 40-km sponsored walk in various provinces organized by *Stichting Vluchteling* (Refugee Foundation) since 2010. In 2019, 5700 people participated. The walk is always from Saturday to Sunday around the World Day of Refugees on 20 June and starts at midnight. In addition, there are smaller versions of 10 and 20 km.

In 2019, there was a fierce debate about one of those walks during the Night of the Refugee. A route was planned from Westerbork to Groningen starting at Camp Westerbork Memorial Center, an important national memorial site for victims of World War II and the Holocaust.³⁰ Westerbork was a transit camp for Jews who were deported from the Netherlands to concentration camps. There was fierce protest from Jewish organizations and individuals against this initiative. The fact that Camp Westerbork was built just before World War II to accommodate Jews who had fled from Germany did not convince the opponents. In their opinion, the link to the current refugee issues would evaporate the memory of the Holocaust. The escalating atmosphere around this issue became very unpleasant, the camp director and staff members felt threatened, and the walk was canceled.

3.4. Linking up to existing moments in the year

In addition to these special refugee days, rituals connect with existing moments on the annual calendar; more specifically, All Souls’ Day and 4 May, when the dead in the Netherlands are commemorated.

All Souls’ Day was originally the day when the dead were commemorated by the Catholic Church, the day after All Saints’ Day, 2 November.

²⁹ Cf., mentioned in note 22, the brochure *Day of intercession in memory of those who have lost their lives at the borders of the EU. Information, Intercessions and Ideas* (2016) published by Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum.

³⁰ <<https://kampwesterbork.nl/>> [accessed September 2019].

In the Netherlands, this day has shown remarkable development in terms of commemorating the dead in the (semi-)public domain. A wide range of collective secular commemorative rituals has emerged – often in and around cemeteries and crematoriums – from local groups or funeral directors.³¹ As such, All Souls' Day has also been appropriated to commemorate refugees for several years. Border deaths in and around the Mediterranean were an important rationale here. Some church organizations in particular regarded All Souls' Day as a good opportunity to commemorate refugees in addition to 20 June. Since 2016/2017, Amsterdam has held the annual national All Souls' Day Refugees Commemoration (*Allerzielenherdenking Vluchtelingen*), an ecumenical initiative of *Wereldhuis* (World House) of the Amsterdam Protestant Charity, Church in Action, the Catholic Worker Amsterdam, Justice and Peace and refugee foundations such as *Welkom hier* (Welcome here). A permanent location for the annual national All Souls' Day Refugees Commemoration in Amsterdam is the Mozes and Aaron church and the jetty at the Hermitage. In 2018, the commemoration was specifically for "refugee victims on European borders". This Amsterdam initiative started locally and developed into a national commemoration; a website lists all places where commemorations are organized.³²

A second national moment where the dead are commemorated in the Netherlands is the National Remembrance Day on 4 May. The original focus was on the dead of World War II, which was later extended to victims of war situations and peacekeeping missions.³³

The central ritual is the national commemoration at Dam Square in Amsterdam, but there are commemorative rites throughout the country (e.g., meetings, wreath layings, silent processions, ringing bells, and a moment of silence). In recent years, there have been initiatives to integrate 'forgotten groups' into the 4 May Remembrance Day rituals.

³¹ There is a lot of research available regarding the transformation of All Souls' Day in the Netherlands; I only mention: W. ARFMANN: *Ritual dynamics in late modernity. The case of the emerging field of collective commemoration* (PhD diss., Tilburg University 2014); M. HOONDERT: 'Vicarious ritual. Requiem concerts as vicarious All Souls' Day ritual', in POST & HOONDERT: *Absent ritual* 167-186 with lit. in notes 17-19; E. VENBRUX: 'New identity of All Souls' Day celebrations in the Netherlands. Extra-ecclesiastic commemoration of the dead, art, and religiosity', in D. DAVIES & CH.W. PARK (eds.): *Emotion, identity and death. Mortality across disciplines* (Farnham 2012) 161-173.

³² <www.allerzielen.eu> [accessed September 2019].

³³ <<https://www.4en5mei.nl/herdenken-en-vieren/herdenken>> [accessed September 2019].

In 2016, for example, the annual commemoration at the international *Homomonument* in The Hague was focused on LGBT refugees. The plan of the Amsterdam Rev. Rikko Voorberg to make 4 May 2017 a special commemoration of deceased refugees was controversial. He was directly inspired by the ongoing news of shipwrecks in the Mediterranean. Together with the action group *We gaan ze halen* ('Let's Bring Them Here', in reference to welcoming people from the camps in Greece and Italy), he planned to place 3000 paper crosses on Rembrandtplein in Amsterdam during Remembrance Day.

The idea was thus to 'update' the memorial ceremony. There was a storm of protest; Rembrandtplein is on the route of the traditional silent procession to Dam Square and the plan was therefore seen by many as inappropriate. However, a relocation to the Nieuwmarkt did not silence the protest, as there was an unprecedented fierce reaction, especially from Jewish groups. This was because the Jews were deported from the Nieuwmarkt in World War II.

The place was not the stumbling block so much as people did not wish to link the commemoration of refugees to 4 May. "On that day you commemorate the war; if we commemorate everything, we will no longer commemorate anything," was the statement issued by the opponents. There was thus a fierce debate in the media about updating the national commemoration of the dead. Eventually, the refugee memorial



Figure 16.6: Poster with a call to commemorate also dead refugees on May, 4, Amsterdam 2017.

ritual did not take place as planned in the public domain due to the strong opposition.

It is important to see this discussion on new forms of commemorative ritual, such as the walks we mentioned, in a broader context that definitely transcends Dutch borders. There is a complex framework in which all kinds of forces and aspirations play a role. For example, in the Netherlands, but also elsewhere in Europe, there is a general reaction to ritual dynamics and transformation. Customs and traditions come under pressure through globalization, migration, and diversity. Certain feasts and festivals such as Sinterklaas with Black Pete (*Zwarte Piet*) have been discussed, museums are asked to adjust their presentations, language has been challenged to adapt, and there is discussion on certain street names that seem to legitimize the colonial past and slavery. Traditional liturgical celebrations are recast as we indicated for All Souls' Day. That generated opposition, as people stand up for 'their' traditions that reflect 'their' identity. The Black Pete debate has been unprecedentedly fierce in recent years, and there was indignation when a large department store chain no longer spoke of Easter but of the Spring Festival (*Lentefeest*). In addition, in the case of 4 May, the commemoration of war has always been a very sensitive ritual. In an extremely careful process, in addition to the military and resistance victims, various groups were given a place to commemorate war victims, but any change, omission, or addition (pertaining to the ritual, texts, announcements, invitations etc.) can upset that balance. In addition to the Jews, think of the position of groups such as the Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, and victims in the former Dutch colony of Indie (now Indonesia).³⁴

The wider discussion about the migration and admission of refugees has been strongly politicized by populism in the Netherlands and throughout Europe. Rev. Voorberg's initiative to update the commemoration of the dead to include border deaths not only affected a nationally cherished tradition and disturbed that delicate balance around the commemoration of the war but took a clear stance on the migration debate.

Another moment in the cycle of the year that explicitly connects to refugee rituals is the annual Week for Peace (*Vredesweek*) around 21 September. Since 1967, there has been the International Day of Peace, from which the World Week for Peace arose. In the Netherlands, the Week

³⁴ R. VAN GINKEL: *Rondom de stilte. Herdenkingscultuur in Nederland* (Amsterdam 2011); I. RAAIJMAKERS: *De stilte en de storm. 4 en 5 mei sinds 1945* (Amsterdam 2018).

for Peace is organized by Pax Christi, now Pax, in collaboration with the national Council of Churches (*Raad van Kerken*).³⁵ It is a widely celebrated week with all kinds of initiatives, which have been explicitly dominated by the theme of refugees since 2017. A permanent component is the Walk of Peace, in which people walk for peace to pay tribute to the journey of the refugee, taking old shoes as a symbol for the long distances that refugees travel or life jackets to represent the journey by boat.

A final day where the refugee crisis is thematized is the International Day of Human Rights, 10 December. It is striking, however, that the refugee theme here is hardly ritualized as explicitly compared to the special days mentioned above.

4. LOOKING BACK

Looking back on this small exploration of refugee rituals, we can point out a number of issues that also relate to disaster ritual in a more general sense.

- (a) I previously described rituals related to the refugee crisis as rituals of victimhood.³⁶ Here I speak of refugee ritual as a repertoire of disaster ritual that we subdivide into rituals *of* refugees on the one hand and rituals *for* refugees on the other. The first includes individual or group ritual ‘on the way’ with a strong prophylactic and apotropaic character. The second is mainly collective memorial ritual and a practice of expressing compassion and solidarity.
- (b) Because we are dealing with a type of a disaster that does not consist of a momentary event but relates to a long-term crisis or ‘slow’ tragedy (made up of a series of consecutive dramatic or disastrous events), the disaster ritual is also complex and diverse. There is more at stake than just ritual after a disaster; it is a repertoire of ritual during the crisis. The refugee crisis is a tragedy that can be peeled off like an onion. The global refugee crisis is monitored by the UNHCR and the IOM through world maps with certain centers, focal areas, and human flows. One can zoom into regions of the map, each with its own specific form of the crisis. The aforementioned dramatic shipwrecks

³⁵ <<https://www.vredesweek.nl/>> [accessed September 2019].

³⁶ POST: ‘Refugee rituals’.

in which large numbers of people drowned often give a face to the enormous diversity of tragic events within the specific regional zone of the Mediterranean. The complexity and stratification of the crisis directly affects the commemorative rites for refugees. The rituals are often evoked by a crisis event, and from that, refugee tragedy as a general crisis also comes to the fore and vice versa (i.e., when people commemorate the global refugee crisis in general or selected calendar days, they try to actualize and concretize it through those events).

- (c) The memorial element strongly dominates the refugee rituals. Although the refugee tragedy is also addressed in a general sense, it is mainly about commemorating victims. We see this very explicitly in the important connection to All Souls' Day, which is developing widely as a general commemoration moment for the dead in the Netherlands.
- (d) The problematic link to the national World War II commemoration on 4 May demonstrates two important elements. First of all, certain themes simply cannot be linked to existing commemorations/celebrations. Celebrations have their own identity and although there is always a variety of appropriations present or possible, there are limits. This is mainly due to what we call 'the ownership' of the ritual. Ultimately, ritual practice will always show what is and is not possible when it comes to adaptations, additions, and transformations. Predictions or indicating certain 'laws' here hardly seems possible. However, our modest exploration shows that in terms of rituals for refugees, joining certain commemorative moments in the year works rather well. General umbrella moments such as All Souls' Day and the Week for Peace offer a suitable framework for giving refugee ritual a place. These are well-established ritual moments with a sufficiently recognizable profile to give ritual attention to the refugee tragedy. 4 May does not fall under that general umbrella profile and appropriation does not work there; rather, it arouses resistance and is viewed as improper. A second element that we see globally around the refugee crisis is its politicization. Refugee flows have now become a major theme of political agendas, programs, and strategies worldwide. Any form of solidarity with refugee rituals are expressions of compassion, but also protest and engagement, which can be seen as taking a position in that polarized debate.
- (e) The aspect of competition just mentioned can often be traced in the process of commemorating disasters. When ritual practices such as commemorating and erecting monuments involve multiple disasters

or tragedies, there is the immediate danger of comparison and competition for attention. We see this when victims of World War II and the Holocaust are brought into relation with the current refugee crisis (see the examples of Amsterdam and Westerbork). There must be a certain degree of ritual profile, identity, and ‘ownership’. It is interesting in this context to see that a very specific ritual (for this individual fireman, this stillborn child, this road traffic victim) can have its place next to a more collective and general commemoration (e.g., a monument for all firefighters who died on the job, a memorial for all stillborn children or all traffic victims, etc.).

- (f) Connecting to existing moments in the calendar is done more often than with the examples mentioned here; however, it is then mostly a one-off initiative. An example is the Commemoration of the Death of ‘Fortress Europe’ in Amsterdam on Dam Square on 11 June 2017 by the No Border Network. That day was chosen as one day before the annual European Day for Border Guards. The religious feast of the Holy Innocents on 28 December was also appropriated in 2018 for the commemoration of border deaths on the beach of Zeebrugge (Belgium) via a walking vigil and labyrinth.
- (g) One final element with which I close this chapter was not mentioned explicitly in our explorations; nevertheless, it is dominant in all refugee rites mentioned: the constant interference of online and offline mediations. Not only does the online dimension play a role in the communication, announcement, and preparation of the rituals but all organizations involved have their own websites where the rituals are live streamed, or there are other possibilities to express empathy and engagement.

WALKING THE MARŠ MIRA: WAR, TOURISM AND RITUAL PRACTICES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

SIRI DRIESSEN

1. INTRODUCTION

Every 8 July, thousands of people take on a 75-kilometre march through the East-Bosnian countryside called the Marš Mira (peace march). In three days, the participants walk from the village of Nezuk to the genocide memorial centre and cemetery in Potočari. During the march, participants follow the reversed route that the Bosniaks living in the Srebrenica enclave took in 1995 in order to escape the Bosnian-Serb troops. Anticipating the fall of Srebrenica on 11 July 1995, the majority of these refugees that had taken shelter in the enclave attempted to flee to safer areas.¹ Guided by the members of the Bosnian army, thousands of refugees formed a column and tried to flee to safer grounds around Tuzla – a journey that forced them to cross territories held by the hostile Bosnian-Serb troops. When the Bosnian-Serb military spotted the column – which was obviously hard to miss – they decided to attack the column, and capture and kill the refugees. It is during this death march that most of the estimated 8,372 victims of the genocide were killed.² Only a small part of the column managed to reach the safer areas around Tuzla, and some refugees arrived after months of walking and hiding in the mountains.

When survivors and relatives of the victims of the genocide initiated the Marš Mira in 2005, they tried to reconstruct the main route that refugees and army members took in 1995. Inevitably, when walking the route of the death march in reverse direction, participants pass by many places that bear the traces of the violence that occurred during the war, such as mass graves and minefields. During the Marš Mira, the

¹ The number of refugees circulates around 10,000-15,000. Data Potočari memorial/exhibition.

² Data Potočari memorial.

participants perform a variety of ritual practices. For instance, on the last day, the march leads downhill to Potočari, where both a cemetery and memorial centre for the genocide can be found. In silence, participants of the march descend to the cemetery and are welcomed by locals, the media and the Bosnian army. The day after, the annual national commemoration of the genocide takes place on the same spot – a commemoration that many of the participants join as well.

While the first marches mainly had survivors and locals among its participants, nowadays the march has a more diverse population, albeit predominantly male. The march is joined not only by direct survivors of the genocide, sympathizing civilian Bosnians from all over the country and groups of Bosnian war veterans, but also by foreigners with a broad range of motives to participate: students who want to learn about the events, people from sympathizing Muslim countries who want to show their support, UN and NATO veterans who served in Bosnia in the 1990s, Turkish boy scouts, members of peace organizations and more. I even met a German woman who participated because she hoped to heal the Bosnian soil spiritually. Hence, the population of the march is diverse, and people participating pursue a variety of goals.

Alongside the motivations of individual participants, the organization of the march itself can be regarded as a political statement too. The Marš Mira guides the participants through the hills of the Bosnian-Serb Republika Srpska (an entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a Serb-nationalist political orientation that carries out a politics of genocide denial). Consequently, for three days the landscape is inhabited by the people whose views on the Bosnian war are not accepted by its current government of the Republika Srpska. “If walking sews together the land that ownership tears apart, then trespassing does so as a political statement”, Rebecca Solnit concludes in her cultural history of walking.³ In this way, walking on the land of others could serve as a means to make a political statement, and symbolically re-take what is assumed to be yours. Still, the current purpose of the march is not to heal the torn and divided landscape. The three days of trespassing are rather undertaken to allude to a narrative of Bosniak and Muslim victimhood.⁴ Although the creation of such a narrative of victimhood might not have been the

³ R. SOLNIT: *Wanderlust. A history of walking* (London 2014) 163.

⁴ M. HOONDERT: ‘Srebrenica. Conflict and ritual complexities’, in M. HOONDERT, P. MUTSAERS & W. ARFMAN (eds): *Cultural practices of victimhood* (Abdingdon 2018).

original aim of the initiators of the march, in its current form the march does not seem to be directed towards reconciliation between the different ethnic and religious groups in Bosnia.

2. WAR TOURISM AS RITUAL PRACTICE

In this chapter, I look at the Marš Mira from the perspective of war tourism, and ask what the (ritual) practices that are performed during the march reveal about war tourism.⁵ Analysing the Marš Mira and its participants from the perspective of war tourism enables me to address the tensions that are present within this particular form of tourism. Where other frames and perspectives, such as those of ‘pilgrims’, ‘commemorators’, or ‘activists’, predominantly capture social and political desirable connotations related to people’s motivations and behaviour on sites associated with (former) wars and conflicts, the frame of war tourism assists in addressing and nuancing the less accepted connotations as well, such as the search for adventure or experiences of voyeurism.⁶ Hence, by using the frame of war tourism, I aim to draw a more diverse image of the Marš Mira and its participants.

To some, ‘war tourism’ might seem an inappropriate term with which to label the activities that are performed during the Marš Mira. Tourism is usually associated with entertainment, fun and pleasure – terms not often connected to visits to places of war and conflict, even though war tourism has been gaining in popularity the last decades.⁷ However, it is questionable whether such associations with tourism are

⁵ I rely on the observations, encounters and experiences I personally had during the marches of 2017 and 2018. This chapter offers my personal perspective on my experiences of the Marš Mira – the perspective of an outsider to the Bosnian war. As such, this research has an explorative character, and more research is needed about the experiences of local Bosnian participants.

⁶ For an elaborate discussion on the tourist-pilgrim dichotomy, see G. TEN BERGE: *Pelgrimeren met een missie. Het Palestijnse ‘Kom en zie’-initiatief in cultuurwetenschappelijk en historisch-theologisch perspectief* (Amsterdam/Groningen 2020).

⁷ C. WINTER: ‘Battlefield visitor motivations. Explorations in the Great War town of Ieper, Belgium’, in *International Journal of Tourism Research* 13/2 (2011) 164-176; J. ILES: ‘Recalling the ghosts of war. Performing tourism on the battlefields of the western front’, in *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26/2 (2006) 162-180; B. SCATES: ‘In Gallipoli’s shadow. Pilgrimage, memory, mourning and the Great War’, in *Australian Historical Studies* 33/119 (2002) 1-21; J. HENDERSON: ‘War as a tourist attraction. The case of Vietnam’, in *The International Journal of Tourism* 2/4 (2000) 269-280.

still adequate, because the nature of tourism has changed drastically over the last decades.⁸ The form and purpose of current tourism endeavours is highly diverse, and tourists may undertake trips for multiple reasons. These reasons surpass the search for entertainment, fun and pleasure. Nowadays, tourism is also undertaken for reasons of education, volunteering or coping – reasons that can be linked to a search for meaningful touristic encounters.⁹ This search for meaningful encounters implies that at least some people travel in order to enlarge their knowledge, grow personally or even have transformative experiences. As such, some of the behaviour and practices performed by the participants of the Marš Mira could be regarded as expressions of contemporary war tourism.

Another argument for the perspective of war tourism can be found in the fact that tourism and ritual practices share characteristics. Think, for example, of the importance of embodied experiences, of the social function of touristic rituals that take place outside daily routines or of the possibility to recharge or transform by means of touristic or ritual practices.¹⁰ Touristic behaviour on former war sites and memorials has a ritual connotation that is informed by cultural traditions concerning ways to behave on these places of death and sorrow. Some tourism researchers even consider tourism a secular ritual that is an integral part of contemporary daily life.¹¹ And although many participants of the Marš Mira might not describe themselves as a tourist, some of their behaviour has a clear touristic dimension. This particularly applies to the participants without a strong personal connection to the events of 1995 – people from ‘outside’ who are visitors to East-Bosnia. One of these touristic rituals is the act of taking pictures.

⁸ N. URIELY: ‘The tourist experience. Conceptual developments’, in *Annals of Tourism Research* 32/1 (2005) 199-216.

⁹ E. COHEN: ‘Educational dark tourism at an In Populo site. The Holocaust museum in Jerusalem’, in *Annals of Tourism Research* 38/1 (2011) 193-209.

¹⁰ J. WOJTKOWIAK: ‘Towards a psychology of ritual. A theoretical framework of ritual transformation in a globalizing world’, in *Culture & Psychology* 24/4 (2018) 460-476; R. GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* (Oxford 2014).

¹¹ J. URRY: *Mobilities* (Cambridge 2007); T. EDENSOR: ‘Performing tourism, staging tourism. (Re)producing tourist space and practice’, in *Tourist Studies* 1/1 (2001) 59-81; D. MACCANNELL: *The tourist. A new theory of the leisure class* (London 1976).

3. PICTURING THE DEATH MARCH

Tourism is traditionally described as an activity defined by the possibility to gaze upon worlds and scenes different than one's own.¹² Taking pictures therein plays an important role. As tourism implicates a 'collection of signs', photography allows tourists to create proof of their collected signs.¹³ Therefore, what tourists gaze upon and take pictures of is culturally mediated: the signs that are sought for by tourists are the signs that culture has taught them to search for.¹⁴ In this way, collecting proof of visited places in the form of images becomes a touristic ritual.

During the march, photography seemed important to the participating tourists. Phones and cameras were part of their experience of marching, in such a way that some scenes only appeared to be consumed through the camera.¹⁵ Regardless of the horrible history of many places along the route, the participating tourists did not keep their phones and cameras put away on these sites. During the three days of walking, I witnessed people posing in front of memorials, minefields and mass graves, of which the latter are accompanied by signs with graphic images of decomposed bodies. This visual signage has a clear purpose: because the (primary, secondary and even tertiary) mass graves are located in territories that are now part of the Republika Srpska, the signage serves as a means to acknowledge the crimes committed on the Bosnian refugees in an area in which those crimes are officially denied. The photos of the decomposed bodies on the signs purposefully contain elements like chains, ropes, handcuffs and other indicators of force, in order to provide proof of the fact that the victims were killed in an organized genocide, and that they did not die fighting, as genocide deniers claim. Hence, besides a commemorative function, these signs have a political goal too. This is an example of what has been called 'necropolitical activism': a way of "directing attention toward the remains of the dead as the reality of a history of repression and neglect".¹⁶ These graphic images fulfil a political purpose, and so does the act of photographing them.

¹² J. URRY & J. LARSEN: *The tourist gaze 3.0* (London 2011).

¹³ URRY & LARSEN: *The tourist gaze 3.0* 4.

¹⁴ URRY & LARSEN: *The tourist gaze 3.0*.

¹⁵ J. LARSEN: *Performing tourist photography* (PhD Dissertation: Roskilde University 2004) 161.

¹⁶ H. RUIN: *Being with the dead. Burial, ancestral politics, and the roots of historical consciousness* (Stanford 2018) 111.

For many people, the act of taking pictures of traces of horrifying events is difficult to grasp, and is condemned publicly – a well-known example is the ‘Auschwitz selfie’.¹⁷ Moreover, the touristification of war sites is considered by some as potentially trivializing the history of such places.¹⁸ Thereby, tourists who visit sites of violence, death and mass atrocities are sometimes said to perform voyeuristic behaviour.¹⁹ This suggests that tourists find ‘pleasure’ in gazing at sites of death and suffering. Taking up a camera to shamelessly collect evidence of such joy is potentially even worse. Condemnations like these reverberate in the discourse of ‘dark tourism’, in which the touristic desire to visit places associated with death and suffering is explained in the light of a post-modern orientation on consumption, entertainment and spectacle.²⁰

A growing number of researchers question the validity of criticism towards war tourists as voyeurs to death and suffering. For instance, in her study on tourism at Ground Zero, Debbie Lisle states that the notion of voyeurism simplifies the complex characteristics of tourism to sites of war and conflict.²¹ The term voyeurism suggests passive tourists who engage in sole acts of looking. Voyeurism also implies a division between two worlds – the classic wall-with-peephole symbolizes the separation of the voyeur and the objects of voyeurism. Lisle disputes whether the tourists should actually be seen as such passive subjects, as their presence on Ground Zero seemed to affect them in various ways: they paid respect, reflected on their presence and questioned their potential voyeuristic

¹⁷ D. LIGHT: ‘Progress in dark tourism and thanatourism research. An uneasy relationship with heritage tourism’, in *Progress in Tourism Management* 61 (2017) 275-301; P. STONE: ‘Making absent death present. Consuming dark tourism in contemporary society’, in R. SHARPLEY & P. STONE (eds): *The darker side of travel. The theory and practice of dark tourism* (Bristol 2009) 58.

¹⁸ S. CAUSEVIC & P. LYNCH: ‘Phoenix tourism. Post conflict tourism role’, in *Annals of Tourism Research* 38/3 (2011) 784.

¹⁹ D.M. BUDA & A.J. McIntosh: ‘Dark tourism and voyeurism. Tourist arrested for ‘spying’ in Iran’, in *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* 7/3 (2013) 214-226; O. SIMIC: ‘Remembering, visiting and placing the dead. Law, authority and genocide in Srebrenica’, in *Law Text Culture* 13 (2009) 273-311; D. SCHALLER: ‘From the editors. Genocide tourism. Educational value or voyeurism?’, in *Journal of Genocide Research* 9/4 (2007) 513-515.

²⁰ M. FOLEY & J. LENNON: ‘JFK and dark tourism. A fascination with assassination’, in *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2/4 (1996) 198-211.

²¹ D. LISLE: ‘Gazing at Ground Zero. Tourism, voyeurism and spectacle’, in *Journal for Cultural Research* 8/1 (2004) 3-21, p. 5.

behaviour.²² Moreover, the tourists explicitly made the choice to visit the site and formed an idea about what they would find at the destination even though they knew that the scene could be hard to watch.²³

A similar response seems to have happened with the tourists participating in the Marš Mira. By talking to my fellow walkers, I learned that many of them struggled to find a ‘proper’ way to relate to the conflict and the many traces of death and suffering along the route – a struggle fed by societal debates about the morality of war tourism. This struggle developed gradually over the three days of the march – where the first day was mainly framed by excitement over being part of the march and seeing traces of war, in the later days, this excitement transformed into a more sombre and contemplative atmosphere, especially when the traces of war proved to be abundant and more stories about the past were told. Interestingly, over the three days of marching, many participants, including myself, developed a personal ritual, through which they sought a way to deal with questions about the purpose of their presence at the Marš Mira, their potential voyeurism or their relation to the victims. Photography played a role in this: I for instance noticed that once I had taken a picture of the first mass grave we passed, I felt obliged to take photos of all the other mass graves that followed, because why would only one mass grave deserve the attention of my camera? Here, taking up my camera as soon as we passed yet another mass grave became a way to deal with feelings of unease on these sites and, also, a way to keep distance. As such, it became a personal ritual, created in order to deal with feelings that were instigated by both the confrontation with atrocities and the confrontation with my presence on these sites – a ritual that took the form of an activity immediately associated with tourism: taking pictures.

4. GOING ALL-IN

While photography makes up a central part of the tourist experience, tourism is more than visual experiences alone. Embodied experiences of place – experiences that are informed by multiple senses – form another important feature of tourism. By not only seeing, but also feeling, smelling and hearing the different places along the route of the Marš Mira, participants are immersed in the East-Bosnian landscape. By means of

²² LISLE: ‘Gazing at Ground Zero’ 11.

²³ LISLE: ‘Gazing at Ground Zero’ 17.



Figure 17.1: Participants in front of a mass grave, Marš Mira, July 2018 (photograph: Siri Driessen).

spending three days of walking and camping along the route that the Bosniak refugees took in 1995, this immersion becomes even more substantial. During those three days and nights, every ruined house, trace of fire, gravestone or bullet hole along the route can be regarded as a marker for another story about a war time event. “Haunting buildings that foreground the memory of death that Srebrenica commemorates”, as Janet Jacobs calls them, that look like tributes to the tragedies that have happened during the wars.²⁴ Every trace along the road signals the tragedy that lies ahead at the end of the route. As such, the complete immersion in the war-torn landscape can be regarded as a form of embodied remembrance that intensifies during the three days of walking and culminates when entering the cemetery in Potočari.

Throughout the Marš Mira, immersive experiences were strongly desired by the participants. In 2018, for instance, the people I was with did not camp along the route, but stayed over at a house in Srebrenica, and were driven back and forth to the start and end points of the daily

²⁴ J. JACOBS: ‘The memorial at Srebrenica. Gender and the social meanings of collective memory in Bosnia-Herzegovina’, in *Memory Studies* 10/4 (2017) 423-439.

marches.²⁵ Yet, some were not happy with this, as the daily commute to Srebrenica detached them from their immersive experience of the Marš Mira. In their eyes, it made the experience of the march less genuine and less authentic. Because of their desire for a complete immersion, they preferred the discomfort of the campsites – no warm food, a lot of noise, no showers, having to carry camping gear on your back all day – to a more comfortable stay at a house further away from the route.²⁶

Such a search for authentic experiences is seen as a key incentive for tourism.²⁷ In her study about hikers on the Kokoda-trail – a 96-kilometer historical trail through the jungles of Papua New Guinea that was used by Australian military in the Second World War – Jo Hawkins concludes that the hikers connected experiences of discomfort to a heightened sense of authenticity during the march.²⁸ By undergoing physical and mental challenges, the experience of hiking the track became more authentic, more emotional and allowed for self-discovery. Moreover, when Hawkins asked tourists about their motivations to hike the Kokoda trail, ‘adventure’ was the most mentioned answer, prior to for example remembrance or learning about the past.²⁹ Rather than a means for mourning and commemorating the past, hiking the Kokoda trail was done in order to obtain self-knowledge, personal transformation and social status.

During the Marš Mira, this urge for adventure and transformation was recognizable too. “I really just want to see if I will make it to the end of the route”, an American student told me when I asked her about her reasons for joining the march. This is an example of how for some participants walking the march becomes a test, a way to challenge and strengthen their physical and mental capacities. This focus on adventure and self-discovery was also noticeable in the stories that were told at night about the experiences of that day. In 2018, for instance, we

²⁵ I joined the marches as part of the Srebrenica summer school – an international study program for researchers, students and anyone else interested in Srebrenica. The summer school is organized by Muhamed Durakovic, a Srebrenica and death march survivor, and one of the initiators of the Marš Mira.

²⁶ Camping at the official campsite also allows participants to take part in an evening program that is set up by the organization. This program contains speeches, prayers, and other kinds of performances. Also, documentaries about the war are being shown. The complete program is in Bosnian.

²⁷ MACCANNELL: *The tourist*.

²⁸ J. HAWKINS: ‘What better excuse for a real adventure. History, memory and tourism along the Kokoda Trail’, in *Public history review* 20 (2013) 1-23, p. 14

²⁹ HAWKINS: ‘What better excuse for a real adventure’ 9.

encountered bad weather during the march, and many of the tracks were transformed into slippery slopes. The evening conversations of the participants revolved around exhaustion, dirt or who had to be pulled over the muddy hills by human chains of Bosnian men, and as such concerned the achievements of the participants under uncomfortable circumstances. Here, what these participants took home from their experience of walking the Marš Mira focused on the personal challenges that were overcome during the march.

While the confrontation with some 'touristic' behaviour, like voyeurism, stimulated some participants to reflect on their behaviour during the march, this did not seem to be the case with the desire for experiences of immersion. This desire did not change during the march, but even got stronger over the course of three days. I noticed, for example, that there was an urge to talk to local people about the war and its aftermath among non-Bosnian participants. Fulfilling this quest became a means to obtain a certain status: if you had been invited for a talk, coffee or lunch by local Bosnian people, you had succeeded in obtaining a more immersive experience of the march and as such had done better as a war tourist.

Different explanations can be given for this kind of behaviour. It might originate in feelings of guilt, privilege and discomfort that surface when being faced with the abundant traces of violence along the route³⁰ – feelings that stem from the confrontations with the suffering of others and that are fed by a narrative of victimhood. Making a serious effort to completely immerse oneself in the experience and talk with local people about their memories and experiences serves as a means to deal with these feelings. By enlarging one's knowledge about the conflict and by learning more about the stories of individuals, participants gain access to the conflict and feel less like privileged outsiders who did not have to go through a war. A similar reasoning applies to the reluctance to choose comfort over discomfort.

Another explanation might be valid too. As a ritual practice, the march is a social event. During the march, people walk, eat and camp together. On the last day, everyone waits for the slowest walkers before collectively starting with the descent to the cemetery in Potočari. Locals provide the participants with food, and volunteers assist the marchers with water and medical care along the route. The experience of 'being in this together' is strong. By experiencing harshness together, a feeling of social cohesion is

³⁰ S. DRIESSEN: 'Summers of war. Affective volunteer tourism to former war sites in Europe', in *Tourism Geographies* (2020) 1-21.

created. Because of the relatively large number of participants with a military background, for some, this feeling slightly resembles a military sense of comradeship. Therefore, the desire for immersion might also be caused by social pressures – not going all-in during the march could be experienced as a violation of the solidarity among the walkers.

To conclude, going all-in is an important feature of the Marš Mira. The purpose of the march – commemorating the victims of the genocide in the area where much of the violence took place – adds a sense of significance, solidarity and social cohesion to the march. The combination of adventure, physical challenges and the very serious undertone give the march a specific character. The knowledge that the commemorated events happened in the recent past and that ethnic tensions still prevail in Bosnia gives the march a sense of urgency. On the one hand, this knowledge feeds into one-sided narratives of the war. Yet, on the other hand, it might also encourage participants to experience personal development and self-realisation. Although education about the wartime events and their consequences, from a Bosniak point of view, makes up another feature of the march, such education mainly takes place through the development of tourists' personal engagement with the war and its victims. During the march, ritual practices are performed individually or in small groups and are embedded in the touristic behaviour on site. This changes when the participants reach the final stage of the march.

6. THE LAST HUNDRED METERS: FROM TOURISM TO COMMEMORATION

The final few hundred meters of the Marš Mira bring the thousands of participants to the cemetery and memorial centre in Potočari. These last meters mark the transition from a rather undefined zone of remembrance, tourism, political activism and adventure, which persisted for the three days of the march, to a zone in which commemoration and contemplation stand out. This is the moment when the Marš Mira intensifies and when collective ritual practices come to the fore. It is common practice to march this last leg in silence. Different groups of people, particularly the ones with a military background, prefer to walk this part of the march in formation, thereby alluding to military rituals. When entering the cemetery, the dirty, sunburnt and exhausted participants are welcomed by local people who are positioned on both sides of the road – people who have experienced the Bosnian war and its consequences personally. For the last part of their journey, the roles are reversed: after



Figure 17.2: Participants arrive in Potočari, Marš Mira, July 2017
(photograph: Siri Driessen).

days of looking at traces of the suffering of local Bosnians, the participants of the Marš Mira become the object to be looked at – at least for a while. A welcome shift, for sure, but for me this was also a difficult moment. For three days, I had been able to hide behind my position as a researcher, my academic gaze and my camera at a safe distance from everything that happened during the peace march.³¹ But by entering Potočari under the eyes of war survivors, I felt pulled into the reality of the war and its aftermath. For me, this was the moment that my immersion in the Bosnian war history felt the strongest – I had become part of it and it was difficult to leave unaffected.

The end of the Marš Mira leads into the start of the official annual commemoration of the genocide on 11 July that is attended by thousands of people. The public part of this commemoration has a religious character: an imam leads a prayer for the victims, after which the coffins with the remains of the bodies that have been identified that year are brought to their graves by family members. References to the Bosnian war are absent during this ceremony. The commemoration is attended

³¹ SIMIC: ‘Remembering, visiting and placing the dead’.

by Bosnians from all over the country as well as the diaspora. Also, international representatives and sympathizers take part in the commemoration. 11 July is the only day that Srebrenica and Potočari are flooded with people – the rest of the year the now predominantly Bosnian-Serb villages do not receive many visitors. During the march and the commemoration, some participants I spoke to complained about the insincerity of the national and international officials, who only come to the area on the day of the commemoration, but ignore it the rest of the year. This feeling of insincerity is strengthened by the fact that before the public commemoration another ceremony takes place, but is accessible for officials, diplomats and invited guests only.

It has been argued that the Marš Mira can be regarded as a failed ritual, as it has become a non-inclusive and political event, despite its original intentions.³² This can be explained by the political polarization in Bosnia: because of this, there is no room for stories about the past that do not fit within one of the ethno-nationalist narratives, especially in the month of July. In Bosnia, the memorialization of the past is a political activity.³³ And, indeed, the Marš Mira can be regarded as such a political activity that fits within the dominant Bosnian narrative of the war of the 1990s. The likelihood that this situation will soon change is low.

7. CONCLUSION

This chapter has looked at the Marš Mira from the perspective of war tourism, causing the focus to lay with participants from ‘outside’. As data on the population of the march is not available – participants do not register their names or background – it is impossible to draw any conclusions about the exact proportions of different groups among the participants, even though the population has become more international over the years.³⁴ Still, the aim of the chapter was not to point out who is a tourist and who not. Rather, it used the lens of war tourism to identify the touristic features in the behaviour of the participants.

For relatives and descendants of the victims, the march functions as a yearly commemorative ritual. Their participation could serve as a means to

³² HOONDEERT: ‘Srebrenica. Conflict and ritual complexities’.

³³ H. HALLOVICH: ‘Beyond the sadness. Memories and homecomings among survivors of ‘ethnic cleansing’ in a Bosnian village’, in *Memory Studies* 4/1 (2011) 44.

³⁴ HOONDEERT: ‘Srebrenica. Conflict and ritual complexities’.

cope or come to terms with their direct past. The march is also a social gathering, where people catch up with friends and acquaintances. Moreover, the march is a moment to tell others about their memories of the Bosnian war in an environment that is for a few days very receptive to their stories. The same goes for other participants that have a close connection to the events – a journalist who documented life in Srebrenica before the fall of the enclave, a former red-cross employee who took care of refugees in Tuzla, or a Dutch UN veteran who was deployed in Potočari in 1995. Yet, many of the participants of the march do not have such a clear-cut connection to the specific events that took place in the area during the war.

Looking at the march from a perspective of war tourism has shed light on its touristic features: the importance of the (voyeuristic) gaze and the camera as well as the search for immersion and authentic experiences. Sometimes, the confrontation with the ‘touristic’ features of the march caused participants to reflect on their own behaviour and, as such, grow personally. At other times, walking through the East-Bosnian landscape might be a way to become engaged with the war and its victims, and learn about the past and its consequences in an embodied way. To return to the words of Solnit: “Walking shares with making and working that crucial element of engagement of the body and the mind with the world, of knowing the world through the body and the body through the world.”³⁵ However, more often the confrontation with traces of death and violence feeds into a politicized and polarized narrative of the Bosnian war. As such, the march has developed a possibly divisive character, and may in this sense be considered a failed ritual. Still, I would argue that on an individual level, the experienced emotions could form a starting point to learn about oneself and the Bosnian war and to collect memories. The concept of walking the 1995 death march in reversed route remains strong. As we have seen, the fact that it takes three days to complete the Marš Mira makes it possible to go through different stages and experiences: from adventure to contemplation and commemoration. This extended timeframe, in my opinion, is an advantage, as it allows participants to escape now and then from the constraints of the ethno-nationalist narratives of victimhood and engage with the war and its history in a personal and embodied manner.

³⁵ SOLNIT: *Wanderlust* 29.

GENOCIDE COMMEMORATION IN RWANDA:
REMEMBRANCE OF THE DEAD AND THE PERFORMANCE
OF MISSED FUNERAL RITUALS

CÉLESTIN NSENGIMANA

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1994, Rwanda experienced a genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi people by a Hutu regime of that time. This crime took place after the propagation of a long-lasting ideology of division and discrimination that was supported and implemented by the colonial power (the policy of ‘divide and rule’) and the first and second Republics of Rwanda through channels such as public policies, churches, schools, media, narratives, research, and publications.¹ During that genocide, which took the lives of more than one million Tutsi in a short period of one hundred days from 7 April to 3 July 1994, other people (Hutu, Twa, and foreigners) who were not supporting the plan and execution of the genocide were also killed or threatened.² Apart from the loss of human lives and destruction of the social fabric of the country, the 1994 genocide decreased the Rwandan Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 58%³ and psychologically affected genocide survivors and perpetrators alike.⁴

In the aftermath of genocide, a number of initiatives have been undertaken by governmental and non-governmental organizations to rebuild

¹ T. GATWA: *The churches and ethnic ideology in the Rwandan crises 1900-1994* (Oxford 2005) 6-7.

² H. HINTJENS: *Genocide, war and peace in Rwanda* (The Hague 2013) 195-196. See also E. MUTWARASIBO: *Ordinary choices in extraordinary times. Resistance to the genocide in Rwanda in 1994* (PhD Dissertation: University of Gothenburg 2018) and T. GATWA & D. MBONYINKEBE (eds.): *Home grown solutions. A legacy to generations in Africa* (Yaoundé 2019).

³ R. HODLER: ‘The economic effects of genocide. Evidence from Rwanda’, in *Journal of African Economies* 28/1 (2019) 1-17, p. 1.

⁴ C. NSENGIMANA: *Peacebuilding initiatives of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. An impact assessment* (Geneva 2015) 18-21.

a peaceful post-genocide Rwandan community. Those initiatives include repatriation of refugees, psycho-social interventions, structural reforms, socio-economic development, justice, reconciliation processes, and genocide commemoration.⁵ A number of memorial sites have been put in place as material symbols of remembrance.⁶ These are places designed to show where the Tutsi were killed or/and to gather symbols and other materials to keep the genocide memory alive for current and future generations.⁷ Those memorials have become places of annual rituals of genocide commemoration at national and community levels.⁸

In addition to the commemoration rituals organized by governmental institutions, churches organize commemorations from a Christian perspective. However, to my knowledge, no scientific research has ever been conducted about Christian commemoration of genocide and how it has been appropriated by participants. Thus, this chapter will explore the ritual of genocide commemoration performed by the Christian community of Kirinda Parish of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda.⁹ The study will pursue the following research question: How is the ritual of genocide commemoration performed at Kirinda Parish shaped and appropriated by participants? This question has two dimensions. The first concerns the structure of the genocide commemoration. The second dimension goes further to explore how different categories of participants appropriate that ritual. To answer this research question, I will adopt a theological-ethnographical research design to consider the cultural specificity of ritual performers as well as their concrete and lived experiences.¹⁰

⁵ NSENGIMANA: *Peacebuilding initiatives of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda* 19-20.

⁶ H. DUMAS & R. KORMAN: 'Espaces de la mémoire du génocide des Tutsis au Rwanda. Mémoires et lieux de mémoire', in *Afrique Contemporaine* 238/2 (2011) 11-27.

⁷ A. KABERA: *An exploration of community perceptions and understandings of Rwandan genocide memorials* (PhD Dissertation: University of KwaZulu-Natal 2012) 100.

⁸ DUMAS & KORMAN: 'Espaces de la mémoire du génocide des Tutsis au Rwanda' 11-27.

⁹ According to Marc Cortez, the concept of "theological anthropology" refers to the area of Christian reflection that seeks to understand the mystery of humanity by reflecting theologically on the human person in constant and critical dialogue with the other anthropological disciplines. See M. CORTEZ: *Theological anthropology. A guide for the perplexed* (London/New York 2010) 7.

¹⁰ T.K. SNYDER: 'Theological ethnography. Embodied', in *The Other Journal: An Intersection of Theology & Culture* 23/5 (2014).

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE GENOCIDE COMMEMORATION PERFORMED AT KIRINDA PARISH

The commemoration of genocide at Kirinda Parish is consistently performed in six main stages: preparation, commemoration night, commemoration at Nyabarongo River, walk of commemoration, commemoration service, and closing rituals. Data gathered during the commemoration of 2018 will be used to describe the different stages of this ritual.

2.1. Preparation

The initial phase, preparation, is to determine the date of commemoration. The annual date of genocide commemoration in Kirinda was originally supposed to be on 14 April each year, because the Tutsi of Kirinda were killed on 14 April 1994. Given that it has been difficult to gather people from different areas during the rainy season of April, church bodies have changed the time of commemoration to different dates during the dry season of June.¹¹ Other aspects of the preparation phase involve inviting participants, coordinating the program with other commemorations in the area, dealing with logistics, renovating memorials, and sharing responsibilities among participants. Although the Kirinda commemoration is organized by Presbyterians, other Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Muslims also participate in that ritual.

2.2. Commemoration night

On the evening preceding the day of public commemoration, the night of commemoration is held by a group of about 130 people at a memorial site in an area called Shyembe at the entrance of the Presbyterian Hospital of Kirinda.¹² The attendance is mainly genocide survivors, local citizens from the neighborhood of Kirinda, religious leaders and local governmental officials, as well as a few people from other districts of Rwanda and those from abroad. Before ritual performers gather, a mourning fire is lit, and tents decorated in gray and white are erected at the memorial site. This eve of the

¹¹ In Rwanda, the summer season covers the months of June, July, and August. Given that the official period of genocide commemoration is 100 days from 7 April to 3 July, the liturgical ritual of genocide commemoration at Kirinda Parish is usually held in June.

¹² The number of participants was estimated based on the commemoration night of 8 June 2018.

genocide commemoration is marked by a series of songs, sermons, testimonials, speeches, and symbolic actions. Candles are also lit as commemoration light (also called the inextinguishable light, the light of hope, or the light of life), and the names of victims of genocide are read. The night of commemoration formally ends by midnight. A few people remain until the morning while others go back home or stay in different guesthouses and at the homes of families that are reserved for guests from outside of Kirinda.

2.3. Nyabarongo River ritual

In the morning following the commemoration night, ritual participants meet at the Nyabarongo River to commemorate the Tutsi who were thrown into that river. It is a short ritual through which representatives of genocide survivors whose family members were thrown into the river play a key role. This event influences the time of the rest of the ritual. For instance, the commemoration ritual on 9 June 2018 was supposed to start by 9:00 a.m., but because a representative of the genocide survivors was late due to bad roads coming from the capital city of Kigali to Kirinda (damaged by rain), the commemoration was delayed almost two hours. The commemoration at Nyabarongo River starts with a prayer delivered by one of the church ministers. Thereafter, the Master of Ceremonies (MC) explains the reasons for the commemoration at that place by noting that the Nyabarongo River is considered to be the cemetery of the Tutsi who were thrown into it. Before leaving, participants throw flowers into the river and lay other flowers at the monument, which preserves the names of the victims.

2.4. Walk of commemoration

After the commemoration at Nyabarongo River, ritual performers rush toward a location called Mburamazi, situated almost two miles from the river. The walk of commemoration starts at that place, which has the symbolic name of 'the chair of death' because of its relationship to the history of genocide at Kirinda. I learned from testimonials and speeches that genocide perpetrators installed a roadblock at that killing site to obstruct the passage of Tutsi people coming from different directions to Kirinda Hospital and/or to the main road. Tutsi were gathered and held there before they were killed.¹³

¹³ Introductory remark of the Master of Ceremony during the commemoration at Nyabarongo River on 9 June 2018.



Figure 18.1: Genocide commemoration at Nyabarongo River, 1 June 2019 (photograph: Célestin Nsengimana).



Figure 18.2: A monument listing the names of victims at the bank of the Nyabarongo River, 1 June 2019 (photograph: Célestin Nsengimana).



Figure 18.3: The commemoration site of Mburamazi known as ‘the chair of death’, 10 September 2020 (photograph: Célestin Nsengimana).

2.5. Commemoration service

After the walk of commemoration is completed, participants meet in tents erected around the memorial site of Shyembe, a site designed for the commemoration service that is officiated by church ministers. This commemoration service lasts about four hours. It includes prayers, songs, sermons, meditation, and more than five speeches, which are delivered by representatives of genocide survivors and by church and governmental officials. It also includes symbolic actions of paying tribute to the victims of the genocide by observing a formal minute of silent commemoration and laying wreaths on the memorial site. Other verbal and non-verbal forms of expression are also part of it, such as testimonials, poems, keyboard music, pictures, colors, dressing style, and candles. The commemoration service follows a prescribed Presbyterian liturgy of genocide commemoration, which is informed by a theology of repentance, forgiveness, resurrection, faithfulness of God, and other messages of consolation and hope.¹⁴

¹⁴ The liturgy of genocide commemoration is part of the Presbyterian liturgical texts. See EGLISE PRESBYTERIENNE AU RWANDA: *Gahunda z’amateraniro* (Kigali 2014) 240-241.

2.6. Closing rituals

The end of the ritual of genocide commemoration at Kirinda Parish is marked by the usual liturgical words of sending and blessing the congregation and the ritual of hand washing. That last ritual consists of washing hands with water and sharing drinks, food, or snacks.



Figure 18.4: A choir performing at the memorial site of Shyembe, 1 June 2019 (photograph: Célestin Nsengimana).

3. APPROPRIATION OF THE RITUAL OF GENOCIDE COMMEMORATION

This section looks at how the ritual of genocide commemoration performed at Kirinda parish has been appropriated by participants. It focuses on the meanings that participants attribute to the constituents of that ritual, rather than reporting official political and theological claims. To clarify, Willem Frijhoff defines the concept of appropriation as “a process of giving meaning, in which groups or individuals attribute their own meaning to the object presented, imposed, or prescribed by others, and thus make it acceptable, liveable, bearable, or humane to themselves”.¹⁵ Thus, throughout

¹⁵ W. FRIJHOFF: ‘Toeëigening. Van bezitsdrang naar betekenisgeving’, in *Trajecta* 6/2 (1997) 99-118, p. 108. Quoted and translated in M. BARNARD: ‘Appropriation. A dynamical process of interpretive action’, in H. ALMA, M. BARNARD & V. KÜSTER (eds.): *Visual arts and religion* (Berlin 2009) 3-16, p. 11-12.

this chapter, the concept of appropriation will be understood as a bottom-up process of finding meanings.¹⁶ For the scope of this chapter, the analysis will be limited to four components (language of colors, mourning fire, lighting of candles, and washing hands) of that ritual of genocide commemoration that blends Rwandan and Christian traditions.

3.1. The language of colors

At the beginning of genocide commemoration in 1995, both the Church and the Government of Rwanda adopted purple as the commemoration color, which is also a Christian color of mourning, preparation, and repentance. Black and white have been informally added as commemoration colors by the grassroots community without any objection from the Government or from the church leaders. In 2013, the Government of Rwanda adopted gray as the official color of genocide commemoration to be used in Rwanda and abroad. This decision aimed at overthrowing the domination of purple, which was considered not culturally grounded. As stipulated by the Article 8 of the law governing genocide commemoration, gray became official color of genocide commemoration upon a ministerial order.¹⁷ Protais Mitali, former Rwandan Minister of Sport and Culture, explains this change as follows: “We also found that our ancestors have adopted gray as the mourning color. So we are encouraging people to adopt this one as well. We have seen purple dominating our mourning period, but it did not come from our culture and it was not conventional as such.”¹⁸

The use of those competitive and complementary colors indicates that genocide commemoration embodies some forms of symbolic power relationships. On the one hand, the obligation to use gray by the Government of Rwanda represents a form of symbolic church-state power struggles

¹⁶ C. WEPENER: *From fast to feast. A ritual-liturgical exploration of reconciliation in South African cultural contexts* (= Liturgia condenda 19) (Leuven 2009) 22. See also M. KLUMP: *The Sound of Worship. Liturgical performance by Surinamese Lutherans and Ghanaian Methodists in Amsterdam* (= Liturgia condenda 26) (Leuven 2011) 134.

¹⁷ “Law No 15/2016 of 02/05/2016 governing the ceremonies to commemorate the genocide against the Tutsi and organization and management of memorial sites for genocide against the Tutsi.” See the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Rwanda* 22 (30 May 2016).

¹⁸ The speech of Protais Mitali was quoted by J. DE LA CROIX TABARO: ‘Genocide commemoration week taken to village level’, In *The New Times*, February 2013, <http://www.netimes.co.rw/section/read/62658/> [last accessed 11 October 2018].

whereas the state has a top-down legal legitimacy of controlling the spaces of genocide commemoration. Thus, the substitution of the color purple by gray can be interpreted as a symbolic overthrow of the domination of churches and affirmation of state power over other institutions. On the other hand, by maintaining its purple stoles at genocide commemorations, the Presbyterian Church preserves its liturgical tradition in spite of state and cultural influences. To assure the balance of powers, the collaboration between the church and the state is of great importance from the preparation to performance of genocide commemoration. Thus, the process is consistent with Catherine Bell and Pierre Bourdieu's position that the efficacy of ritual is not only about domination and resistance, but also represents a kind of negotiated power relationship and involvement in the activities of ritual.¹⁹

Knowing the meanings of these colors is also essential to fully understanding their significance. Indeed, gray represents ashes in both Rwandan and Christian traditions. People of both traditions used to smear their foreheads with ashes as they mourned their dead.²⁰ Besides gray, black is mainly seen in the dressing style of participants such as flower ladies and chorales. That color is reminiscent of the traditional Rwandan ritual of *Kwirabura* (becoming black), a Rwandan concept for mourning. In addition to gray and black, empirical data indicates that the color white, which is also part of the colors of genocide commemoration, has a Christian meaning of hope by assuring grievors that the deceased did not perish but went to rest in peace in heaven.²¹ Next to this Christian influence, white also has a cultural meaning which reflects the term of *kweru* (becoming white), another Rwandan concept for the traditional ritual of closing the mourning period. In that sense, the white symbolizes the transition of ritual performers from the life of grief and uncleanness (impurity caused by death) to the normal life course (work, eating meat, sexual intercourse, organizing weddings, and contact with others).²²

¹⁹ C. BELL: *Ritual theory, ritual practice* (Oxford 2009) 215-220. See also P. BOURDIEU: *Language of symbolic power* (Cambridge 1991).

²⁰ R. KORMAN: 'La politique de mémoire du génocide des Tutsi au Rwanda. Enjeux et évolutions', in *Droit et Cultures* 66/2 (2013) 87-101. M. JASTROW: 'Dust, earth, and ashes as symbols of mourning among the ancient Hebrews', in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 20 (1899) 133-150.

²¹ Interview with IOT41 on 29 August 2019.

²² G. VAN 'T SPIJKER: *Les usages funéraires et la mission de l'Eglise. Une étude anthropologique des rites funéraires au Rwanda* (Kampen 1990) 68.

3.2. The mourning fire

In addition to the language of colors, the mourning fire is another ritual component that has been appropriated by both church ministers and lay participants in two main ways. First, the mourning fire is a symbol of missed funeral rituals, as expressed by one of the genocide survivors in these words: “The mourning fire shows that genocide commemoration is an opportunity to accomplish missed funerals, because we did not have time to mourn and to bury the victims of genocide.”²³ Augustin Nshimiyimana uses the concept of “symbolic mourning” to indicate that the incorporation of funeral rituals in the commemoration of genocide is an attempt “to accomplish what the culture was supposed to do”.²⁴ Hence, the insistence on finding the truth about the location of bodies of genocide victims is anthropologically significant, because unaccomplished rituals generate permanent distress. That is what a representative of genocide survivors expresses as follows: “The distress of genocide survivors is that they did not yet find bodies of theirs to bury them in dignity.”²⁵ According to John Samuel Mbiti, African people believe that if the living-dead (the dead who are still remembered by the living) have been improperly buried, or were offended before they died, it is feared by the relatives or by the offenders that the living-dead would take revenge in form of misfortune or by their disturbing frequent appearance. Mbiti further argues that if people fail to observe instructions that the living-dead may have given to them before dying, misfortune and suffering will be interpreted as resulting from the anger of the departed. People are therefore careful to follow the proper practice and customs regarding the burial and fair treatment of dead bodies.²⁶

The second meaning of the mourning fire refers to the fear caused by death and dead spirits. For instance, as one genocide survivor interviewed about the meaning of that symbol said, “you have to be aware that death is fear-provoking. The mourning fire is necessary to cope with

²³ Interview with IGS35 on 28 August 2019. For further insight on the question of missed rituals, see P. POST & M. HOONDEERT (eds.): *Absent ritual. Exploring the ambivalence and dynamics of ritual* (Durham, NC 2019) 187-203.

²⁴ A. NSHIMIYIMANA: ‘Mourning-based culture for addressing grief and trauma’, in T. GATWA & P. DENIS (eds.): *Memory work in Rwanda. Churches and civil-society organizations twenty-five years after the genocide against the Tutsi* (Pietermaritzburg 2020) 107.

²⁵ Excerpt from the speech issues by the representative of genocide survivors during the commemoration night of 8 June 2018.

²⁶ J.S. MBITI: *African religions and philosophy* (London 1990²) 83.

the fear caused by death.”²⁷ Other individuals who were interviewed during the course of this research, including survivors, perpetrators, and other members of the community, expressed the same concern. They stated that the mourning fire was a way of facing obscurity caused by death and preventing any other subsequent deaths.²⁸ Whereas some respondents limit their meanings to the fear of death in general, others are concerned with the dead spirits that must be appeased. In that perspective, one of the church ministers argues that “the mourning fire is a way of facing fear caused by the presence of the spirits of the dead known as *Abazimu* who come in abundance when there is a case of death in the family.”²⁹ Some older respondents added that the communication with the spirits of ancestors was traditionally done through the ritual of *guterekera* (cult of ancestors) by offering food and drinks to the living dead through the fire. That offering was accompanied with the words of invocation and/or appeasement.³⁰ Bernardin Muzungu reiterates some of those words as follows: “Be favorable to us, source of happiness for Rwanda. Smile at us, be peaceful. Listen to us, oh you, master of the house. Drive away our enemies and poisoners.”³¹

3.3. The ritual of lighting candles

Participants in the ritual of genocide commemoration interpret the ritual of lighting candles as the light of reintegration, remembrance, unity, hope, and life. That ritual is reminiscent of the traditional fire of closing the mourning period because it replaces the mourning fire after it is used during the commemoration night. In this regard, Gerard van ‘t Spijker realized that the end of the mourning period was traditionally symbolized by the action of putting out the mourning fire. After throwing away its ashes, a new fire was lit by a traditional officiant called *umuse* to launch the ritual of *kwera*, which marks a transition from mourning to normal life course.³²

At the same time, the ritual of lighting candles has become a special time to commemorate victims of genocide by citing their names and

²⁷ Interview with IGS37 on 28 August 2019.

²⁸ Interview with IGS38 & IOT41 respectively on 28 and 29 August 2019.

²⁹ Interview with IGS39 on 28 August 2019.

³⁰ Interview with IOT45 on 20 August 2019.

³¹ B. MUZUNGU: *L'image du Rwanda à travers les contes moraux* (Kigali 2014) 8.

³² VAN ‘T SPIJKER: *Les usages funéraires et la mission de l'Eglise* 107-109.

their accomplishments. For instance, during the commemoration of 9 June 2018, a group of ritual performers who were given time to cite the names of victims consistently said, after a series of names, “Your name will never be extinguished as long as we are still alive.”³³ According to Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, telling and retelling the name and biography of the deceased is a way of maintaining his/her presence and his memory in his/her family and in the community.³⁴ Mbiti maintains that the dead are considered as living when they are still remembered by their respective descendants. He argues that when the last person who knew a particular living dead dies, the departed is no longer counted as member of the *sasa period* (present and recent past of less than five generations). S/he ceases to hold human properties and enters the domain of ordinary spirits in the *zamani period* (the remote past beyond five generations). In that case, the process of death for that particular living dead is complete. S/he is no longer remembered as a human being by name because the dead who reached the region of zamani “are ontologically spirits, and spirits only”.³⁵ In the context of genocide commemoration performed at Kirinda parish, the church takes over the responsibilities of commemorating non-kin living-dead, particularly on behalf of the families who have been completely decimated by genocide.³⁶

Other participants interviewed associate the ritual of lighting candles with the traditional inextinguishable *fire of Gihanga*, who is known as the first (mythical) King of Rwanda.³⁷ In the same sense, the words and songs accompanying the ritual of lighting candles refer to that ritual as representing the inextinguishable light of Rwanda, the light of remembrance and hope for a better life after the crisis generated by the genocide.³⁸ The tradition of inextinguishable fire of Gihanga is also confirmed by secondary sources. For instance, Jean de Dieu Nanzabera reported that the original fire was made of erythrina trees in a huge clay pot. That fire, which symbolized the sovereignty of the kingdom and sustainable unity of Rwandans, never stopped burning for more than

³³ The words accompanying the ritual of lighting candles on 9 June 2018.

³⁴ S.W. KUNHIYOP: *African Christian ethics* (Nairobi 2008) 19-20.

³⁵ MBITI: *African religions and philosophy* 82-83. See also S.J. JOUBERT: ‘When the dead are alive! The influence of the living dead in the letter of Jude’, in *HTS* 58/2 (2002) 576-592, p. 579.

³⁶ Interview with IGS54 on 22 October 2020.

³⁷ Interview with IGS49 on 6 October 2020.

³⁸ The words accompanying the ritual of lighting candles on 9 June 2018.

845 years until it was extinguished by European colonizers in 1936 during the reign of Mutara V Rudahigwa.³⁹

3.4. The ritual of hand washing

Hand washing is an element of traditional Rwandan funeral rituals that was appropriated in two main ways. First, that ritual has a cleansing function (purification from the contamination caused by death). Some participants at the Kirinda commemoration in 2019 used the expression “washing death away” in the sense of using water to move death from hands and, symbolically, from the community. One respondent explains that because the soil from cemeteries is contaminated, there is a need of purification before going back home. The same individual exclaims: “Who does not know the meaning of the soil from the tomb? Can you go back home with it?”⁴⁰ According to Van ‘t Spijker, it is believed that the contact with the soil and objects from cemeteries can contaminate people and cause misfortune, such as skin diseases or unanticipated death. Hence, purification rituals and wise management of those objects are required as preventive measures.⁴¹

The second function of hand washing signifies the beginning of nourishing people and welcoming guests after a long period of mourning when they did not eat enough because of distress. Eating is also desirable because some participants have a long way to go back home. Thus, it would be an object of shame for the family of the deceased to see people returning home from a funeral while they are hungry.⁴² In other words, hand washing is a metaphor of inviting guests for a drink or meal, because most of the time that ritual is organized in spaces that offer the possibility of getting drinks and food.

4. CONCLUSION

The end of this chapter returns to the research question about how the genocide commemoration performed at Kirinda Parish of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda is shaped and appropriated by participants.

³⁹ G. MBONIMANA: ‘The kingdom of Rwanda from the beginning to 1900’, in P. RUTAYISIRE & D. BYANAMFASHE (eds.): *History of Rwanda. From the beginning to the end of the twentieth century* (Kigali 2016) 103. See also J. DE DIEU NSANZABERA: *Imizi y’u Rwanda* (Kigali 2013) 48.

⁴⁰ Interview with IGS40 on 28 August 2019.

⁴¹ VAN ‘T SPIJKER: *Les usages funéraires et la mission de l’Eglise* 120.

⁴² Interview with IOT41 on 29 August 2019.

That commemorative ritual, which blends Rwandan and Christian traditions, is performed in six stages (preparation, commemoration night, commemoration at Nyabarongo River, walk of commemoration, commemoration service, and closing rituals). It is also a bearer of anthropological and theological meanings mediated by speeches, testimonies, songs, prayers, sermons, and a variety of tangible and intangible symbols.

The primary function of genocide commemoration is to keep the memory and presence of the dead alive by way of remembrance. Thus, those who are living have a designated time to tell the dead that their names will never be extinguished as long as their relatives are still alive. For the departed whose relatives have been completely taken by genocide, the Christian church family takes over the responsibilities of commemorating the non-kin living-dead to prolong their life. In that way, death is not itself the end of life, but a passage from the physical to the spiritual state of life that is guaranteed by remembrance. Consequently, the deceased who is not remembered loses human properties and ceases to exist as living.

At the same time, genocide commemoration has become an arena for symbolic power struggles and an occasion to perform missed funeral rituals. Whereas the state wants to reaffirm its control over memorial spaces by enforcing gray as official color of genocide commemoration and prescribing the ritual process, the church wants to preserve its liturgical tradition by keeping the color purple and elaborating a Presbyterian liturgy of genocide commemoration. In the same way, the grassroots community in Kirinda challenges top-down imposition of symbols and meanings through informal use of black and white. In doing so, ritual performers do not only want to maintain traditional rituals of *kwirabura* (mourning) and *kwera* (closing the mourning period), but also to insist on Christian meaning of death (successful transition from earth to heaven). Besides that Christian meaning, the incorporation of traditional funeral rituals in the genocide commemoration is a symbol of unaccomplished bereavement.

From 1994 to the present, the challenge of locating missed dead bodies is still very critical, not only to the process of recovery from trauma, but also to the process of unity and reconciliation undertaken in Post-Genocide Rwanda. Therefore, there is a need for continuous collaboration between individuals, religious, governmental, and non-governmental organizations for the sake of establishing truth about the genocide and ensuring the effectiveness of its commemoration.

THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE COMMEMORATION:
A DYNAMIC DEMAND OF MEMORY

RIMA NASRALLAH

1. INTRODUCTION

The sun is blazing in the Lebanese spring sky reflecting on the white t-shirts with purple flower prints of thousands of Armenians gushing out of the Catholicosate in Antelias, Lebanon, and onto the highway blocked for that purpose.¹ After the usual commemorative mass, they march together young and old, male and female, clergy in full vestments side by side with public figures and politicians. Orange, blue and red flags of the Republic of Armenia in all sizes fly over the long solemn procession passing by the Armenian neighborhood Bourj Hammoud² collecting people on the way and ending in Beirut's central square nine kilometers away.³ The procession is organized by an ecumenical committee of Armenian clergy and political party representatives and supported by all Armenians. Every few meters, individuals hold high above their heads signs with one of the following sentences: '1915, Never Again', 'We Remember and Demand' or 'Turkey Criminal'.

¹ The Catholicosate complex in Antelias is the seat of the Catholicos (Patriarch), which moved from Cilicia to Antelias, Lebanon in 1929. It contains the cathedral of Saint Gregory the illuminator, the winter residence of the Catholicos, a memorial chapel for the victims of the genocide, a museum and a library of manuscripts, as well as the administrative offices. It is important to keep in mind that the Armenian Nation was the first to convert to Christianity in 301 AD and that Christianity and the Nation are tightly linked. The genocide is seen as attack on the faith, and those who perished as martyrs for the faith.

² Bourj Hammoud developed from an Armenian refugee settlement into the center of the community's economic and political activity as well as the hub for a variety of Armenian Churches from the different traditions, Armenian schools and Armenian clubs. The street names of this densely populated municipality are called after Armenian cities now in Turkey. It is also where The Armenian Orthodox Prelacy can be found.

³ These marches are not always in the same direction or timing. They could be the eve of 23 April from Bourj Hammoud to Antelias followed by a mass, or on the afternoon of the 24th from Bourj Hammoud to downtown Beirut. But the main elements are rather constant.

The Armenian community worldwide commemorates every year on 24 April the atrocious killing, dispossessing and displacing of their ancestors which happened in what today is (eastern) Turkey.⁴ The year 1915 witnessed the largest organized massacre and death marches of the Armenians,⁵ killing around one and a half million, spreading survivors around the world and moving their religious hierarchy from Cilicia to Lebanon.⁶ One hundred and five years later, the commemorations are still regularly held worldwide and are massively attended. Masses and worship services are held in all three church traditions (Apostolic, Catholic and Evangelical).⁷ Large gatherings are held in public squares with speeches by bishops, pastors, members of Armenian political parties and activists. Cultural programs are held in schools and clubs with Armenian music, poetry and art. In places where there are memorials, wreaths, flowers and candles are laid down in solemn ceremonies.⁸ In many places around the world, manifestations are held in front of Turkish diplomatic representations.

The commemorations of the Armenian Genocide have both an internal aspect, for Armenians only, and an external aspect, directed towards the other citizens of their countries of residence as well as the international community. They have a highly religious and spiritual component as well as a secular component. This chapter aims at exploring how this enduring disaster ritual functions today in the life of the Armenian community, in

⁴ The genocide, which killed one and a half million Armenians, began with the rounding up and wholesale killing of the men and continued by the deportation of women, children and the elderly into the desert leading them to their death by the slashing of throats, decapitation, burning alive, cutting wombs of pregnant women, paling, mass rape, throwing into the river, sexual violence against women and girls. See for example A. DEMIRDJIAN (ed.): *The Armenian genocide legacy* (= Palgrave studies in the history of genocide) (Basingstoke 2016).

⁵ The genocide extended from 1915 to 1923.

⁶ Exact number of Armenians in Lebanon are hard to estimate today. At its peak, before the Lebanese Civil war in 1975, there were 250,000 Armenians. There are estimates of 100,000 left in Lebanon today (93% Armenian Apostolic, 5% Armenian Catholic and 2% Armenian Evangelical). See I. PAPKOVA: 'The three religions of Armenia in Lebanon', in A. AGADJANIAN (ed.): *Armenian Christianity today. Identity, politics and popular practice* (Surrey 2014) 171-196, p. 174.

⁷ Despite the recent dramatic decrease in numbers due to emigration, Lebanon remains an important religious home for all diaspora Armenians since the Apostolic See of Cilicia, the center of the global Armenian Catholic Church and the Union of Armenian Evangelical Church of the Near East all have their headquarters in this small country. See more in PAPKOVA: 'The Three Religions of Armenians in Lebanon' 171.

⁸ There are more than 200 memorials in over 32 countries around the world.

particular that of Lebanon and Syria.⁹ I base my investigations on recent literature written about the genocide, public lectures, sermons and talks delivered at the occasion of the commemorations, observation of the ritual physically and virtually over the past five years, and interviews with Lebanese and Syrian Armenians.¹⁰ In what follows, I will first explore how the rituals of commemoration connect to collective memory and how moving between remembering and forgetting, Armenians use ‘canonical’ memories as resources for identity formation.¹¹ I will then observe the assimilative and flexible aspect of the commemoration throughout history and the latest direction it has taken. Finally, I will look at the political and moral aspects of the events and the ground for remembrance as an ethical action. I conclude that this dynamic and unfinished memory has an enduring claim on Armenians worldwide who interact with it yearly through the elements of the commemoration in order to keep shaping their collective identity in the face of an uncompleted violent past.

2. REMEMBERING: INCOMPLETE AND DYNAMIC MEMORY

In recent years, we witnessed a surge in the study of memory. Memory as well as forgetfulness in the face of mass violence have been investigated at large by scholars analyzing how memory, particularly ‘historical narrative’, “is produced, consumed, transformed and transmitted by social groups”.¹² A large component of the annual commemorations of the genocide is what the word itself literally means a ‘bringing to remembrance’, a reaching towards the fragments of stories and transmitted experiences in order to reconstruct a meaningful narrative as well as get in touch with it materially. However, due to the particular circumstances of the genocide as well as the factor of time, these traumatic and emotionally charged memories

⁹ As these two communities experience fluidity between them, particularly after the recent war in Syria.

¹⁰ I have chosen few representative figures both Syrian and Lebanese, clergy from each tradition and laity, men and women, older Armenians as well as millennials. The purpose of the interviews was to deepen the understanding of how contemporary Armenians living in the area participate and experience the rituals.

¹¹ Canonical as used by Aleida Assmann; see A. ASSMANN: ‘Canon and archive’, in A. ERLI and A. NÜNNING (eds.): *Cultural memory studies. An international and interdisciplinary handbook* (Berlin/New York 2008) 97-107.

¹² U.U. ÜGÖR: ‘Lost in commemoration. The Armenian genocide in memory and identity’, in *Patterns of Prejudice* 48/2 (2014) 147-166, p. 148.

remain incomplete trapping generations in perpetual rummaging of remembered and forgotten remnants. In their perpetual revisiting of the narrative through the annual rituals of commemoration Armenians find resources to shape and maintain their collective and personal identities.

2.1. Bringing to remembrance: dealing with the absent

It has been one hundred and five years since all the horrendous events have happened and yet in the memories of second and third generation survivors, the genocide and its world are still present and active. Though the yearly rituals of commemoration change from year to year and from place to place, they do keep certain enduring features and rhythms. Starting from 23 April in the evening and during the 24th, speaking only Armenian and surrounding oneself with Armenians is paramount. “The TV would be on all day, broadcasting the commemorations from around the world but mostly those in Yerevan around the *Tsitsernakaberd* memorial”, said one of the respondents.¹³ Narratives, images and songs connected to the violent events would be revisited. In schools, clubs and churches individuals would stand up and retell the dramatic stories of their families tracing genealogies, names and places. The arrests, the marches, the desert and all that has happened, in as many details as one can conjure up, would be mentioned allowing the listeners to participate in a mental pilgrimage stirring emotions. There is also a strong material and bodily aspect to these rituals. Not only are they “deeply into the bone”, as Ronald Grimes would put it, but they actually emanate from bones.¹⁴

In the memorial monument erected on the premises of the Catholicoosate, an ossuary confronts and attract the visitors; a glass vase filled to the brim with the bones and skulls of those who perished, collected from the Syrian desert. Many Armenians interviewed for this chapter recall memorable commemorations of visiting Deir Ezor, Margada and Shaddadi shrines in Syria, the end points of the death marches in 1915.¹⁵ These places are described as ‘deathscape(s)’, places “associated with death and imbued with meaning by people who carry with them the

¹³ Shant Akoushian (M), Protestant theology student, interviewed April 2020.

¹⁴ R.L. GRIMES: *Deeply into the bone: Re-inventing rites of passage* (Los Angeles/London 2000).

¹⁵ The two shrines in Deir Ezor and Maragada contain ossuaries, while Shaddadi is a cave filled with asphyxiated bodies. The neglected desert surrounding the shrines is filled with bones. It is described as the largest Armenian cemetery.

memory of catastrophic loss, and remember it through ritual”.¹⁶ A number of respondents recall digging in the sand and touching bones with their fingers.¹⁷ In an interview, Syrian Armenian Talar explained

we used to go every year by bus from Aleppo to Deir Ezor and crowds would push to visit the ossuary and stand in silence in front of the bones. Those waiting their turn, would roam in the space surrounding the shrine looking for bones. One year, I dug with my hands in the sand mound outside and I felt the bones buried there, I touched it! I still feel it in my body.¹⁸

Another respondent described her two-day pilgrimage trip to that region:

we stood by the Euphrates and started to throw flowers in the river in memory of the people who were killed then thrown into the river and specially women and children (...) that was moving and powerful for me. After that, I remember, there was a strong sand storm, we had to run with our eyes closed to the busses, *at that moment* I recalled all the stories I heard in my school days and from poetry about the harshness of the desert during the death marches. Now I experienced it in my body.¹⁹

These pilgrimages and interactions with bones, sand and the topography have served Armenian survivors and their descendants to form what Elyse Semerdjian calls ‘bone memory’ through “mourning rituals and the collection of material bone fragments”.²⁰ This is reminiscent of Paul Post’s discussion of vicarious or transferred rituals and how in these contexts setting up a monument, ‘relics’, “tangible remains (objects) of victims and their journey play an important role. They are often part of artistic ritualizations and practices with a ritual dimension.”²¹ Indeed, in

¹⁶ As it is called by Elyse Semerdjian and inspired by Arjun Appadurai as well as A. Maddrell and J.D. Sidaway. See E. SEMERDJIAN: ‘Bone memory. The necrogeography of the Armenian genocide in Dayr al-Zur, Syria’, in *Human Remains and Violence* 4/1 (2018) 56-57, 60.

¹⁷ Touching and being in touch with the materiality of the absence is a form of mediation with the past. See M. BILLE, F. HASTRUP & T.F. SØRENSEN (eds.): *An anthropology of absence. Materializations of transcendence and loss* (New York/London 2010) 9.

¹⁸ Talar Marashlian (F), Armenian Protestant, young theology graduate, interviewed April 2020.

¹⁹ Maral Haidostian (F), Armenian Protestant, Bible teacher and leader in the church community, interviewed May 2020.

²⁰ SEMERDJIAN: ‘Bone memory’ 61.

²¹ P. POST & M. HOONDEERT (eds.): *Absent ritual. Exploring the ambivalence and dynamics of ritual* (Durham, NC. 2019) 15.

Semerdjian's analysis, these relics and rituals possess mnemonic as well as affective powers. We see how these bones, sand and river "bind the living and the dead across temporal distance" and "preserve a material presence in the face of embodied absence".²²

In these particular rituals, an actualization or affirmation of a "contract between the living, the dead, and the not yet living" takes place.²³ One of the respondents, Alina, told how "they still exist for me; it is in my mindset it is in my every-day. I think of them. I owe them. I feel that I need to do something so that they rest in peace."²⁴ Although generations have passed since the genocide, traumatic family memories seem to persist and, apparently, many feel the need to fill in the gaps in their self-narrative.²⁵ "Nothing reminds us of the victims who were killed there, which makes it impossible for the descendants to mourn them", explains Uğur Ümit Ügör in his analysis of the Turkish covering up and erasing of the traces of the genocide.²⁶ As a reaction, the survivors feel an obligation towards the martyrs: "before all else we must perpetuate the faith for which they died."²⁷

Touching the bones, contemplating what is left from the lost bodies, imagining the desert and even reliving the experiences through narrative and movies are visceral needs for this memory. That pain, carried in one's own bones, within one's body,²⁸ finds its place in rituals of repeated collective mourning where the dead bodies who were never identified, collected or properly buried can be honored in what could be labeled as an ever 'postponed ritual' or even ongoing funeral.²⁹ Indeed, for the first hundred years, a requiem was held in the Apostolic and Catholic Churches on that day, and all three Christian traditions joined, and still join, in singing the traditional and heart-wrenching hymn *Der Voghormia* (Lord have mercy).³⁰

²² BILLE [et al.]: *An anthropology of absence* 10.

²³ ASSMANN: 'Canon and archive' 94.

²⁴ Alina Dakassian (F), Armenian Apostolic, adult, Interviewed April 2020.

²⁵ ÜGÖR: 'Lost in commemoration' 163

²⁶ ÜGÖR: 'Lost in commemoration' 166.

²⁷ V. GURORIAN: *Faith, church, mission. Essays for renewal in the Armenian Church* (Armenian Prelacy 1995) 91.

²⁸ A. HOLSLAG: 'Memorization of the Armenian genocide in cultural narratives', in A. DEMIRDJIAN (ed.): *The Armenian genocide legacy* 263.

²⁹ POST & HOONDERT: *Absent ritual*.

³⁰ *Der Voghormia*, as composed by the famous spiritual and musical maestro Gomidas, translates as "Lord have mercy, All Holy Trinity give peace to the world and healing to the sick, forgiving the souls of the deceased."

In the ‘liminal space’³¹ of the desert, in the stories recounted by pilgrims and the poets, or in the liturgies held, Armenians connect with the tragedy, feel the pain and compensate for the missing burial of the bodies. Moreover, in these rituals they also reclaim a lost and marred past not acknowledged by others nor properly reconstructed. As Morrill says, “memory, like liturgy, depends upon actual humans performing it”.³²

2.2. Memory and forgetfulness

After the disaster, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Armenians are known to have kept silent. It was only after the fiftieth anniversary (1965) that Armenians became vocal and visible in the commemorations. Many have studied this from a psychological and cultural aspect of the trauma. However, besides the traumatic reasons behind the silence, it is known that after the two world wars “society was characterized by what was at the time called ‘vergangenheitsbewältigung’, mastering the past, which we generally describe today as blotting out the past (‘schlussstrich’)”.³³ An “orientation towards modernization” and the future rather than a fixation on the past was valued for the sake of the salvation of Europe from “infinite misery”.³⁴ It is only after the 1960s that this ‘plea for closure’ came under criticism ushering “a new era of therapeutic discourse” of remembering.³⁵ Scholars propose that for the Armenians it is not until the 1980s that a “systematic account of the genocide” began to be put together.³⁶ This deferring of commemoration coupled with the harsh realities of the genocide meant that many details are still missing from the narrative. The gap in the memory, the absence of much information, bodies, artefacts and property tease the memory into a perpetual revisiting of the past, never achieving closure.

³¹ SEMERDJIAN: ‘Bone memory’ 60.

³² B.T. MORRILL: ‘Models of liturgical memory. Mystical-political dimensions, mythic-historic tensions’, in *Studia Liturgica* 50/1 (March 2020) 40-54, p. 42.

³³ A. ASSMANN: ‘To remember or to forget. Which way out of a shared history of violence?’, in A. ASSMANN & L. SHORT (eds.): *Memory and political change* (Basingstoke 2012) 59.

³⁴ Winston Churchill’s speech in Zürich in 1946; quoted in ASSMANN: ‘To remember or to forget’ 58.

³⁵ ASSMANN: ‘To remember or to forget’ 60.

³⁶ J. WHOOLEY: ‘The Armenian Church in the contemporary Middle East’, in A. O’MAHONY & E. LOOSLEY (eds.): *Eastern Christianity in the modern Middle East* (London/New York 2010) 86.

These absences and gaps, this “defective continuity”, demands completion.³⁷ As Armenian practical theologian Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian mentions in his lecture at the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the genocide, “the magnitude of what was lost is immense”.³⁸ In addition to human lives and property, he lists cultural, political, social and emotional losses.³⁹ Therefore, according to Vigen Gurorian, “to remember is an ‘imperative’ for Armenians”.⁴⁰ It is not by chance that the symbol proposed at the centennial of the genocide and printed on all merchandise was a ‘forget me not’ flower.⁴¹ However, we should keep in mind that memory is always fuzzy, changing and ambiguous, and its contours are never fixed. Remembering and forgetting come together, and bits and pieces are continuously rearranged and reinterpreted.

In the case of the Armenian genocide, not only were some elements circumstantially missing from the memory, but there was an intentional imposition of forgetfulness. Material objects, intangible heritage and people were made to be forgotten by violent destruction, intentionally driving to forgetfulness.⁴² “What memory do we have if most of our ancestors perished in an undocumented way and if they died in the duress of the desert and (...) the memory was buried with the innocent victims?”⁴³ Add to this Turkey’s longstanding systematic program of erasing memory (as I will explain later in this chapter). The annual commemoration, thus, functions as a resistance to the spontaneous as well as the forced forgetfulness, a retrieval of memory and a clinging to that which is to be forgotten. Through the genocide commemoration rituals, the Armenians, in the words of Aleida Assmann, preserve a ‘canon’ of memory to counter the

³⁷ BILLE [et al.]: *An anthropology of absence* 12.

³⁸ Paul HAIDOSTIAN, Practical Theologian, Armenian Evangelical Pastor and President of the Armenian Haigazian University. The quote is taken from a public lecture delivered at the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, April 2015.

³⁹ What the UNESCO calls ‘intangible cultural heritage’.

⁴⁰ GURORIAN: *Faith, church, mission* 90.

⁴¹ We are reminded here of Deleuze’s comment that ‘memorial culture cannot be sustained without the will of the public to remember and the desire to continue remembering’ in A. PARR: *Deleuze and memorial culture. Desire, singular memory and the politics of trauma* (Edinburgh 2008) 5.

⁴² Even Adolph Hitler is known to have said “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?” The acts and the people were assumed forgotten.

⁴³ HAIDOSTIAN: Public Lecture.

destroyed memory. The religious as well as the secular rituals function as “the institutions of active memory” to “preserve the past as present”.⁴⁴

2.3. Commemoration and identity

In a video message addressed to fellow Armenians on the occasion of the missed physical commemorations in 2020 due to the COVID-19 lockdown, young Talar Haidostian reminded the audience that “our history is inside each one of us (...) it has shaped us and our identity” and by commemorating “we attest our identity as Armenians in the world”.⁴⁵ In the same day, in his official address, Catholicos Aram I explained how “the life and existence of each Armenian is intertwined with the symbolism of April 24”.⁴⁶ In the rituals of commemoration we see how memory and identity coalesce.⁴⁷ The retelling, the framing and the enacting of the collective narrative shape and sustain personal and collective identity towards the self and ‘in the world’.

In a chapter on communicative and cultural memory, Jan Assmann reminds us that as “the human self is a ‘diachronic identity’ built of the ‘stuff of time’”, “memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level”.⁴⁸ Clinging to the intense and embodied rituals, remembering through “formal and vernacular” rituals, as Semerdjian calls them, the Armenians transformed the collective experience and memory of the genocide⁴⁹ into the “most significant building blocks”⁵⁰ where “identity is constituted”.⁵¹

⁴⁴ ASSMANN: ‘Canon and archive’ 98.

⁴⁵ Facebook video, <https://www.facebook.com/ShiBiFeed/videos/849030888909459> [posted on 22 April 2020].

⁴⁶ <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1013368/>

⁴⁷ ERLI & NÜNNING: *Cultural memory studies* 5.

⁴⁸ J. ASSMANN: ‘Communicative and cultural memory’, in ERLI & NÜNNING: *Cultural memory studies* 109.

⁴⁹ Tessa Hofmann confirms that “many Non-Armenian scholars and journalists concluded that the collective remembrance of the genocide is the most significant determinant of the ‘collective identity and community in the Armenian Diaspora’”. T. HOFMANN: *One nation, three sub-ethnic groups. The case of Armenia and her diaspora* (Yerevan 2011) 48.

⁵⁰ HOLSLAG: ‘Memorization of the Armenian genocide’ 264.

⁵¹ SEMERDJIAN: ‘Bone memory’ 68.

One of the respondents, Nejteh, tells of the first time he heard about the genocide when he was just a seven-year-old school boy.

At the commemoration that year the teacher explained to the class what happened eighty-five years ago, about the massacres and the struggle of the ancestors and she told us it is important to keep the fight going. (...) That evening when I went home and asked my grandparents and then my parents about all these things, I had many questions and I started to understand why we are Armenian, why we live in a country that is not Armenia (...) and then I understood what had happened to us (...) after that I started participating in the marches and the official commemorations.⁵²

Teachers, parents and grandparents transmitted the memory, which by interaction and participation got integrated in Nejteh's identity perceived as something that has happened 'to us'.⁵³ It became a 'collective autobiography' and a collective identity.⁵⁴

For diaspora Armenians this strong collective identity that in the words of Holslag "may have to carry a weight that no other ethnic identity can carry" is also "under continuous threat and must be protected".⁵⁵ Therefore, tirelessly keeping the commemorations even after a hundred and five years have passed – besides the political and ethical demands – is a demand of the identity in order to maintain it but also to develop it. Due to historical and geopolitical changes, this identity "is not 'finished'. It is an identity in creation".⁵⁶ And for it to survive, its greatest feeding source, the commemoration of the genocide, needs to change and adapt.

⁵² Nejteh Bodroumian (M), university graduate, Armenian Apostolic, interviewed, May 2020.

⁵³ As Tessa Hofmann remarks, survivors of the genocide "spread their emotions (...) expanding their trauma and loss into an all-Armenian sentiment whose components became despair, the experience of humiliation and wholesale dispossession, broken promises of rehabilitation and restitution, lost hope and trust". HOFMANN: *One nation* 46.

⁵⁴ ASSMANN: 'Canon and archive' 100. An example of Jürgen Habermas's argument that people "can develop social identities only if they recognize that they maintain their membership in social groups by way of participating in interactions, and thus that they are caught up in the narratively presentable histories of collectivities". Quoted in ÜGÖR: 'Lost in commemoration' 160.

⁵⁵ HOLSLAG: 'Memorization of the Armenian genocide' 264.

⁵⁶ HOLSLAG: 'Memorization of the Armenian genocide' 264.

3. PERMEABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

“Every year we do something different. Sometimes the march is on the eve of 23 April sometimes on the 24th, the route could change as well (...) sometimes we included the Assyrians and Syriacs and sometimes not (...) every year we have a committee and they decide what the events will look like. All the sub-communities participate in whatever is planned”, explained one of the respondents.⁵⁷ Throughout its history, the commemoration ritual has changed and morphed not only in shape, but also in its meaning and function for the community depending on the context and in response to new developments. In what follows I will highlight some of the major turning points, particularly for the communities of the Near East, showing that

the past is not given, but must instead continually be re-constructed and re-presented. (...) This holds true not only for what is remembered (facts, data), but also for how it is remembered, that is, for the quality and meaning the past assumes.⁵⁸

In the early phases after the genocide, “the victims did not have the chance to fully own the story they unwillingly became the heroes of. Neither the dead nor the survivors had time to own it. A reversal took place, the story itself took a persona and it owned the people, it owned the survivors and their descendants”, said P. Haidostian.⁵⁹ While the story still ‘owns’ the people, this ownership is negotiated through acts of remembrance over time. As the story is retold it is interacting with the environment and with historical events picking up new meanings on the way. The underlying feeling of sadness lurking in the remembrance intertwine with feelings of pride, anger, pain and hope.

As mentioned before, it is not until fifty years had passed that official and visible commemoration rituals started to be held. The rather shy and introverted beginnings, turned into more vocal and visible events by the 1980s as better documentation and research of the events were disseminated. In the 1990s the establishment of the international criminal tribunals such as those for Yugoslavia and Rwanda brought new hope to the Armenians who started allowing themselves to believe that retribution is

⁵⁷ Garen Yosolkian (M), archdeacon in the Armenian Apostolic Church, interview, June 2020.

⁵⁸ ERLI & NÜNNING: *Cultural memory studies* 7.

⁵⁹ HAIDOSTIAN: Public Lecture.

possible.⁶⁰ However, it was after the re-establishment of the Republic of Armenia on 21 September 1991 that “the scope and the content of the Diasporic struggle changed profoundly”.⁶¹ In the existence of Armenian land and country, even if not replacing lost land or coinciding with it, the focus of the commemoration moved from dreaming of return to asking for “recognition of the Armenian genocide by the various host lands”.⁶² Though not totally quenching the thirst of Cilician or Western Armenians for the land and for retribution, it did give some sort of anchor and transferred the torch of struggle to the Republic of Armenia.

The Armenian community in Lebanon and Syria is among the most passionate towards issues of *Armenianism* and is according to many scholars the keeper of genocide memory. However, after 1991 it is in the Republic of Armenia that the big events happen around the *Tsitsernakaberd* memorial complex. Watching the broadcasted ceremonies from Yerevan is one of the fixtures of the rituals of the day for many, not only in the Near East, but worldwide. Thousands of people climb the hill forming processions, laying fresh flowers and observing silence around the eternal flame surrounded by the twelve slabs and giving hope to those observing them behind TV screens. In addition, since the establishment of the Republic of Armenia diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia and Turkey’s EU bid have impacted the discourse on Armenians among Turkish civil society, sometimes blurring issues of justice for the sake of diplomacy and driving diaspora Armenians to work more fervently towards recognition.⁶³

Another more recent event that reshaped the memorial rituals is the war in Syria that started in 2011. In a speech at the occasion of the centennial of the genocide in Paris, the then French president François Hollande said “by some curious and terrible fatality, it so happens that a hundred years later, in the very places where those barbarous acts were committed, barbarity is at work once again”.⁶⁴ Though Hollande refers to the ‘barbarity’ in places such as Deir-Zor in Syria as if by ‘chance’, for most Armenians this comes as a confirmation of the continuation of

⁶⁰ DEMIRDJIAN: *The Armenian genocide legacy* 3.

⁶¹ HOFMANN: *One nation* 50.

⁶² HOFMANN: *One nation* 50.

⁶³ See S. BAYRAKTAR: ‘The politics of denial and recognition. Turkey, Armenia and the EU’, in DEMIRDJIAN: *Armenian Genocide legacy* 197-211.

⁶⁴ F. HOLLANDE: ‘2015. The Centennial of the Genocide’, in *Politique Internationale* (= Special Issue, *A Hundred years ago... the Armenian Genocide*) 147 (2015) 9.

a pattern of Turkish behavior and that Turkey (and its allies) are forever targeting the Armenians and their history, wanting not only to erase them but to erase their history, particularly the genocide history buried under the sand and in the caves of Deir-Ezor.

“We have started hearing in the news names of cities and places that are associated in our memory with the genocide. As if the news is coming out of the history books”, said Maral in an interview.⁶⁵ Vana, a citizen of the Kessab region, the last standing Armenian colony from the time of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, commented on the events happening in these villages: “What happened to us in Kessab in the Spring of 2014, and how they attacked us from Turkey and destroyed our churches, is only the continuation of what they did during the genocide. They want us dead.”⁶⁶ The Deir-Ezor Armenian Genocide Memorial Museum and Martyr’s Church were both destroyed by ISIS in 2014, reminding the Armenians of all the previous erasures of mass graves in Turkey such as the ones that happened in Mardin in 2006.⁶⁷ The hundred-year-old memory and the buried bones mixed with new bones and new violent memories. The commemorations henceforth, as they did after various historical disasters experienced since the genocide 1915, picked up the new pain and losses within them. “After the annual commemorations we now visit the tombs and we remember not only those who died in the past but those Syrian Armenians who died during this war”, added Vana, “and we pray for all the dead Armenians”.⁶⁸ As the genocide memorial collects other death within it, it becomes a memorial of everything and everyone that the Armenians lost, reminding that dramatic conditions and “bereavement after catastrophes, war or crime, or the destruction of people, monuments and buildings” bring the ‘absences’ or losses and make them present.⁶⁹

Another influential landmark on the commemoration’s timeline is the centennial in 2015. The entire year, all over the world, was marked by a burst of activities. Hundreds of events, exhibitions, concerts, plays, movies as well as symposia, conferences and political rallies took place. Driven by the fear that the passing of a hundred years would make them lose their claims and that their demands can become obsolete, the Arme-

⁶⁵ Maral Haidostian, interview, May 2020.

⁶⁶ Vana Tanielian (F), university graduate, wife of Armenian Apostolic priest, interviewed May 2020.

⁶⁷ SEMERDJIAN: *Bone memory* 56.

⁶⁸ Vana Tanielian, interview May 2020.

⁶⁹ BILLE [et al.]: *An anthropology of absence* 3.

nians went full on. Emotions were stirred and the history was revisited more intensely.⁷⁰ “We expected something big will happen after the centennial”, said Shant, “maybe not that our lands will be given back but that something will change.”⁷¹ And something did change.

The build up as well as the commemoration day in 2015 galvanized Armenians worldwide, but also non-Armenians who joined them in empathic celebration. Though traditionally this was a day for sadness and collective mourning, starting in 2015, the focus shifted to a more hopeful expectation and determined struggle. “When we were children, the women used to come to church dressed in black and many would tear up during the service. But now, it has become less morbid. People tend to wear white”, said Marianna.⁷²

Indeed, the shift was not only on the emotional level but also on the liturgical level. As Archimandrite Hrant Tahanian explained, until the year 2015, a requiem, called *Hakehankisd* in Armenian, used to be celebrated on that day.⁷³ But on the occasion of the centennial, the Armenian Church canonized the martyrs collectively as Saints in an impressive open air liturgy in Echmiadzin. Instead of a requiem, a celebratory mass of intercession is now performed with a canon of hymns specially composed by the famous bishop Zareh for the occasion.⁷⁴ Indeed, after that date, the commemoration is no longer a day of lament and sadness. It is, according to pastor Sevag,

a day for renewing our commitment for the struggle and fight for justice. It is more about the Armenian cause. The commemoration has gone through many phases and the current phase is not about sadness. Sadness is there but now it is about being more practical on the ground, and working towards the recognition.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Keeping in mind that the Syrian war events were still unfolding.

⁷¹ Shant Akoushian, interview, April 2020.

⁷² Marianna Khatchadourian, Protestant Armenian, University graduate, interviewed April 2020.

⁷³ Archmandrite Hrant Tahanian, Ecumenical Officer at the Catholicosate of Cilicia, the Armenian Apostolic Church, interviewed May 2020.

⁷⁴ In the liturgically oriented Armenian apostolic church “unlike the Catholic tradition, there is no rigorous canonization process, requiring a minimum of two miracles and so on”. Many prominent persons who contributed to the community have acquired unofficial sainthood status through liturgical practices, by simply having their names mentioned in the liturgy. C. SHEKLIAN: ‘Venerating the Saints’, in AGADJANIAN: *Armenian Christianity today*, 145-170, p. 157.

⁷⁵ Pastor Sevag Trashian, Protestant Armenian, Informal Chat, June 2020.

The flexibility of the commemoration and its capacity to adapt and address new circumstances is remarkable. In the absence of physical commemorations due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the celebration during April 2020 went online and in the open air. In addition to the broadcasted liturgies and worship services, on the night of the 23rd Armenians mobilized all sympathizers around the world to turn off the lights in their apartments and turn on phone lights or light candles near their windows, joining the action entitled *Illuminated Commemoration Vigil*. In the Armenian neighborhood Bourj Hammoud in Beirut, a few clergy and dignitaries gathered in a public square, addressing the viewers via live streaming. A prayer was read by prominent Evangelical pastor Rev. Dr. Haidostian, concluded with

In the name of all Lebanese Armenians we light this torch⁷⁶ to establish a new light in our national self-understanding and to take into new horizons the just struggle that our people is leading for the recognition of the Armenian genocide around the world. (...) We ask for moral diligence and bravery to our people towards both Lebanon and our fatherland so that we stay willing and faithful towards both.⁷⁷

The torch was then lit and the fire was paraded in the narrow streets of Bourj Hammoud, held high on top of a pick-up truck clad with a black cloth and decorated with an Armenian and a Lebanese flag while Armenian music emanated from its loud speakers.

This permeability allows other sorrows and events to imbue it. It also has flexibility as it adapts to events, environment and circumstances and testifies to the elastic process of remembrance. Society's way of remembering is selective and can change perspective on past events. A variety of versions, not mutually exclusive, of the past can be upheld at different times "according to present knowledge and needs".⁷⁸ The 'present knowledge and needs' of Armenians today turn the attention towards political and moral demands.

4. POLITICAL AND MORAL DEMANDS

On the eve of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide in 2015, during the canonization of the martyrs into sainthood, the Catholicos said in his sermon "through their sainthood we should remember that,

⁷⁶ An actual torch was carried by a young man standing by.

⁷⁷ Cilicia TV, Facebook page, <https://fb.watch/2-ODYRFjqH/>; translated into English by pastor Sevag Trashian for the sake of this study.

⁷⁸ ERLI & NÜNNING: *Cultural memory studies* 5.

inspired by the Holy Spirit, they defied evil; we, their descendants, should also defy the evil of our modern times”.⁷⁹ In 2020, his sermon, in line with previous years, did not fail to demand with passion Turkey’s recognition: “we continue to remember, remind, and demand our rights”, he said, even if “the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, unfortunately, has remained on paper”.⁸⁰ The new shift to considering those who died as saints who ‘defied evil’ instead of simply martyrs, transforms the discourse around the genocide from victimhood to agency while maintaining the obligation to remember.

Many have discussed whether memory of past atrocities and conflicts are to be upheld or forgotten. In a chapter entitled ‘To remember or to forget. Which way out of a shared history of violence?’ Aleida Assmann argues against Christian Meier’s proposal that forgetting is an imperative for peace. On the contrary, she proves that the process of “remembering has a transformative and integrative power”.⁸¹ Similarly, in *Absent ritual*, Martin Hoondert argues against David Rieff’s defense of oblivion in his book *In praise of forgetting*, where Rieff points to the political and moral dangers of remembering events such as genocides.⁸² Answering Rieff, Hoondert gives four reasons against forgetting, the third of which is very relevant here: “memorials, especially genocide sites, massacre spots and gravesites, have an important function in combatting genocide denial”.⁸³ Armenians have, as I have described so far, dealt with memory in various ways. As Paul Haidostian, in his aforementioned lecture, asks, ‘we will never forget’ has been a common slogan, but then what to do with memory?”

American Political scientist Razmik Panossian identified four different positions or ‘themes’ in regard to this memory and remembrance. The first is a victim position that looks back and says “we are a victim nation and all our dead in the Genocide are martyrs”; the second continues this perception into “we are still suffering because injustice has not been recognized by the perpetrators and most of the world”. The third carries an exile and lost land dimension by emphasizing awaiting the return of its ‘true inhabitants’, and the fourth position asks for “revenge and

⁷⁹ <https://www.armenianorthodoxchurch.org/en/archives/11703> [last accessed 25 June 2020].

⁸⁰ <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1013368/>

⁸¹ ASSMANN: ‘To remember or to forget’ 57.

⁸² M. HOONDERT: ‘Non-healing rituals and how to build a peaceful future. Between memory and oblivion’, in POST & HOONDERT: *Absent ritual* 76

⁸³ HOONDERT: ‘Non-healing rituals’ 83.

retribution”.⁸⁴ These positions or themes are not to be seen as mutually exclusive. Many Armenians may carry more than one of these themes in varying degrees and the commemoration is seen as one of the ways through which they can be expressed. The two first positions of victimhood and of lack of recognition of pain see in the commemoration a way to resist further annihilation through public amnesia, the ‘crime of silence’ and assimilation, also known as ‘white genocide’. The second two ask for return and more commonly for retribution and compensation and tend to stage the commemoration as a political campaign where international demands are made.

In comparison with other massacres such as the Holocaust and the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina that have inscribed themselves in global consciousness, Armenians lament the absence of the recognition of their pain. “A hundred years later, no distinctive episode of the Armenian Genocide is inscribed in global, common awareness”, says Alexis Demerdjian. “The detention camps of Ayash and Chankiri, the desert of Deir-Zor, and the deportations and killings from Van, Erserum, Diyarbakir, Erzindjana and other locations have little to no meaning in public consciousness in relation to the events of 1915.”⁸⁵ Add to this the fact that from the very beginning Turkey has had a policy of erasing the genocide memory and even all memory of Armenians from its territories. As Turkish scholar Uğur Ümit Üngör explains, after the genocide “although the Armenians were gone, in a sense they were still deemed to be too visible” through their architecture, cemeteries and even in Turkish cultural memory.⁸⁶ The Kamalist regime and all subsequent regimes followed a policy of suppressing information and removing physical landmarks and even blocking the production of films and documentaries in an attempt to erase memory. Raphael Lemkin’s definition of genocide also includes these systematic acts of vandalism of the arts and cultural heritage in what he called ‘ethnocide’.⁸⁷ The yearly commemorations worldwide, the mention of villages, cathedrals and all that was lost, is a resistance against these erasures, oblivion and loss.

⁸⁴ R. PANOSSIAN: ‘The past as nation. Three dimensions of Armenian identity’, in *Geopolitics* 7/2 (2002) 137. Quoted in HOFMANN: *One nation* 49.

⁸⁵ DEMIRDJIAN: *The Armenian genocide legacy* 1.

⁸⁶ ÜGÖR: ‘Lost in commemoration’ 151

⁸⁷ N. KEBRANIAN: ‘Cultural heritage and the denial of the genocide law’, in DEMERDJIAN: *The Armenian genocide legacy* 244.

The commemoration is one way to prove that the Armenians existed and still exist and serves as an attempt to make the genocide more internationally legible. Another aspect that needs resistance is the ongoing loss experienced through the diaspora situation. Generally known as ‘white genocide’, it is seen as the “continuing catastrophe that had brought the survivors to the brink of acculturation and assimilation”.⁸⁸ Migrating from the Near East to America⁸⁹ or marrying an *odar* (non-Armenian⁹⁰) are also seen as threats to an identity “placed in the body”.⁹¹ In order to preserve and protect this identity, the genocide has to be recognized “publicly and politically”.⁹² Its denial, is – as Hoffman reminds through Elie Wiesel’s words – a “double killing”.⁹³ We see here the ethical dimension of memory where the loss or abandonment of memory, forgetfulness, can be seen as lack of character or of humanity.⁹⁴

Through the yearly commemoration, the Armenian community is not only staging its pain and asking for international recognition and the continuation of its identity, it is also exerting pressure on the international public opinion in order to gain Turkish recognition and compensation and demanding legal accountability. Archimandrite Hrant Tahanian explained: “Turkey has to confess before we can forgive.”⁹⁵ For him this is not a personal issue, it is a political issue: an issue of justice and ethics.

A new dimension was added to these demands in recent years and that is the resistance to evil, mentioned by the Catholicos, not only for the sake of the Armenian cause but for humanity. Paul Haidostian calls on governments to take the necessary steps as time alone does not solve matters of justice. He also calls Armenians to “move to new levels of responsibility also towards those who face similar crimes as the one they had experienced. They have to translate their experience as moral giving action to others”.⁹⁶ It is no surprise then that during the recent years the commemoration occasionally included the Syriac and Assyrian

⁸⁸ HOFMANN: *One nation* 49.

⁸⁹ As this was seen to please the USA and her NATO ally Turkey, securing that Armenians would never return to their homeland.

⁹⁰ Endogamy is seen as essential for maintaining identity, culture and language.

⁹¹ HOLSLAG: ‘Memorization of the Armenian genocide’ 266.

⁹² HOLSLAG: ‘Memorization of the Armenian genocide’ 266.

⁹³ As quoted by HOFMANN: *One nation* 54.

⁹⁴ Mary Carruthers, as quoted in SHEKLIAN: ‘Venerating the Saints’ 148.

⁹⁵ Archmandrite Hrant Tahanian, interview, May 2020.

⁹⁶ HAIDOSTIAN: Public Lecture.

communities who experienced similar massacres. The discourse of the commemoration today includes the hope that the experience of the Armenians would aid in preventing further genocides.

In a song about the Armenian Genocide, French-Armenian singer Charles Aznavour describes how millions from his people atrociously fell dead and are now “covered by a wind of sand and then of forgetfulness”.⁹⁷ It is to this deep-seated feeling of being abandoned in the desert without a proper funeral, of having one’s identity buried under the sand and under the feet of the aggressor, of forgetting or losing one’s heritage and being forgotten by others, that the commemoration rituals speak.

⁹⁷ The title of the song is “Ils sont tombés”. The French verse reads, ‘Recouverts par un vent de sable et puis d’oubli’.

BLOOD BROTHERS:
THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE COMMEMORATED IN ART
PROJECTS

MARTIN J.M. HOONDERT & SAM VAN ALEBEEK

1. INTRODUCTION

The systematic mass murder and expulsion of 1.5 million ethnic Armenians within the Ottoman Empire from approximately 1914 to 1923 was the reason behind the Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959) coining the word ‘genocide’. It was during World War II that Lemkin introduced this concept, a neologism formed from the Greek *genos* (‘people’ or ‘race’) and the Latin *caedere* (‘to kill’). He defined genocide in 1944 as “a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves”.¹ Already in 1948, the same year in which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights came into fruition, the United Nations brought the word into the context of transnational criminal law through the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. While the Armenian Genocide took place before the term was first introduced, as of 2020, the governments and parliaments of thirty-three countries² have recognized these events as a genocide.³

The history of the Armenian Genocide is complex and has its roots in the way the (Christian) Armenians were treated by the (Muslim) Ottoman rulers. Massacres had already taken place between 1894 and

¹ Cited U.Ü. ÜNGÖR: ‘Studying mass violence. Pitfalls, problems, and promises’, in *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7/1 (2012) 68-80, p. 68.

² In February 2020, Syria recognized the Armenian Genocide, see <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/syria/syria-s-parliament-recognizes-armenian-genocide-1.8530809> [last accessed 14 February 2020].

³ See also the previous chapter, by Rima Nasrallah, concerning the development of the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide.

1896 and were motivated by nationalistic ideologies on the side of the majority group in the Ottoman Empire. On 24 April 1915, the Armenian Genocide officially began with the arrest and execution of several hundred Armenian intellectuals. After that, ordinary Armenians were turned out of their homes and sent on death marches through the Mesopotamian desert without food or water. Due to a ‘Turkification campaign’, many Armenians and members of other religious minorities were killed.⁴

The Armenian Genocide was and still is part of fierce political dispute. Turkey, the main successor of the Ottoman Empire, maintains that the word genocide is not an accurate term for the crimes committed against the Armenians. Many governments have employed the strategy of so-called interpretive denial: they acknowledge the raw facts, but they give them a different interpretation. These governments deny the genocide by using concealing language, such as ‘so-called genocide’, or refer to the crimes committed as a ‘tragedy for both sides’.⁵ It is within this tension between acknowledgment on the one hand and interpretive denial⁶ on the other that several artists have tried to explore the issue of truth (i.e. ‘what has really happened, and how historical facts can be interpreted’) and work toward reconciliation between Armenians and Turks. Our research focuses on the artistic practices involving the Armenian Genocide and the tension between acknowledgment and denial as their main focus. First, we will describe some of the artistic practices related to the Armenian Genocide as a first exploration of the field. Then, we will describe a six-part documentary that was broadcast on Dutch television and evaluate it using the concepts of victimhood and acknowledgment, and responsibility and denial as key terms.

⁴ B. MORRIS & D. ZE’EVI: *The thirty-year genocide. Turkey’s destruction of its Christian minorities 1894-1924* (Cambridge, MA 2019). T. AKÇAM: *The Young Turks’ crime against humanity. The Armenian genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ 2012). R.H. KÉVORKIAN: *The Armenian genocide. A complete history* (London 2010).

⁵ For example, see: Turkey commemorates first diplomats assassinated by Armenian terrorists, *Daily Sabah*, 27 January 2020 at <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2020/01/27/turkey-commemorates-first-diplomats-assassinated-by-armenian-terrorists> [last accessed 27 May 2020]. In this article the Armenian Genocide is referred to as the ‘so-called genocide’ and ‘a great tragedy in which both parties suffered heavy casualties’. *Daily Sabah* is a Turkish pro-government daily.

⁶ S. COHEN: *States of denial. Knowing about atrocities and suffering* (Cambridge, UK/Malden, MA 2001).

Two issues have to be dealt with before we can begin to describe some of the artistic practices. First, does the Armenian Genocide belong in a book regarding *disaster* rituals? We answer this question with a firm ‘yes’. In disaster studies, genocides are dealt with as man-made disasters and the Holocaust serves as a kind of prototype. In their chapter on new, old, and in-between types of disasters and crises, Enrico Quartantelli, Patrick Lagadec and Arjen Boin mention “intentional conflict situations” and list wars, terrorist attacks and genocides in this category.⁷ A second issue concerns whether a discussion of artistic practices fits in a book regarding *disaster rituals*. Also, here the answer is ‘yes’, for artistic practices can be considered ritual practices due to the symbolic dimensions of art.⁸ Through art, artists express their ideas, which in this case regard the Armenian Genocide, and, at the same time, they confront audiences and participants in order to engage or even transform their views. By studying artistic practices from the perspective of ritual and ritualization, we become aware of their symbolic dynamics, performative elements, use of tradition or reiteration, engagement of audiences and functions in terms of cultural confrontation, meaning-making processes and transformation.⁹ Studying artistic practices from the perspective of ritual theory shows how the arts not only express but also (re-)shape identity and cultural values. Cultural musicologist Christopher Small locates the ritual potential of art exactly in the participatory engagement to which one is invited through art.¹⁰ In his chapter about disaster theater in this volume, Kees de Groot writes about how “the spectator sits in her chair, shields down, and watches to what is not real, but ‘only play’. And then, as it might happen, the spectator is taken in”.¹¹

⁷ E.L. QUARANTELLI, P. LAGADEC & A. BOIN: ‘A heuristic approach to future disasters and crises: New, old, and in-between types’, in H. RODRIGUEZ, E.L. QUARANTELLI & R.R. DYNES (eds.): *Handbook of disaster research* (New York 2007) 16-41. In a 2001 article, Quarantelli did not include social conflicts, such as war and genocide, under the disaster label. See: E.L. QUARANTELLI: ‘Statistical and conceptual problems in the study of disasters’, in *Disaster Prevention and Management* 10/5 (2001) 325-338.

⁸ See also chapter 30 by Kees de Groot regarding disaster theater. There, De Groot refers to Victor Turner, who identified theater as the functional equivalent of ritual in postmodern times. See: V. TURNER: *From ritual to theatre. The human seriousness of play* (= Performance studies series) (New York 1982).

⁹ E. FISCHER-LICHTE: *The transformative power of performance. A new aesthetics* (London/New York 2008).

¹⁰ C. SMALL: *Musicking. The meanings of performing and listening* (Hanover 1998).

¹¹ K. DE GROOT: ‘Disaster theater. Play when things go awry’, p. 570 in this handbook.

Ritual and art may serve similar purposes for those participating in them: they may serve as a form of protest, as confrontational and connective practices, or as a wake-up call aiming at transformation and action. For this reason we have chosen to study artistic responses to the Armenian Genocide as an empirical focus for the larger issue of understanding genocide acknowledgment and denial.¹²

2. ARTISTIC PRACTICES RELATED TO THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

In this section, we will present some examples of artistic practices related to the Armenian Genocide. This overview includes various genres of art. The number of art works about the Armenian Genocide is quite overwhelming, perhaps due to the ‘pain’ of non-recognition by a great part of the international community. We might consider this to be a continuous call for international recognition by artists originating from Armenia or the transnational Armenian diasporic community. In the following, we present an overview of the artistic practices related to the Armenian Genocide, that is far from complete, but which nevertheless gives at least an impression of how the Armenian Genocide has become a central topic in various genres of art.

In the realm of music, several contemporary Armenian composers have reflected on the genocide in works such as the composition *The Sobbing of Armenia* (1915) by the musician and painter Vardan Makhokhyan (1869-1937).¹³ Another example is Edgar Hovhannisyan’s *Antuni Ballet* (1969), in which the character of Komitas (an Armenian monk and composer, 1869-1935) embodies the collective image and destiny of all Armenian artists from Western Armenia who perished because of the genocide. A third example is Alan Hovhannes’s *Exile Symphony* (1939). According to the Armenian researcher Lilit Yernjakyan “[the] symphony became a symbolic self-acknowledgment of the composer’s Armenian identity, and an offering in commemoration of the victims of the genocide”.¹⁴

Armenian painters have depicted specific scenes of the genocide or related their work to the expression of grief. A good example is the

¹² R. FELSKI: *Uses of literature* (Malden, MA 2008). R. SHUSTERMAN: *Pragmatist aesthetics. Living beauty, rethinking art* (Lanham, MD 2000).

¹³ See <https://www.wikiart.org/en/vartan-mahokian> [last accessed 17 February 2020].

¹⁴ *Armenian Genocide-100. From Recognition to Reparation. International Conference 15-16 October 2015. Abstracts*. Yerevan: National Academy Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, 263.

French Armenian surrealist painter Léon Tutundjian (1905-1968), who was saved from the genocide and continued to resort to this subject in his creative work.¹⁵

The Armenian Genocide has also been a subject in films, including *Ravished Armenia* (1919), also known as *Auction of Souls*, an American silent film based on the autobiographical book *Ravished Armenia* by Arshaluys Mardiganian; *Nahapet* (1977; *Nahapet* means ‘Patriarch’) by Hendrik Malyan; *The Cut* (2014), about the life and experiences of a young Armenian in light of the Armenian Genocide and its repercussions in different parts of the world; *1915* (2015) which explores, among other themes, the denial of the Armenian Genocide; and *The Promise* (2016), an American historical drama film that deliberately aimed at educating people about the Armenian Genocide.¹⁶

There is also the genre of documentaries, which includes productions that balance art, education, commemoration, and in some cases, such works overlap with those in the category of film. In the Netherlands, where we as authors are based, two documentaries were released in 2015 on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. First, there was the six-part documentary series *Bloedbroeders* (‘Blood brothers’) in which two Dutch men of respectively Armenian and Turkish backgrounds travel together. Second, there was the documentary *Sayfo, de vergeten genocide* (‘Sayfo, the forgotten genocide’). This documentary tells the story of the Aramean or Assyrian Genocide that took place within the same context of the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Armenian Genocide. Other documentaries related to the Armenian Genocide that have been broadcast on Dutch television include *Het land van onze grootouders* (2010; ‘The land of our ancestors’), *De laatste Armeniër* (2011; ‘The last Armenian’) and two documentaries by director Dorotheë Forma: *Een muur van stilte* (1997; ‘A wall of silence’) and *Het verhaal van mijn naam* (2006; ‘The story of my name’). Of course, documentaries were also produced outside the Netherlands, such as *Orphans of the Genocide*, a 2014 American documentary, and *Aghet – Ein Völkermord* (2010; *Aghet – A Genocide*), a German documentary by the director Eric Friedler.

¹⁵ J. MURACHANIAN: ‘Léon Tutundjian–TRAuma in ART’, in R.G. HOVANNISIAN (ed.): *The Armenian genocide* (Somerset, NJ/London 2006) 121-142.

¹⁶ See <https://mirrorspectator.com/2017/04/20/director-terry-george-speaks-about-the-promise/> [last accessed 17 February 2020].

In 2015, 100 years after the beginnings of the Armenian Genocide, several commemorative initiatives and artistic practices took place. We already mentioned several movies and documentaries, but other practices are worth adding to the list. For example, in Los Angeles in the United States, which houses the largest Armenian community outside Armenia, Arutyun Gozukuchikyan created a mural stating “Our wounds are still open” as a protest against genocide denial.¹⁷ One of the main artistic manifestations appearing in 2015 was the national pavilion of the Republic of Armenia at the fifty-sixth Biennale of Venice.¹⁸ The art works in this pavilion, which were designed by eighteen artists from the diaspora, provided an occasion to rethink the notions of identity, memory, justice, and reconciliation. The artists were the grandchildren of those who had witnessed the genocide. As Adelina von Fürstenberg, the curator of the pavilion, stated the following:

No matter where they were born – in Aleppo, Bethlehem, Yerevan or Los Angeles – they share a special sensitivity toward the issue of borders, geography and territory, as well as issues of survival, adaptation and historical memory, not to mention a dream-like image of a country in which many of them have not had a chance to live.¹⁹

The exhibition took place in the Armenian Mekhitarist Monastery on a small island in the Venetian lagoon. The central concept of the pavilion was ‘Armenity’, referring to the complex and diverse identities of the genocide survivors and the next generations in the diaspora. The Armenian pavilion won the 2015 Biennale’s Golden Lion Award for best national participation. By selecting a diverse group of artists who had engaged with Armenian history, geography, art history, literature and religion, curator Adelina Cüberyan von Fürstenberg did not prescribe to any single narrative of Armenian identity but instead presented it as a complex multiplicity.²⁰ The ritual, transformative dynamics of the

¹⁷ See <https://longlistshort.com/tag/arutyun-gozukuchikyan/> [last accessed 17 February 2020].

¹⁸ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPjL_TtEC7g [last accessed 17 February 2020].

¹⁹ See <https://www.armenity.net/press-reviews> [last accessed 17 February 2020]. A review of the pavilion was published on 100lives.com: A. ARUTIUNOVA: ‘Armenia’s triumph at the Biennale di Venezia’, 13 May 2015.

²⁰ See <https://cpb-us-east-1-juc1ugur1qwqqo4.stackpathdns.com/blogs.uoregon.edu/dist/b/12682/files/2016/07/hughes-youtube-essays-biblio-1fbx6i5.pdf> [last accessed 17 February 2020].

concept of Armenity were explained by one of the participating artists, Hera Büyüктаşçıyan, as follows:

‘Armenity’ is for me more than a definition of an identity, more than a state of being. It’s the accumulation of time, knowledge, language, tradition, habits and a rich topography. Although it has political implications for many people, for me it is not something that can be limited to certain aspects of history. There is the tragic and heavy reality of the memory and traces of 1915 that has stayed inside people’s hearts and spirits generations long. However, today explaining what ‘Armenity’ truly means can become a language that opens up a path for healing the past (...) not completely of course, but it does partially succeed.²¹

The Biennale in Istanbul of 2015 was also partly dedicated to the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide.²² Due to the Turkish refusal to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide as such, the organizers had to keep this subtheme a secret. Regarding one of the aims of the exhibition, curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev wrote, “with and through art we mourn, commemorate, denounce, try to heal, and we commit ourselves to the possibility of joy and vitality, of many communities that have co-habited these spaces”.²³

3. CASE STUDY: THE 2015 DOCUMENTARY *BLOOD BROTHERS*

As described in the previous section, in 2015, a six-episode documentary was broadcast on Dutch television. This documentary, titled *Bloedbroeders* (‘Blood Brothers’) is still available online, also with English subtitles.²⁴ In *Bloedbroeders*, a Dutch journalist of Turkish descent and a Dutch musical actor of Armenian descent travel through Turkey to Armenia in search of answers to the following questions: Was the mass murder of 800,000 Armenians a genocide, and can Turkey be held responsible? What had happened to their ancestors during this period?

²¹ See the interview with Hera Büyüктаşçıyan at <https://www.drosteeffectmag.com/interview-hera-buyuktasciyan-armenity-venice-biennale/> [last accessed 17 February 2020].

²² <http://14b.iksv.org/index.asp> [last accessed 28 May 2020].

²³ Fourteenth Istanbul Biennial: ‘Saltwater. A theory of thought forms’, *ArtAsiaPacific* 1 September 2015 at <http://www.artasiapacific.com/Blog/14thIstanbulBiennialSaltwaterAThoryOfThoughtForms> [last accessed 28 May 2020].

²⁴ In Dutch: <https://www.2doc.nl/documentaires/series/bloedbroeders.html>. With English subtitles: <https://www.bnnvara.nl/bloedbroeders/english> [both last accessed 20 July 2021].

The series is a road movie, with both historical and highly emotional identity issues as the focal points. The production of the documentary was financially and substantively supported by the Democracy and Media Foundation.²⁵ The protagonists in the documentary also wrote a book, in which they extensively report on their journey through Turkey and Armenia.²⁶

In the next sections, we will summarize the content of the six episodes of the documentary. We will also analyze the documentary, using insights from ritual studies, victimology, and genocide studies.

3.1. *Blood Brothers*: content

In *Blood Brothers*, a Turkish-Dutch journalist (Sinan Can) and an Armenian-Dutch musical actor (Ara Halici) investigate how their families were involved in the Turkish mass murder of the Armenians one hundred years prior. The goal of the documentary series was to obtain answers to many questions, with perhaps the most important question that has caused so much sadness, fear, hatred, violence, and distrust being the following: Did the Ottoman government deliberately commit a genocide in 1915 on the Armenians? And if so, how could that have happened?

In the first episode we are shown that Halici knows nothing about his own Armenian history. When he is approached by the Turkish research journalist Sinan Can to go on a trip to discover the history of the Armenian Genocide, he decides to join. The trip starts in the Netherlands where Can and Halici begin their journey by speaking with their family to gain some initial knowledge about the genocide.

The second episode takes place in Istanbul. The goal of learning more about Halici's family history seems to fail. The few Armenian people in Istanbul are still living in fear, and the Turkish inhabitants have been taught from a very young age to see the Armenians as traitors. Can attempts to investigate why the Turkish started to develop hatred toward the Armenians. He finds out that in the nineteenth century, Armenians were heavily dominated by the Ottomans and were therefore looking for support from the West. When the Ottoman Empire started to collapse,

²⁵ <https://www.stdem.org/en/project/bloedbroeders/> [last accessed 29 May 2020].

²⁶ S. CAN & A. HALICI: *Bloedbroeders. Verscheurd door het verleden, herenigd in hun zoektocht* (Houten 2015).

the Armenians were viewed as a threat, and this led to the desire to create a ‘new Turkey’ with Turkish people only.

In the third episode, Can and Halici travel to Kayseri in central Turkey, where Halici’s family was originally based. However, when they get there, the Armenian houses, churches, and neighborhoods turn out to have been destroyed. Nevertheless, Halici manages to find traces of his family and their history. When speaking to the locals, they do not know anything more than that the Armenians left the area themselves, and they appear view the events of 1915 as something the Armenians started themselves. When traveling to different locations, they discover how the plan to deport the Armenians to the desert was approved.

In the fourth episode, Halici finds the grandchildren of the Turkish farmer who saved his great-grandmother and grandfather. They are very welcoming and loving toward him. After this encounter, Can and Halici travel to Erzincan, where Can’s family comes from. His great-grandfather was a landlord who had managed to get hold of a lot of Armenian land. As Can will one day inherit this land, he wants to know if his family has blood on their hands. He discovers that in this area, tens of thousands of Armenians were systematically murdered and thrown in the Euphrates. All of a sudden Can’s own history has lost its innocence.

The fifth episode takes Halici and Can to some experts, through whom they try to obtain proof that the Turkish government deliberately murdered the Armenians. However, there appears to be no conclusive evidence to prove that there was an order to kill all Armenians.

In the last episode of the series, Halici and Can travel to Armenia. They join the official commemoration ceremony of the genocide and find out that an apology from the Turkish government would never work, since there is too much resentment among the Armenians. Moreover, they meet one of the last survivors of the genocide, who tells them his story. This particular individual still holds a grudge against all Turks, including Can. After quite a lengthy discussion, he gives Can a hug and forgives him and Turkey. They conclude that both countries can only heal each other. As long as Turkey will not acknowledge the genocide, Armenia cannot forgive, and as long as Armenia will not forgive Turkey, Turkey will never acquit itself.

We did no systematic research into the responses to the documentary, but we would like to quote one review. Hovik Torkomyan, founder of the website *History of Armenia*, referred to Halici’s and Can’s venture as “an emotional, brave and remarkable journey to say

the least and a must watch for every Armenian and Turk.” Torkomyan continues as follows:

[Watching] the documentary is an emotional rollercoaster that will make u (*sic*) cry, leave you in shock and feel hopeful. My hope is that it will be a small start for the discovery of the truth for many and the start of a healing process that is more than a century overdue.²⁷

3.2. Denial and truth

One of the motivations for making the documentary *Blood Brothers* was the search for truth. At the start of the journey, Can is in a state of disbelief (“This can’t be true!”), and Halici is ignorant about his own history. In fact, both men are themselves actually denying the Armenian Genocide, but in different ways. Genocide denial comes in many shapes and forms, but, as the sociologist Stanley Cohen wrote in his book *States of Denial*, one common thread runs through the many forms of denial: “people (...) are presented with information that is too disturbing, threatening or anomalous to be fully absorbed or openly acknowledged. The information is therefore somehow repressed, disavowed, pushed aside or reinterpreted.”²⁸ In the case of Can, we might speak of interpretive denial, at least at the start of the journey. He knows that something terrible has happened, but he continues to ask whether it really was genocide, and whether we ought to interpret this massacre as one of the consequences of civil war. In the case of Halici, the genocide seems to be no part of his memory; his parents did not tell him what happened to their ancestors and they did not share the reasons why they moved to the Netherlands.²⁹ Halici was not even able to deny the genocide, for he did not know anything about it. In his family, the genocide was somewhat taboo. For Halici, being a member of a new generation, the genocide was not part of the collective memory and the stories that should be remembered.³⁰

²⁷ <http://historyofarmenia.org/2017/05/19/watch-blood-brothers-bloedbroeders-documentary-series/> [last accessed 29 May 2020].

²⁸ COHEN: *States of denial* 1.

²⁹ G. RIEMERSMA: ‘Uit onwetendheid komt alleen maar slechtheid voort’, in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 27 February 2019 at <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/uit-onwetendheid-komt-alleen-maar-slechtheid-voort> [last accessed 8 June 2020].

³⁰ J. ASSMANN: ‘Communicative and cultural memory’, in A. ERLI & A. NÜNNING (eds.): *A companion to cultural memory studies* (Berlin/New York 2010) 109-118.

The fact that Sinan Can invited an Armenian actor to travel with him into history is an acknowledgment of at least two perspectives on truth. In an article about commemorating genocide, literary scholar Odile Heynders elaborated on the concept of multiple narratives from the perspective of life writing. Life narrative or life writing is the umbrella term for stories representing a life or a part of one, which in this case would be the stories of the Armenian Genocide. These types of stories are always interwoven with other stories:

storytellers are part of a shared context of meanings that they do not (only) create themselves. Because of the relatedness of stories, it is difficult to decide upon the truth of any one story, since no speaker has the final representation at their disposal of all the perspectives and historical and political facts.³¹

In the documentary it becomes clear that there is not just one story of what happened during and after the First World War for the Armenian people. The documentary encounters a barrier as the protagonists try to find official proof of the genocide, but in considering the micro-stories and looking for the bottom-up perspective, it is evident that there is no way to deny the genocide anymore. Truth seems to be related to ethnic backgrounds and political purposes, but in the confrontation of the two involved parties, here represented by Can and Halici, truth might appear to be multifaceted, but the core is unavoidable: the Armenians had been deported and killed in a process of Turkification, and there is no other term for this than genocide.

3.3. Transformation (1)

Analyzing the documentary from a ritual perspective, we see transformation taking place on several levels. First, there are transformative rituals *in* the documentary. During the journey, Can and Halici see so much evidence of the genocide that denial is simply no longer possible. In the introduction of the final episode, we hear Halici say, “My Turkish brother Sinan doesn’t deny anymore”. For Halici, the journey in six parts through Turkey and Armenia results in the discovery of his Armenian identity. He transforms from a man who did not know anything about the history of

³¹ O. HEYNDERS: ‘Speaking the self, narratives on Srebrenica’, in *European Journal of Life Writing* 3 (2014) 1-22, p. 5.

his own family and people to someone who has such knowledge and appropriates it as part of his identity. The transformative impact on Halici is, in his own words, not a form of hate against the Turks, but rather a connection to his Armenian brothers and sisters, through which he finds his true self. For Can, the hatred against the Turks that he encounters in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, is hard to stand. He suffers from both the hate he discovers and the feeling of responsibility for what has happened to the Armenian people; he is also distressed by the lack of acknowledgment on the part of the Turkish government and a lot of his fellow people.

A very impressive transformation and reconciliation ritual takes place in the sixth episode. An old Armenian man, Papi Movses, one of the last survivors of the Armenian Genocide, gives Can a hug as a sign of forgiveness. Both for Can and the viewer of the documentary, this scene is exciting, for Movses is very hesitant to forgive Can. The following excerpt is from the English version of the documentary:

Can: I have crossed the border, from the other side of the Ararat, to come here after ninety-nine years, as a Turk to embrace you. Is it possible that you can forgive me or the new generation of Turks?

Movses: Forgive him? Accept his apology? Forgive what? Is he a Turk? (...) You can't accept the word of a Turk. Should you put your hand in a bag with a snake in it? (...) They kill of an entire nation in front of children, and one 'sorry' should erase all that? (...) Come on, can that be forgotten?

Then, Movses's son and his wife interrupt, stating that reconciliation is necessary and that Can cannot be blamed for the mistakes of the past. The son asks his father, "Must we be enemies for all eternity?" In the next scene, we see Movses embracing Can in a very emotional moment:

Movses: I forgive you because I hope nothing like this will ever happen again between Turks and Armenians. The young people can't be blamed, that's true. The old grandpas are guilty. (...) But the pain is always in my heart. It will be there until the day I die.

In this impressive scene, Movses breaks out of the rigid dichotomy of victims and perpetrators, or at least he recognizes that not every Turk is a perpetrator. To understand this remarkable move, we make use of Michael Rothberg's book *The Implicated Subject. Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*. Here, Rothberg refers to the ideas of both Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt and their conceptualizations of guilt and responsibility.³² Jaspers distinguishes

³² M. ROTHBERG: *The implicated subject. Beyond victims and perpetrators* (Stanford 2019).

between several forms of guilt, of which metaphysical guilt can be applied to Can's understanding of his role regarding the Armenian Genocide:

[M]etaphysical guilt derives from 'a solidarity among men as human beings that makes each coresponsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world, especially for crimes committed in his presence or with his knowledge'.³³

Rothberg prefers to understand metaphysical guilt as a form of responsibility and finds Arendt to be on his side, who wrote:

There is such a thing as responsibility for things one has not done; one can be held liable for them. But there is no such thing as being or feeling guilty for things that happened without oneself actively participating in them.³⁴

This responsibility is shared collectively and can be both synchronous and diachronous. In Can's situation, the responsibility he feels is diachronous, and in response to his seriously expressed feeling of being responsible, which grows during the journey from Turkey to Armenia, Movses is able to turn to him and forgive. What makes this scene in the documentary even more complex is the simple fact that Can indeed feels responsible, but does not apologize. This evokes the question of what is actually going on here, and what kind of ritual has been performed. Can Movses forgive Can of something he is not guilty of, but is indeed responsible for just because he is a social human being? We propose to evaluate the ritual of embracing and forgiving as a recapturing of the past, but in an inverted form: the Turk and the Armenian participate in this ritual, not as enemies against each other, but in a gesture of friendship and reconciliation.

3.4. Transformation (2)

Transformation also takes place at the level of the viewers or audiences. We can perceive the documentary itself *as* a ritual insofar it is a road movie that impacts the viewers. Watching the documentary, we see the changes in the attitudes of both Can and Halici. As viewers, we are included in the reflections of the two main characters of the documentary; we engage and identify with them and, as such, our views regarding the Armenian Genocide will either change or be confirmed.

³³ Karl Jaspers as quoted in ROTHBERG: *The implicated subject* 43.

³⁴ Hanna Arendt as quoted in ROTHBERG: *The implicated subject* 45.

We might consider the documentary as a mediatized ritual that first and foremost involves the two protagonists, but also impacts the viewers as they witness the transformation that takes place during the documentary. Within media studies, the ritual dimension of media is a new, emerging field of study. In 2005, a group of leading anthropologists and media scholars coined the phrase 'media anthropology' to define the field of media research which focuses specifically on myth, ritual, and religion.³⁵ Scholars in this field analyze mediatized rituals and ritual dimensions of media events, using both a Durkheimian approach that focuses on social order and a more critical line of analysis focusing on power relations and the way media rituals are used for political agenda-setting.³⁶

The documentary addresses the audience through the use of several performative means.³⁷ First, the activities and events in the six episodes are commented upon by the two protagonists in the form of a voiceover. The viewer witnesses their tears and doubts and sees how they struggle with the 'truth'. As a result, the viewer is thrown back and forth between the Turkish and the Armenian sides of history. The multifaceted history of the Turks and the Armenians is personalized in the two protagonists, and the viewer is invited to sympathize with both of them. Second, although the trip that Can and Halici embark on seems to be quite spontaneous, everything they do is more or less staged. The viewer sees only parts of the meetings they have had with the Turks and Armenians in the Netherlands, Turkey, and Armenia. What the viewer sees has been edited and presented in a certain order to sway his or her views and opinions. Third, the six episodes of the documentary follow a script that the audience is not aware of. Research and other inquiries have preceded the actual road trip from Turkey to Armenia and have led to the final meeting with Movses, the survivor of the Armenian Genocide. We do not doubt the good intentions of the producer and protagonists of *Blood Brothers*, but it is certain that the script would not allow for the genocide to be denied in the end. The title betrays what the final outcome will be: brotherhood and reconciliation

³⁵ E.W. ROTHENBUHLER & M. COMAN: *Media anthropology* (Thousand Oaks, CA 2005).

³⁶ S. REIJNDERS: 'Media rituals and festive culture', in *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 10/2 (2007) 225-242, p. 226. See also N. COULDRY: *Media rituals. A critical approach* (London 2003); N. COULDRY & E.W. ROTHENBUHLER: 'Review essay: Simon Cottle on 'mediatized rituals'. A response', in *Media, Culture & Society* 29/4 (2007) 691-695.

³⁷ FISCHER-LICHTE: *The transformative power of performance*.

despite the bloodshed. As such, the documentary acts out the vision of brotherhood by seeking to make this ideal into a reality. Watching the documentary means entering a world in which reconciliation and acknowledgment are possible, without losing one's identity or becoming enemies with the other. The documentary thus functions as a 'space of morality', that has been carefully constructed.³⁸

4. FINAL REMARKS

In this chapter we have dealt with the question of how artists deal with the Armenian Genocide in the space between denial and acknowledgment. Using *Blood Brothers* as a case study, we have shown the very nuanced approach of an artistic and at the same time ritual way of dealing with the Armenian Genocide as a very controversial and emotional issue. The documentary shows that history is multifaceted and that truth can only be reached by viewing history through the eyes of all parties involved. The producer and protagonists have done everything in their power to make the documentary as informative and transformative as possible. Evaluating the documentary as a ritual practice, we presume that it might lead to reconciliation and brotherhood, at least among the new generations of Turks and Armenians.

We might consider the documentary as a vicarious ritual advanced as a response to the absence of political apologies by the Turkish government and the international (sometimes joint) efforts of acknowledging and commemorating the Armenian Genocide. It reminds us of an article by Claudia Siebrecht showing how women in Germany developed new rituals between 1914 and 1918 via their own artistic practices as alternatives to what would have been impossible commemoration and mourning rituals at that time.³⁹ The current political circumstances hinder the full acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide; however, the documentary seems to go beyond the limitations set by political agendas. As such, *Blood Brothers* is the expression of a future ritual, a vicarious ritualized practice of a disaster ritual that does not exist and has never existed thus far, but which is nevertheless so very needed.

³⁸ J. LYDEN: *Film as religion. Myths, morals, and rituals* (New York 2003).

³⁹ C. SIEBRECHT: 'Imagining the absent dead. Rituals of bereavement and the place of the war dead in German women's art during the First World War', in *German History* 29/2 (2011) 202-223.

THE GLORY OF DISASTER: THE HERERO FLAG MARCHES

WALTER VAN BEEK & JAN-BART GEWALD

The Flag Marches of the Herero are famous in Namibia and far beyond, featuring in local commemorations throughout the Herero area, in national celebrations, and nowadays also in tourist brochures. In each of these ceremonies, the men dress up in military garb, while the women clothe in long, brightly coloured dresses, and together they march in a military-style parade through their respective towns. Three colours dominate the marches: red, white, and green—visible mainly in the women’s dresses—which together form the flag of what is called the Herero nation. Each of these colours belongs to a specific commemoration and a different segment of Herero society. For instance, each year on the weekend closest to 10 October, the White Flag segment hold a procession from the Ozonde suburb in Omaruru to a graveyard opposite the mission station, where their chief Wilhelm Zeraua was buried after his defeat in the German-Herero wars. The Green Flag Herero, or Ovambanderu, march in their green outfits on two commemoration days: Kahimemua Day in June and Nikodemus Day in mid-August. Finally, there is the Red Flag Herero march on the last Sunday of August in the city of Okahandja, just north of the capital Windhoek. This third march, in fiery red, is the largest, most spectacular, and most contested of the three, but all point back to the history of the Herero people as a whole, to the disaster that befell them in 1904. What happened at that time? What do these Flag marches mean, and why is this a disaster ritual? And, crucial issue in this volume, how do these marches contribute to the resilience of what the Herero call the ‘Herero Nation’?

In order to answer these questions, we begin with a historical impression of the Green Flag rituals in 1991. The place is called Okeseta, some four kilometres south of Gobabis, in the east of Namibia, and the narrator is the second author.

1. THE GREENS

We¹ were led by some uniformed *Truppe*² to the enclosure with the tombs, which were actually quite unprepossessing: two were simply piles of stones, one still with the remains of cattle horns on it,³ the rest with tombstones. We knelt down, received ritual splashes of water in our faces, and joined the queue that passed by the graves of Kahimemua and Nikodemus⁴ – in fact, the piles of stones. At the end of Nikodemus' grave, two old men in uniforms made everyone kneel down, with the kneeler's right hands pressed into the soil at the foot of the grave. We gave our names, and they forced our faces down and dribbled a pinch of soil over the back of our necks, while the old man introduced us to the dead. After this we had to follow a set route past all the gravestones, touching each one as we passed; some of these bore a patina from contact with the many hands. The uniformed men ensured that we all followed the correct route past the graves, the last one of which was covered in sacking. It was around this stone that all men and women gathered in a tight throng for the next phase. A short prayer followed; the brass band played a tune, followed by a song, and the women started lamenting, wailing, and fainting, and all clung onto each other as one solid mass of grief. An officer removed the cover from the last grave and showed it to be that of Aaron Mtjatindi, who died in 1988; gradually the crying calmed down, more songs and music followed, and we all flocked past the last grave to touch it.

After this, all *Truppe*, led by their various officers, paraded down the slope past the holy fire. The horse guard closed the parade – some twenty horses, under the command of an officer who kept rearing up and charging around to loudly call the names of all present. We strolled on down the slope to the holy fire where our faces were smeared with ash paste, and a man in civilian clothes collected money for the organization.

At the encampment, a pickup truck faced a patch of open land and was used as the stage for the speeches that would occupy most of the day: addresses by all the chiefs of the Ovambanderu and other Herero segments, other officials such as a pastor, a regional commissioner,

¹ Jan-Bart Gewalt and his wife Gertie; the field report on which this case is based is from 19 August 1991 and is quoted verbatim.

² *Truppe* refers to the pseudo-military organization of uniformed Herero men who are the centre of the commemorative marches.

³ The old Herero way of marking a grave.

⁴ The most important heroes of the Ovambanderu.

a government minister, and representatives of political parties, high-ranking *Truppe* ‘officers’, and among them leaders from other flags, the Red and the White.

After the speeches ended, the *Truppe* formed up and paraded before the assembled crowd, who voted a *Truppe* from Mariental as the best; then the mounted *Truppe* roared around again, raising dust everywhere. By this stage some of the participants had begun leaving and a *Truppe* major was sent out to prevent them from departing before the encampment was cleaned up. At the end, a chief asked if I could take a couple of his family members, so we set off for Windhoek with them.

This brief fieldwork vignette shows the major elements of the flag days: cleansing rituals, a march by the graves of fallen heroes, with the women in relevant colours and men in uniform, horse riders, and speeches from a host of officials – plus a deep history that is emotionally revived in profound grief. The Green Flag Day is, as stated, one among several, and not the central one; so in order to gain a more in-depth view of these rituals, we now turn to the pivotal Red Flag Day, and to a recent instalment thereof.⁵

2. FIRE AND WATER

On the west side of the city of Okahandja, adjoining the township where the majority of the population lives, a square of 500 × 500 metres has been marked off with police tape. In the middle a modest structure of corrugated iron forms what the Herero in rather grandiose terms call the Commando Post. A wooden pole structure adjoins it to the west, and to the east is a small monument in the form of a slender triangle with two flagpoles with an inscription honouring the memory of the historical heroes.

At sunrise on Wednesday, 20 August 2014, a host of Herero – comprised of chiefs, traditional priests of various *otuzo* (patriclans, sg. *oruzo*), and their followers – gathered on the east side of the Commando Post, just adjacent to the monument, to restore the holy fire, led by Kenapeta Tjatindi, traditional priest of the Ondanga patriclan. A young man came with a bucket full of fresh, clean sand from the nearby Okahandja river to cleanse the fire locations – a fitting, fresh base for the new fires. Tjatindi then proceeded to mark out three rectangular fireplaces with white stones; and using a specific traditional fire procedure, he lit the new fire, the holy

⁵ The 2014 fieldwork was by the first author and his wife.

fire that is central in all Herero ritual proceedings. As part of the cleansing ritual, he then sprayed water from his mouth over all participants. Tjatindi belongs to the Ondanga *oruzo*, which performs such ritual services for the Ohorongo *oruzo*, the one to which Maharero, the first paramount leader of the Herero, and his sons belong and that is actually in charge of the ritual. This ritual twinning of clans is standard in Herero culture, a service to be reciprocated when appropriate. Then a major sacrifice followed: a brown heifer was presented, and young men were assigned to slaughter the heifer while the priest invoked a prayer for the well-being of the Tjamaaha/Maharero family as well as for the entire Herero community – in particular for the smooth implementation of the Red Flag proceedings. Of the three fireplaces, the middle one was for the holy fire, the flanking ones to cook the meat of the sacrifice. Young men butchered it and prepared its meat for consumption; the meat from the north fire was for the chiefs and other senior men, that of the south for the commoners. Now the scene was set for the march itself.

All three – fire, water, and sacrifice – belong to the symbolic reservoir of the traditional Herero religion; in fact, they form its core.⁶ So it is relevant here that all the participants in this ritual are Christians, as were their immediate ancestors. The last Herero chief to convert to Christianity was Andreas Kukuri in 1903; and as a signal, he handed in the fire sticks of his holy fire, thus severing his link with his ancestors.⁷ Now, over a century later, the sticks, the fire, and the sacrifice seem to be back in vogue. What happened? What caused this resurgence of traditional items? The answer lies in the march itself and especially in the history that is being commemorated, and thus we proceed to the Red Flag March of 2014, a ritual saturated with history, in which representatives of all three colours participated.

3. RED FLAGS IN ACTION

The sun was just above the horizon when the various companies of men and women lined up, with one of the men in charge giving the orders. The groups made a concerted effort at serious marching: march,

⁶ This is still the case among the Himba, a Herero-speaking group in Kaokoland. Cf. D.P. CRANDALL, *The place of stunted ironwood trees. A year in the lives of the cattle-herding Himba of Namibia* (New York 2000).

⁷ See J.B. GEWALD: 'Herero annual parades. Commemorating to create', in H. BEHREND & T. GELDER (eds.): *Afrikaner schreiben zurück. Texte und Bilder afrikanischer Ethnographen* (Cologne 1998) 131-151.



Figure 21.1: The various Flags, at the head of the Red Flag March, Okahandja 2014 (photograph: Walter van Beek).

halt, turn around. Small groups of women, all dressed now in their spectacular dresses, applauded them, ululating at full force in the typical African praise fashion. At this march sizeable delegations of the White Flag and the Green Flag were present. The three colours kept to themselves, with the local chapters forming their own cohorts, each of them eager to show off their military prowess and marching precision. Late-comers, also in uniform, were still greeted at the fire to be sprayed upon by the priest.

All the men were dressed in various types of uniforms, and the women were resplendent in their huge Victorian-style traditional dresses – groups of green, red, and white ones, all with similar jackets: jet-black with variations of glorious golden embroidery. Each year this spectacle inevitably draws a flock of tourists with their cameras, and they are very welcome. Even more than welcome, their presence adds to the festive atmosphere of the occasion, as the Herero in this parade show off their attire, their military order, and their fundamental unity. In 2014 not only the tourists were taking photographs, but so also were the participants themselves, with cameras, cell phones, and even tablets. The spectacle of a splendidly red-black-robed woman taking pictures with her tablet of her fellow Herero is an emblem of a living tradition. Quite naturally, without too much control or fuss, the various groups lined up

behind the chiefs and senior generals who bore the three flags, and the whole cortège set out for the tar road. From there the procession followed the historical route, crossing the main highway and the railroad, straight into Okahandja city. Each chapter consisted of a group of men in uniform, marching as militarily as they could, followed by their women, walking with a more swinging gait, clearly enjoying themselves and savouring the moment of being on camera. Horse riders flanked the companies, which were preceded by two police cars from the Okahandja municipality to clear the way. Behind the long column of colourful cohorts – first the Red, then the Green and White chapters – a fleet of cars followed as part of the parade, to provide also transport back home afterwards.

Proudly the parade turned the corners, and with gusto marched the road to the Herero graves on the north-east side of the city, the march lasting – with all the waiting and rearranging – about an hour. This was a public show of Herero-ness, their signature ritual of collective identity. And this was what they wanted Namibia and the world to see: a proud, self-confident collective bearing the name of Herero, a reminder of a heroic past living with the rest of Namibia in an impressive present while marching towards a glorious future. Now all cameras should zoom in on the marching men and swinging ladies, and these images should spread around the world. Finally, they arrived at the graveyard in the woods; and now the public part of the ritual gave way to a more private one – less advertised, at least – for ahead of them waited the heroes, the departed chiefs and ancestors of old, the ones sanctified by suffering and martyrdom.

4. AT THE GRAVES

In the small and quiet grove in the heart of Okahandja, the men and women quietly walked the path along the double row of palm trees, heading for the graveyard at the back of the grove – a plain rectangular enclosure with a few tombs, some in view, others covered with straw. Their advent in a long, respectfully silent throng was halted three times when Chief Tjinaani Maharero, the current head of both the Tjamuaha and Maharero dynasties, at the head of the procession knelt down and offered a lengthy prayer to the departed ancestors. The men around him, each in uniform, knelt with him; behind them, men and women bent over a little or just stood to attention, to resume their slow walk only after he said, “*Muazuu? I tuazuu*” (Did you hear? Yes, we heard you).



Figure 21.2: A mix of Greens, Reds and Whites brings up the rear in the Red Flag March in Okahandja (photograph: Walter van Beek).



Figure 21.3: Herero women on their way to the graves (photograph: Walter van Beek).

This was the moment of commemoration proper, of turning the thoughts to the fearful and fateful events that have marked their collective history. At the far end, where a low porch gives entrance to the plot, each of them rested a hand on the wall, their thoughtful faces indicating that this was the moment they had been waiting for, when they really commemorated the fallen heroes. Some shed a tear or even burst into tears, the emotions that had been mounting the previous few days giving way to an emotional release; but most just walked slowly, silently, in deep thought. It took half an hour for all of them to pay their homage to the fallen chiefs of old. Then the small graveyard, tucked away in its palm-lined grove, fell silent again, waiting to be revived the following year. This Sunday in August, the graves were, for one day again, at the very heart of the Herero nation.

From the graves, the crowd ambled past the horses tethered at the side, slowly gathered at the roadside, and, regaining its military formation, marched down the road. There, after about one kilometre, two more graveyards awaited them. The first is in plain sight and consists of more ostentatious tombstones and monuments. At their arrival, the bells of the nearby Evangelical Lutheran Church, on whose ground these other graves are located, rang as a salute, welcoming the crowd to the Christian burial site.⁸ These graves are just looked at from a distance; no hands lingered on the separating wall, and no tears were shed. Some looked thoughtful, but the emotions clearly had been reserved for the yard in the bush.⁹

Finally, the people crossed the street to the regular church graveyard. Behind a series of old German graves from the 1903-1908 war, prominent Herero are buried there. Their graves are spread out over the plot, and each one looked for their own kinsmen. One woman showed us¹⁰

⁸ This was done at the initiative of this ELCIN church itself, and people said that it was standard procedure in the past. Still in 2005 Bishop Kamburona of the Oruano Church (the independent Herero church) ceremonially knocked at the locked door of the Lutheran chapel, to assert his people's claims. (The authors thank the anonymous reviewer of a prior version of this chapter for pointing this out.) In 2014 the Lutheran pastor and his wife freely mingled with the crowd. Bishop Kamburona died in December 2014.

⁹ In the past, before 2011, the people went into the church-side graveyard and touched these graves; the distance they kept in 2014 was a result of an internal conflict within the ranks of the Herero.

¹⁰ The 'us' here is Walter van Beek and his wife, who participated in 2014.

the recent grave of her deceased kinsman, and she also pointed out another one, with the inscription ‘chief, her chief. The atmosphere was still subdued, but clearly more relaxed, as all had gone well. Men and women mounted the many vehicles that had followed them during their traditional procession to the graves, and those without transportation followed on foot. Adopting a form of marching order, they headed back for the main ceremonial area: the Commando Grounds.

At the starting point of the march, two large tents had been set up, one for the women and one for the men, plus a rostrum with microphone and amplifiers for the speakers. The rest of the day was filled with speeches by a host of authorities, introduced by two majestic Herero ladies serving as masters of ceremonies. Of course, the speeches dwelt on the past, on the disaster of the genocide at the hands of the German colonizer (whose uniform, in principle, the men are wearing). But just as inevitably, the present rift in the Herero society was also touched upon, when the speakers issued a call for unity, for remaining steadfast and unified, with the ensuing lesson drawn from their troubled history: “If we had been one, we could never have been defeated.” The conflict at hand is between the Maharero Royal Family and the present Paramount Chief Vekuui Rukoro over who in fact commands the holy places that form the destination of the marches.¹¹

So here we have a fourfold ritual that seems to be quite stable over time and place: a sacred fire with a sacrifice, a very public military march, a silent procession by old graves, and public speeches. Together they form a single ritual complex called the Flag March. Why this curiously military fashion, and why the resurgence of holy fires? In order to answer these questions, we have to go back into the history of Namibia and especially of the Herero.

5. THE DISASTER: THE 1904 GENOCIDE

The entire ritual of Red Flag Day is shot through with military reminiscences of a violent past – and, indeed, violence has been plentiful. On 11 January 1904, in Okahandja, then a small and dusty town in central German South West Africa (GSWA), war broke out between the

¹¹ For a historical overview of this conflict see W.E.A. VAN BEEK, J.B. GEWALD & P. KAAPAMA: ‘A contested ritual of unity. The Herero Red Flag Day’, in *Journal of Ritual Studies* 31/2 (2018) 29-46.

Herero and the German colonizers.¹² By the time hostilities ended, genocide had been committed, the majority of the Herero had been killed, and the survivors – mostly women and children – were incarcerated in concentration camps as forced labourers in a war of extreme brutality and conscious genocide, the likes of which had never before been witnessed in southern Africa.¹³ From Okahandja the war steadily spread across central Namibia and developed in intensity and brutality as ever more fresh contingents of German troops dispatched by sea from Imperial Germany poured into the country and attempted to impose their vision of order on the territory and its inhabitants. The personal appointment by Kaiser Wilhelm II of General Lothar von Trotha as the commanding officer of German forces in GSWA signalled the highest authorization and endorsement for what occurred in the name of Imperial Germany. In a conscious policy of genocide, German soldiers and settlers hunted down, shot, beat, hung, starved, and raped Herero men, women, and children. When the war finally ended, no less than 80% of the Herero had lost their lives. The majority of the Herero who remained in Namibia, primarily women and children, survived in concentration camps as forced labourers employed on state, military, and civilian projects.¹⁴ The same fate also befell the Nama communities in central and southern Namibia, which lost approximately 60% of its population, after rising against German colonial oppression. The concentration camps were finally abolished in 1908, after which the Herero were confined within a tangled web of legislation that sought to control the lives, in their entirety, of all black people living in GSWA.

This is the disaster, the genocide that is at the basis of the march we witnessed, a catastrophe that fits whatever definition of disaster one may use.¹⁵ But the history behind the rituals is much more complicated still, since after the Germans a new colonizer entered the scene. At the

¹² On the war between the Herero and the German colonizers, see L. FÖRSTER: *Postkoloniale Erinnerungslandschaften. Wie Deutsche und Hetero in Namibia des Kriegs von 1904 gedenken* (Frankfurt 2010).

¹³ See J.B. GEWALD: *Herero heroes. A sociopolitical history of the Herero of Namibia 1890-1923* (Oxford 1999).

¹⁴ See GEWALD: *Herero heroes* 141-230.

¹⁵ For definitions of 'disaster', see the introduction to this handbook; A. OLIVER-SMITH & S.M. HOFFMAN (eds.): *Catastrophe and culture. The anthropology of disaster* (Santa Fe 2002); and R.W. PERRY & E. QUARANTELLI (eds.): *What is disaster. New answers to old questions* (Philadelphia 2005).

outbreak of the First World War, South African forces under British command invaded GSWA and successfully defeated the much-vaunted German army. Between 1915 and 1921, Namibia fell under the jurisdiction of a military administration. The South Africans, upon entering GSWA, were greeted by a population that was still recoiling from the shock of German rule. In the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was deemed unfit to govern colonies and forced to renounce “in favour of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers all her rights and titles over her overseas possessions”.¹⁶ In addition, under the terms of the League of Nations charter, Namibia – which was seen to be “inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world” – was deemed to be a territory which could “be best administered under the laws of the Mandatory [the Union of South Africa] as integral portions of its territory”.¹⁷ As such, Namibia was placed under the jurisdiction of South Africa and henceforth, until its independence in 1994, would share the conditions of life under that new colonizer, including apartheid – dynamics reflected in the Red Flag Marches that increasingly became a political item.

6. THE GLORY OF DEFEAT: THE *OTERUPA*

How did the marches emerge after the genocide? The first reaction to the disaster quickly took ritual form, and from the start it was painted in military colours. As early as 1916 the new administration had begun receiving reports from worried settlers across the country of young men gathering together and marching to and fro. These military men would later become known in German colonial literature, condescendingly, as the *Truppenspieler* (those that play at being soldiers)¹⁸ – a name that stuck, as shown in our Green Flag description. Among the Ovaherero, the common name of this association is the *Otjiserandu* (the Red Flag regiment). Herero society was already highly militarized. From the 1860s onwards, Herero men had been organized into European-style, highly armed, uniformed, and mounted military units, which were usually

¹⁶ Article 119 of the Treaty of Versailles, available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv13/ch13subch1> [last accessed 20 July 2021].

¹⁷ Article 22 of the League of Nations Charter, available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv13/ch10subch1> [last accessed 20 July 2021].

¹⁸ Namibian National Archives NNAW, SWAA 432 A 50/59 Vol. 1 *Truppenspieler* 1917-1938.

mobilized only in times of trouble. With the advent of German colonialism in Namibia, many Herero were employed as auxiliaries in the German army, and Herero military units fought alongside German forces.¹⁹ Following the Herero-German war, numerous Herero orphans and children were captured and adopted, initially as mascots and servants, later as soldiers, into the German army, young men growing up in the confines of the military. With the defeat of the German forces in 1915, they were left leaderless and thus sought to maintain and recreate the structures that had given their lives meaning, power, and standing. They appropriated the names and titles of their former commanders, sent handwritten telegrams in German to one another, issuing military passes, pay books, and commands to one another. And, on moonlit nights, they gathered together to march, talk, and dream of the power that could be theirs.

These so-called *Otruppe* (in Otjiherero, *Oterupa*) were organized into regiments that corresponded to magisterial districts. Regiments were characterized by specific uniforms, designations, and names. Thus, the *Oterupa* of Windhoek wore a khaki uniform, those of Keetmanshoop wore white, and those of Lüderitz wore khaki tunics and white trousers.²⁰ The regiments also had different designations. Thus, *Oterupa* of Okahandja were known as an infantry regiment, and those of Windhoek as a machine-gun regiment. The areas under the control of the various *Oterupa* regiments were given new names. Significantly, Okahandja was named Paradies (paradise) and was headed by the *Kaiser*, a.k.a. Eduard Maharero, the younger brother of both Samuel and Traugott Maharero.²¹ Eduard was the father and grandfather of Chief Kaihepovazandu and Chief Tjinaani, respectively.

The documents captured from the *Oterupa* by the South African colonial administration in 1917 evoke a surreal world – a world in which the self-styled Excellency Governor von Deimling; State Secretary Heighler; Treasurer von Ministermann; Oberstleutenants Leutwein, Franke, and von Estorff; Major Muller and Hauptmann und Adjutant Schmetterling (butterfly!) von Preussen, correspond with one another in a mixture of

¹⁹ See GEWALD: *Herero heroes* 61-109.

²⁰ See W. WERNER: “Playing soldiers”. The *Truppspieler* movement among the Herero of Namibia, 1915 to c. 1945’, in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16/3 (1990) 485-502.

²¹ NNAW, SWAA 432, *Truppspieler* 1917-1918 Vol. 1.

German and Herero. Patrol reports, military passes, pay slips, and notices of promotion and regimental transfer, written on music paper and the discarded stationery of the German colonial administration, litter the archives. The messages refer to collected contribution dues, letters of attestation to other regiments, and the payment of fines and assistance out of regimental funds on behalf of regimental members. Information that was of importance to regimental members, such as a magisterial ban on marching, were passed on by circular telegrams.²² A member of a regiment, travelling through the district of another regiment, who was able to produce a letter of attestation (*Reisepaß*) from his regiment commander was guaranteed the support of the regiment he was visiting. Thus, in May 1917 a telegram was sent to Lt. Col Franke (a.k.a. Erastus) requesting him to pay Oberleutenant von Mausbach, who had travelled from Omaruru, the sum of three shilling so that he could continue on his journey to Windhoek. The telegram was sent by Schmetterling von Preusen, Hauptmann und Adjutant der Ettapenkommando (a.k.a. Fritz).²³

This first stage in ritualization was principally one of organization, along the lines of the Stockholm syndrome,²⁴ adopting the form and organization of the oppressor. Effectively, by copying the structures and images of the German military and apparently blending these with existing war songs,²⁵ young Herero men had set up a countrywide support and information network for themselves – one that extended from Lüderitz and Keetmanshoop in the south, to Gobabis in the east, Tsumeb, Grootfontein, and Otjiwarongo in the north, Swakopmund and Omaruru in the west, and Okahandja and Windhoek in the centre of the territory.²⁶ The Otjiserandu regiments formed an organization that looked after the welfare of its members, a social structure to replace the society which they did not have or were only marginally part of.

²² NNAW, SWAA 432, enclosure 11, circular telegram 1/7/16.

²³ NNAW, SWAA 432. See enclosure 4 telegram 5/5/17.

²⁴ For a discussion of the Stockholm syndrome as a symbolic and psychological resource, see M. ADORJAN, T. CHRISTENSEN, B. KELLY & D. PAWLUCH: 'Stockholm syndrome as vernacular resource', in *The Sociological Quarterly* 53/3 (2012) 454-474.

²⁵ See D. HENRICHSEN & G. KRÜGER: "We have been captives long enough, we want to be free". Land, uniforms and politics in the history of the Herero during the interwar period', in P. HAYES, M. WALLACE & J. SYLVESTER (eds.): *Namibia under South African rule. Mobility and containment 1915-1946* (Oxford 1998) 314-326.

²⁶ See WERNER: "Playing soldiers".



Figure 21.4: Practising the military salute in the Green cohort (photograph: Walter van Beek).

7. HONOURING THE HEROES

It was during the South African administration that the second phase of the ritualization took place, the ritual march to the cemetery where in effect a dynasty is buried: the Maharero family. Samuel Maharero was the Herero chief in the war against the German colonizer in 1904, and after losing that war he fled to Botswana. As was the case with most of the exiles, he never returned to Namibia; Samuel lived in Tsau, Bechuanaland, where he died in 1923. After his death, the South African administration allowed his body to be returned to Okahandja on 23 August 1923. The remains were taken to the homestead of the Tjamuaha/Maharero clan and placed for a vigil in the hut belonging to his younger brother, Traugott. The Commando Post is now located at this very spot. The burial took place a few days later, on 26 August, at the graveyard in the woods, which already had a history of its own. It previously served as the location of the holy fire of Samuel's grandfather,

Chief Tjamaaha; after his death in December 1861, he became the first person to be buried there. When Chief Maharero, the father of Samuel Maharero, died in 1890, he became the second person to be buried there, so Samuel was the third person to have his remains interred at this very spot. From the day of the burial of Samuel's remains, the graves in the woods became a monument for the Herero, a place of both memory and commemoration.²⁷

So here we have the formal beginning of the ritual now known as the Red Flag Day, since in its liturgy it is a re-enactment of the reburial of Samuel Maharero. From this moment onwards, the quiet little cemetery in the woods gradually became the pivot of Herero identity.

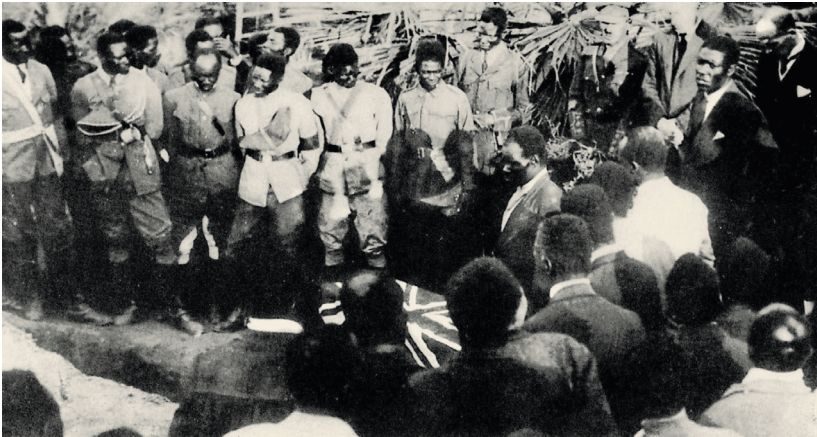


Figure 21.5: The funeral of Samuel Maharero in 1923. Note the Union Jack on the coffin and the presence of three white officials around the coffin.²⁸ The person in the upper right-hand corner looking up is Hosea Kutako, the pivotal leader of the Herero till 1970.

²⁷ See J.B. GEWALD: 'Die Beerdigung von Samuel Maharero und die Reorganisation der Herero', in J. ZIMMERER & J. ZELLER (eds.): *Völkermord in Deutsch Süd-West Afrika. Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen* (Berlin 2003) 171-179.

²⁸ The Union Jack implies that Samuel Maharero is getting more or less a state funeral, which was not exactly the intention of the South African administration.

8. THE FLAG MARCHES AS DISASTER RITUAL

Clifford Geertz speaks about Bali as a ‘theatre state’, in which the rituals of state constitute the major structure of the state itself;²⁹ likewise, the *Oterupa* and the flag regiments, Red, and later on the Green and White regiments, form a ‘theatre army’. But just as the small Bali state in fact did function thanks to its theatrical element, the flag regiments generated a sense of purpose and unity inside a war-torn society. Throughout the twentieth century the *Oterupa*, or *Truppenspieler*, provided social support and sought to maintain Herero identity in the face of colonial oppression, albeit by a different colonizer. In the aftermath of the Herero-German war, it was the *Oterupa* that provided the structures and leadership, which allowed for the re-establishment of Herero society.

Following Ronald Grimes³⁰ and Paul Post (this volume)³¹ we define rituals as ‘a more or less repeatable sequence of action units that take on a symbolic dimension through formalization, stylization, and their situation in place and time’. Few actions are as repeatable and formalized as a military drill and march; the issue is how to endow these intrinsically meaningless acts with relevant meaning. The Stockholm effect, in fact, does just that: borrowing the form of the oppressor one identifies with him and thus also appropriates his power. In the Herero case, this psychological inversion gradually changed the subjugation into domination, with the slain victims morphing into martyrs and heroes, and the defeat turning into glory. For those familiar with Herero history, the sight is still strange – the men dressed in their oppressors’ uniforms, first German, later South African – but in a ritual it works. The same holds for the women. The precolonial Herero dress was a loincloth made of cow’s leather, comparable to what the Himba wear these days, far to the north-west in Kaokoland. For the missions this was too much nakedness, so the women had to ‘dress up’, with the fully covering colonial gowns one finds over many ex-colonies in Africa. That dress forms the basis of the women’s outfit now – in fact, this is the image projected by the colonizer

²⁹ See C. GEERTZ: *Negara. The theatre state in nineteenth-century Bali* (Princeton 1980).

³⁰ See R. GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* (Oxford 2014).

³¹ For approaches to ritual and disaster, see P. POST, R. GRIMES, A. NUGTEREN, P. PETTERSON & H.J. ZONDAG: *Disaster ritual. Explorations of an emerging ritual repertoire* (= Liturgia condenda 15) (Leuven 2003).

for how an African woman should look. The most distinguishing part, however, the *otjikaiva*, the woman's horned headdress, is not colonial and refers back to the precolonial leather headgear indicating the status of a woman.³² Be that as it may, the first part of the ritual repertoire is the culture of the military itself: the march, the order of the drill, the ranks, the uniforms, and the flags – empty ritual forms that have been filled with meaning.

The second major part of the ritual repertoire is the funeral – a 'colonial-style' funeral, in fact, taken from missionary Christianity but Herero-ized.³³ The photographs are very telling: in 1923 the Herero nation was still in tatters, teetering from the devastating blow delivered by the former colonials. But the photographs offer us a glimpse of a self-confident nation, a huge troupe of adult men, many in uniform – and, in any case, well organized – a group of people who do not just bury their former chief but show themselves in full control of the situation.³⁴ It was they who had requested the Union Jack from the South African administration – which was reluctantly granted – and it was they who organized the transport, the huge reception, and the solemn march from the first repose of the corpse towards the cemetery in the bush, right though the white part of Okahandja. Not just a reburial, thus, but a reconstitution of Herero identity, of their own leadership structure, and of ownership of their core symbols.

Much more than just a commemoration, the march re-enacts the genesis of the modern Herero-ness, the reburials of their heroes. For the Whites, the hero is Zeraua; for the Greens, Nicodemus and Kahememua are the main figures; but the pivotal focus is for the Reds, with Samuel Maharero and the others of the Maharero dynasty. Therefore, during the Red Flag March, delegations of the White and Green chapters always put in an appearance – although they have their own marches, they also define themselves as part of the whole Herero nation by marching with the Red brigades.

So the Red Flag March is a funerary procession-plus – plus a lot, in fact. In 2014 a local church brass band joined the preparations, something

³² See H. HENDRICKSON: 'Bodies and flags. The representation of Herero identity in colonial Namibia', in H. HENDRICKSON (ed.): *Clothing and difference. Embodied identities in colonial and postcolonial Africa* (Durham, NC 1996) 215-244.

³³ See J.B. GEWALD: 'Flags, funerals and fanfares: Herero and missionary contestations of the acceptable', in *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 15/1 (2002) 105-117.

³⁴ See HARTMANN: 'Funerary photographs'.



Figure 21.6: Part of the crowd at the reburial of Samuel Herero.

which the participants at that time saw as an innovation. However, we saw that in 1991 the Greens had a brass band for the music, while the photographs of the 1923 event show the Windhoek Native Brass Band at the front of the funeral cortège – so this part of the ritual commemorative repertoire is of long standing. Already at that early stage, the Herero showed that not only had they mastered the commemorative rituals of their colonial masters, but they had also combined them. The *Otruppe* had done their work, and the military sheen of the rituals fitted in well with the gist of the funerary proceedings, resulting in a self-portrayal as a self-confident, proud, even feisty collective of inheritors of a great past.

The public speeches at the close of the march form a third part of the repertoire, one borrowed from modern political culture, with an added touch in 2014 of female masters of ceremonies, fitting for a society with double descent. The gist of the speeches, at least in 2014, focused on the present split in the ranks of the Herero, on the debate between the two major factions of the group, which had surfaced right at the heart of the Red Flag proceedings. Appeals to unity formed the core of the messages, with the subtext that this very divisiveness had been the reason for their loss against the Germans in 1904: “If we are one, we are invincible; if we had been one, we would could never have

been defeated.” From the start, the Flag Marches have been highly political, but the shifting political scene implies that the arenas shift as well: anti-colonial first, then a colonial tool during the South African administration,³⁵ and now an internal arena in the struggle for paramount leadership.

The final part of the repertoire is surprising. Significantly, it is the colonial ritual repertoire of burial and speeches that has triggered the rebirth of the endogenous symbols: fire, cardinal directions, and water, plus the core ritual of Herero religion: sacrifice. In the wake of the war heroes, the ancestors made their reappearance; in fact, since 1923 the ancestors have become almost identified with the war heroes, so the old symbolic repertoire has been more or less updated. The *otuzo* no longer have the ritual functions of old at the local level, but the major lines of the patri-system have been strengthened in the processes of rehabilitation, expressed now in the vibrant colours of the Flags: red, white, and green.³⁶ Characteristically, the conflict within the Herero focuses precisely on the core symbol of the indigenous religion: the holy fire, the very symbol of clan unity.³⁷ The war, the genocide, the recovery, and the subsequent colonial history have led to a changed Herero society in many ways: first the emergence of a royal dynasty (the Maharero family), where before none existed; then the crystallization of a paramount chieftaincy, which in precolonial times was not there either; and, finally, the integration of Herero into a national state, which itself also laid claims on the symbols of the Herero past. In fact, the Namibian government, dominated by non-Herero, has pre-empted the Red March as part of the national celebrations of independence: Heroes Day. Reinvention of self involves adaptive transformation.

³⁵ For a short overview of this dynamic, see VAN BEEK, GEWALD & KAAPAMA: ‘A contested ritual of unity’.

³⁶ The Herero possess a double-descent kinship system, with both patri- and matrilineal clans. The patrilineal clans, the *otuzo* are indeed strengthened by the commemorations, but the matrilineal clans, the *eanda*, never lost much of their functions, and still form the major framework for everyday social life.

³⁷ The conflict as such is not the focus of this particular chapter but has been described and analysed in detail in VAN BEEK, GEWALD & KAAPAMA: ‘A contested ritual of unity’.

9. A RITUAL VICTORY

The victims of the war became martyrs first and heroes later, morphing a painful memory into a cherished remembrance.³⁸ The *Oterupa* ritualized a military organization and, by doing so, transformed a fighting machine into a virtualized space for ethnic healing. With the coming of the Flag Day marches, they symbolically turned the tables of history, from ‘extermination’³⁹ and genocide to collective recovery and ethnic pride. The military annihilation became symbolic capital, which then – such is also the irony of history – developed into an arena of its own outside their own control. In this symbolic arena the Herero, also by squabbling over details and thus fighting over political legacy, again took the initiative. Through fully modern means mixed with traditional symbolism, they redefined the crucial symbols as theirs and theirs only, acknowledged conflict as part of their identity, and took the lead in selecting ‘what to remember and what to forget’.⁴⁰

All these dynamics, the conflict included, have kept the ritual marches at the centre of public attention, with the attention by media and tourism increasing the stakes in the conflict, while rendering the Herero ritual repertoire more national; here the tribal disaster ritual has been taken over by the nation as a whole – “we suffered as a nation”. But not only ethnic identity has been redefined; so also has history. The crucial point in the rehabilitation pathway is that history has been upturned, for the crushing defeat in the end comes out as a victory: the ritual has trumped the genocide. The Flag Marches exemplify the ritual resilience of a nation, forged in the crucible of disaster and grief, of recovery and

³⁸ See, for similar dynamics, D. DAVIES: ‘Health, morality and sacrifice. The sociology of disaster’, in R.K. FENN (ed.): *The Blackwell companion to sociology of religion* (Oxford 2001) 404-417; M. HOONDEERT, P. MUTSAERS & W. ARFMAN: *Cultural practices of victimhood* (London/New York: 2018); and P. STEWART & A. STRATHERN: *Diaspora, disasters, and the cosmos. Rituals and images* (Durham, NC 2018). For the Herero, see K. POEWE: *The Namibian Herero. A history of their psychosocial disintegration and survival* (Lewiston 1985) and R. KÖSSLER: ‘Entangled history and politics. Negotiating the past between Namibia and Germany’, in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 26/3 (2008) 313-339.

³⁹ The Von Trotha extermination order is still well remembered as an atrocious aspect of the war; GEWALD: *Herero heroes*.

⁴⁰ Cf. R. PUTNAM & D.P. ALDRICH: *Building resilience. Social capital in post-disaster recovery* (Chicago 2012). See B. ANDERSON: *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London 2006) for this expression.

reinvention, ritually led and symbolically effectuated. As long as the Red Flag cohorts keep marching, as long as the Herero women relish in the glory of their magnificent dresses, the horns of their headdresses proudly pointing to the admiring crowd, and as long as emotions surge at the graves, the heroes will not be forgotten and Herero identity will flourish. History is here to be ritually rewritten!

COMMEMORATING THE STRUGGLE AGAINST COLONIALISM IN FREEDOM PARK, PRETORIA

MARCEL BARNARD & CAS WEPENER

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aim and design

The history of Africa and, more specifically, of South Africa is characterized by a series of colonial wars, racial oppression, and apartheid, and the struggle for a just, new South Africa.¹ Freedom Park in Pretoria is a government-initiated memorial place of these wars, injustices, and struggles.² This chapter examines how disasters in South Africa's history – which here means conflicts in pre-colonial times, colonial conflicts, and the struggle against apartheid – are represented in Freedom Park, what coping strategies the park offers, and how strengthening resilience and social reconstruction take shape in the memorial site. To introduce Freedom Park, we first describe a visit to the site, and we then deduce how disaster can be described in the context of the memorial site. This section also includes some theoretical notes. Subsequently, we investigate what options the park offers and suggest ways to cope with these disasters and strengthen resilience and social reconstruction, focusing on the paradox of inclusion and exclusion. In doing so, we more specifically focus on the religious and spiritual aspects of Freedom Park. We end with some conclusions.

¹ This chapter is part of the research program *Moving Identities*, whose theme is “Negotiating African and Western Christian ontologies and epistemologies”, part of the Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam, and of the inter-institutional research collaboration between the PThU and the Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch.

² For a review of the processes and debates that led to the establishment of Freedom Park, see M.A. MASOGA: ‘Constructing “national” sacred space(s) – notes, queries and positions. The case of the South African Freedom Park Monument’, in P. POST, P. NEL & W.E.A. VAN BEEK (eds.): *Sacred spaces and contested identities. Space and ritual dynamics in Europe and Africa* (Trenton 2014) 267-278.

1.2. Ritualizations

More than rituals, this chapter refers to *ritualizations*, as described by Paul Post in the introduction to this handbook. Freedom Park is a memorial place that offers plenty of opportunities for all kinds of commemorative rituals. Rather than conducting long-term ethnographic research into how any rituals take shape in Freedom Park, this chapter examines the opportunity the place offers for such ritualizations. Given the small number of visitors that the park has been attracting since its opening, this approach is entirely justified. During our research, the question constantly arose whether the prestigious park can fulfill its purpose, or whether it is destined to fail. Either way, the park aims to achieve exactly what disaster ritual as we use in this book aims at: strengthening the resilience for the peoples of South Africa, social reconstruction of society, and finding ways to deal with the complex and painful past. We consider our own visits to the memorial site as ritualizations: practices with a ritual dimension that never become a ritual. The rituals performed in the construction of Freedom Park, as described by Mogomme Masoga (see below), can also be included in this category. In short, we consider the construction of Freedom Park and the Park as such, the visits that people pay to the place, and the official performances in the Park as three modes of ritualization.

2. VISITING FREEDOM PARK AND //HAPO MUSEUM, PRETORIA

Freedom Park in Pretoria, South Africa, opened in March 2004 and covers an area of 52 hectares, with a memorial hall in the middle.

2.1. The scenery of Freedom Park

When you enter the park at the foot of the hill, you buy a ticket, and a golf cart brings you uphill from the cash desks. From there, you walk along the gravel paths. Standing within the memorial hall, your eye is drawn to a glass wall, behind which a pond can be seen with an eternal flame burning in the middle. Behind the pond, the view opens into an immense amphitheater of green grass. Climbing up the grass walls of the amphitheater, the memorial hall and the adjacent pond appear to be the stage. On the top edge of the amphitheater, the view opens up wide to a panoramic sight of Pretoria. On one side, the long-distance learning

University of South Africa is very close. On the other side, the Union Buildings, the seat of the South African government, and the offices of the president of the republic are visible on the horizon. Behind you, the massive granite structure of the *Voortrekker Monument* is visible on the other side of the fissure (now the bed of a highway). This monument commemorates the Voortrekkers who left the then English Cape Colony in the nineteenth century to settle in other parts of South Africa. Seeing the *Voortrekker Monument* on the opposite hill, it is as if the old and the new South Africa nod to each other. Remarkably, the two monuments are accessible with one admission ticket, as the people at the cash desks tell you when you buy your ticket.

Metal poles that prove to be long pipes on the top of which gas flames can burn surround the terrain, and a 697-meter-long wall etched with the thousands of names of those who lost with their lives in the struggles winds its way through the memorial landscape.

The Wall of Names is a poignant tribute to the many lives lost in the numerous conflicts that have taken place on South African soil, from pre-colonial wars to the South African War (Anglo Boer War), World War I,



Figure 22.1: Freedom Park, Amphitheater with metal poles for gas flames, pond with eternal flame, and memorial hall (photograph: the authors).



Figure 22.2: Freedom Park, Memorial Hall, pond with eternal flame, and amphitheater (photograph: the authors).

World War II, and the liberation Struggle. The 697m-long wall is inscribed with the names of those who played a role in these conflicts. It can accommodate 150,000 names.³

Before our first visit to the park, we had already seen on the website that the park is composed of elements of culture, heritage, history, indigenous knowledge, and spirituality.⁴ So the park promotes itself explicitly as a spiritual place, thus bringing together, or, better, not dividing, the cultural and religious aspects of remembrance. On the premises of the park is a memorial place, *Isivivane*, the Garden of Remembrance, where people of all religions may perform rituals. Trees surround the place. Large stone blocks from all provinces of the country, as well as from the national government and the international community, are set in a circle from which steam spirals up. Signs tell the visitors that it is prohibited

³ <https://www.freedompark.co.za/index.php/products-and-services/elements-of-the-park/elements-overview/history.html> [last accessed 18 February 2021].

⁴ <https://www.freedompark.co.za/index.php/elements-of-the-park/elements-overview.html> [last accessed 6 May 2020].

to enter this space with shoes on your feet, and visitors are asked to cleanse themselves after visiting the Garden of Remembrance by washing their hands at the wash basin provided at the entrance.⁵ Here, all the spirits of people that gave their life in the struggles for freedom were laid to rest by way of elaborated rituals, according to the information provided.⁶ Also in this space is a semi-circle around a tree, comparable to places where in indigenous traditions decisions take place. There is also a gallery of portraits of African leaders in the park and a so-called sanctuary – an empty zen-like space for prayer and meditation.



Figure 22.3: *Isivivane* or Garden of Remembrance (photograph: the authors).

⁵ For the significance of water rituals in the (South) African context, see C. WEPENER & B. MÜLLER: 'To be healed and (re)connected. The wonder of water', in C. WEPENER, I. SWART, G. TER HAAR & M. BARNARD (eds.): *Bonding in worship. A ritual lens on social capital formation in African Independent Churches in South Africa* (= Liturgia condenda 30) (Leuven 2019) 179-192.

⁶ MASOGA: 'Constructing "national" sacred space(s)' 272-275.



Figure 22.4: *Isivivane* and the semi-circle low stone wall around a tree, comparable to places where in indigenous traditions decisions take place (photograph: the authors).

2.2. //hapo Museum

On the premises of Freedom Park is also a museum, the //hapo Museum, //hapo meaning ‘dream’ in the Khoisan language. The museum presents the following exhibits:

Extensive South African and African indigenous knowledge and indigenous knowledge systems. These exhibits also fall under the Pan African Archives, which preserves such teachings for future generations. The exhibits comprise artefacts and information on how Africans lived, going back some 4,000 years, and showcases African innovations and achievements.⁷

⁷ <https://www.freedompark.co.za/index.php/elements-of-the-park/elements-over-view/indigenous-knowledge.html> [last accessed 6 May 2020].

In my (MB) field notes, made after my first visit to the museum, I reconstructed the story that is being told in the museum in my view:

From the creation, as told by an indigenous myth (God created rock, but it was not good, then he created fire, but it was not good, then... water etc.), indigenous knowledge and wisdom have guided the people to the current South Africa. This knowledge and wisdom were the real resistance against suppressing structures of colonialism and apartheid.⁸

2.3. Visitors

During our repeated visits to the park, we noticed that the number of visitors was always limited or at least seemed small compared to the enormous space that the park takes up. This limited number of visitors was confirmed by the figures that Freedom Park publishes annually. The number of visitors grew slowly from 22,200 in 2010/2011, to 22,903 in 2011/2012, and 23,425 in 2012/2013. In later years, a distinction was made between ‘paying visitors’ and ‘total feet through the gate’ (implying learners, tours, and events). The numbers climbed to 21,051 visitors/54,156 ‘total feet’ in 2014/2015; 21,933/45,479 in 2015/2016; and 25,703/63,195 in 2016/2017.⁹ With regular opening on 365 days per year, this means an average of 70 visitors/173 ‘total feet’ per day.

An important observation with regard to our visits is what we call the highly politicized and even militarized features of entering Freedom Park. Upon arrival, visitors drive through several gates guarded by the officials in brown uniforms, reminiscent, to a certain extent, of army uniforms. We agreed that the act of entering Freedom Park reminded us of the act of entering the nearby *Voortrekker Monument* with its very explicit political and military tone (see below). As part of our research and after our initial visit, we tried to contact the administration of Freedom Park for an interview or even just a conversation about the site with some questions we had, but our numerous attempts to make contact were all fruitless.

⁸ Field notes MB, 5 October 2013.

⁹ https://www.freedompark.co.za/images/annualreports/2017/Annual_Performance_Plan_2018-2019.pdf [last accessed 11 May 2020].

3. DEFINING DISASTER IN THE CONTEXT OF FREEDOM PARK: SOME THEORETICAL NOTES

3.1. Defining disaster

At first glance, it is not difficult to deduce how the park defines disaster. The Wall of Remembrance commemorates the names of those who fell in pre-colonial wars, the South African War (previously also known as the Anglo-Boer War), the First and Second World Wars, and the liberation struggle against apartheid. As a consequence, disaster could be defined as the wars and struggles in which the country was involved. A more in-depth circumscription of disaster can be distilled from the five elements that make up the park according to its own website: culture, heritage, history, indigenous knowledge, and spirituality.¹⁰ The narrative that Freedom Park tells is not only that of the fallen in the various wars and struggles, but also that of the (almost) loss of indigenous African cultures, heritage, knowledge, and spirituality. Differently framed, the memorial site mainly refers to colonialism, which South Africans of all colors paid for with their lives, and which entailed the suppression of indigenous culture and knowledge.



Figure 22.5: Wall of remembrance with the names of the victims of Sharpeville (photograph: the authors).

¹⁰ <https://www.freedompark.co.za> [last accessed 13 May 2020].

3.2. Theoretical notes for a critical reading of Freedom Park

For a critical reading of the park, it is worth interrupting our story to introduce some theoretical notes.

We see Freedom Park as a particular ‘text’ with specific semantics and a definite syntax that refer to the past, but at the same time refer to the here and now and point to the future. ‘Text’ is seen as a more or less defined unity – in this case, literally a fenced-off space – that leads to events loaded with meaning.¹¹ Freedom Park intends to become a *lieu de mémoire*, to use Pierre Nora’s famous expression, a memorial site “in which the memory of entire national or religious communities is concentrated”.¹² Following Jan Assmann, we frame Freedom Park as a scene of ‘cultural memory’, claiming that memory has ‘a cultural basis’ on top of social and psychological layers.¹³ As Jacques Derrida says, cultural memory draws on a repertoire or a tradition or an archive of “linguistic and extralinguistic, discursive and nondiscursive”.¹⁴ According to Assmann, individuals participate in cultural memory because they want to belong to the collective. Politicized forms of remembering, such as cultural memory, also imply ‘collective memory’.¹⁵ Freedom Park is strongly politicized: it is government initiated and funded. At the organizational level, this politicization is reflected in the number of staff – ninety-four according to the last annual report.¹⁶

With its founding by the state and its references to heritage, history, indigenous knowledge, and spirituality, Freedom Park easily meets the quality of a scene of cultural memory that intends to become a space of collective memory. However, we will see that the choice from the cultural repertoire is selective and that the goal to be achieved of becoming a space of collective memory is still far away. Here, the more pointed question might be how Freedom Park wants to develop into a collective memorial place that people from different cultures want to share.

¹¹ M. BAL: *Reading ‘Rembrandt’. Beyond the word-image opposition* (Cambridge 1991) 220f.

¹² J. ASSMANN: *Religion and cultural memory. Ten Studies* (Stanford 2006) 8.

¹³ ASSMANN: *Religion and cultural memory* 1-9, esp. 8.

¹⁴ ASSMANN, who refers to DERRIDA, in *Religion and cultural memory* 27.

¹⁵ ASSMANN: *Religion and cultural memory* 7.

¹⁶ https://www.freedompark.co.za/images/annualreports/2017/Annual_Performance_Plan_2018-2019.pdf 12.

3.3. Remembrance of the dead as a primordial space for cultural memory

We have seen that the Wall of Remembrance etched with the names of the people that fell in the past wars and struggles is a dominant structure in the park. It refers to the most obvious definition of disaster in the park: the wars and struggles in which South Africa was involved. Assmann states that the remembrance of the dead is a primordial space for the production of cultural memory. In summary, Assmann says,

A projection on the part of the collective that wants to remember and of the individual who remembers in order to belong. Both the collective and the individual turn to the archive of cultural traditions, the arsenal of symbolic forms, the ‘imaginery’ of myths and images, of the ‘great stories’, sagas and legends, scenes and constellations that live or can be activated in the treasure stores of a people.¹⁷

The question arises of how Freedom Park refers to the “arsenal of symbolic forms, the ‘imaginery’ of myths and images, of the ‘great stories’, sagas and legends, scenes and constellations” of South Africa. And especially how these references compare to the previously established in-depth definition of the disaster that Freedom Park refers to – the (almost) loss of indigenous African cultures, heritage, knowledge, and spirituality.

4. WALK TO FREEDOM: EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION

According to its own views, Freedom Park aims to provide “a pioneering and empowering heritage destination that challenges visitors to reflect upon our past, improve our present and build on our future as a united nation”.¹⁸ That claim raises the question of what options the park offers and suggests for coping with the disasters as we defined them, and how it strengthens resilience and enhances social reconstruction. In other words, what opportunities does the memorial site offer for the long walk to freedom? It will be shown that Freedom Park attempts to achieve its goal through a curious paradox of inclusivity and exclusivity: at the level of the fallen, it includes all names and all spirits, but at the level of beliefs

¹⁷ ASSMANN: *Religion and cultural memory* 7f.

¹⁸ <https://www.freedompark.co.za/index.php/about-us/overview/vision-mission-and-strategic-goals.html> [last accessed 14 May 2020].

and values that South Africans adhere to, it is very selective. So the future is negotiated by means of a paradox of all-inclusiveness and exclusiveness. References to traditions, archives, or stored repertoires in cultural memories that aim to become a collective memory result from and aim at collectivity, that is, inclusion. But they inevitably also exclude peoples, traditions, values, and beliefs. The domain of cultural memory is also a balance of powers or an arena of power struggles.

4.1. The inclusion of all names and spirits

The Wall of Remembrance and *Isivivane*, the Garden of Remembrance, represent the fallen in the wars and struggles in a discursive and non-discursive, extra-linguistic way. The inclusiveness of the long wall is striking: the names of the dead in the South African War (1899-1902) receive exactly the same treatment as those from the Sharpsville protests (1960). The park offers visitors the opportunity to walk along the wall and reflect on the magnificence of this gesture: Sharpsville's fatalities were undeniably killed, directly or indirectly, by the descendants of the Afrikaners who lost the battle against the English in the South African War. In other words, the wall "refers to a common past, in which the suffering of the other side and one's own share of the guilt have their proper place".¹⁹ *Isivivane* is more ambivalent. Although the garden claims to be all-inclusive, the following observation has already been made:

[The] conceptual inscription also renders the site sacred in a manner resembling a particular belief system. The real danger is that memory is monopolized by a particular section of society in position of power to determine what collective heritage is and how it should be spatialized as sacred and memorial site.²⁰

In the African context, sites for the dead, such as burial grounds, are closely connected to the spirit world of Africa. Freedom Park is such a space where the dead are commemorated with explicit symbolic references to the spirit world. As such, Freedom Park becomes a place where the living and the living dead, not just the dead, meet one another. According to Dominique Zahan, death presents in the African

¹⁹ ASSMANN: *Religion and cultural memory* 20.

²⁰ MASOGA: 'Constructing "national" sacred space(s)' 275.

worldview not an end of existence, but rather a change in status, and there is continuity between the living and the dead.²¹ To a certain extent, the park serves this cult of the ancestors as it serves remembering. John Mbiti explains how a person can, after death, become part of the so-called Sasa time where he remains as long as he is remembered but will gradually disappear into the Zamani time as he is forgotten.²² In Freedom Park with its Wall of Remembrance, this is important, as Mbiti states: “While the departed person is remembered by name, he is not really dead: he is alive, and such a person I would call the *living-dead*.”²³

4.2. The absence of Christianity in the //hapo museum

Allow us a personal reflection. Already on our first visit to Freedom Park, we noted that the //hapo Museum imposes a strongly pronounced vision on the visitor, emphatically excluding other perspectives. In this section, we focus on only one aspect of this exclusion. That aspect is inspired by our field notes and thus by our impressions, which can no doubt be traced back to our affiliations with theological faculties mainly focused on Christianity in the Netherlands and South Africa. The choice for this focus is in any case justifiable with the massive following that Christianity has in (South) Africa.

Christian religion is virtually absent, and when it is present, it is in a negative sense in the //hapo Museum. This is striking in a country whose inhabitants are predominantly committed to the Christian religion and where Christianity is a strong force, also in its specific African configurations. Indeed, Christianity played a negative role in colonization and apartheid in South Africa, but it also played a huge role in the struggle for freedom. A showcase in the museum displays fashion dolls with typical blue-white clothes of priests and members of Zionist churches, whereas the explaining tag refers to traditional healers; it does not in any

²¹ D. ZAHAN: ‘Some reflections on African spirituality’, in J. OLUPONA (ed.): *African spirituality. Forms, meanings and expressions* (New York 2000) 10.

²² J. MBITI: *African religions and philosophy* (Gaborone 2008²) 24. On rituals and the spirit world of Africa, see also C. WEPENER: ‘Liturgical “reform” in sub-Saharan Africa. Some observations on worship, language and culture’, in *Studia Liturgica* 44 (2014) 82-95.

²³ MBITI: *African religions and philosophy* 25.

way refer to Christianity. Further, the well-known quote, incorrectly ascribed to Desmond Tutu, is displayed:

When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said: ‘Let us pray’. We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land.²⁴

4.3. A construct of traditional African religions underlying Freedom Park

It has been demonstrated that during the construction of the park, it was decided to present and facilitate foremost Traditional African Religions (TARs). However, this concept has been criticized because TARs are a construction, more precisely, in this case the construction of one social anthropologist, Prof. Harriet Ngubane (1929-2007) of the University of Cape Town, who was employed as a senior researcher and adviser at Freedom Park. Ngubane was raised in Roman Catholicism, but later “grew to embrace African-centered belief systems”.²⁵

At Freedom Park, Ngubane was commissioned “to generate a comprehensive indigenous African perspective on management of death”.²⁶ This led to the construction of *Isivivane*, where, in a number of rituals, the spirits of the dead, after being detached from their own region, were taken from all parts of the country to be laid to rest.²⁷

In a response to a presentation of our research on Freedom Park, Prof. Retief Müller pretty critically described the site, which, rather than a space of cultural memory, is

a site of invented or constructed memory. The prominent place of TAR itself actually endorses this perspective because as Rosalind Shaw among others have strongly claimed, African Traditional Religion is actually an invented religion,²⁸ one invented by academic scholarship but subsequently adopted by diverse interest groups, and to make the case even stronger one could cite the argument by some anthropologists and historians of religion

²⁴ P. JENKINS: *The next Christendom* (Oxford 2011³) 52.

²⁵ <http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/NAM/newafre/writers/hngubane/hngubaneQ.htm> [last accessed 13 May 2020].

²⁶ MASOGA: ‘Constructing “national” sacred space(s)’ 271.

²⁷ See MASOGA: ‘Constructing “national” sacred space(s)’ for a full description of the process.

²⁸ R. SHAW: ‘The invention of “African traditional religion”’, in *Religion* 20/4 (1990) 339-353.

that the concept of religion itself is a Western invention.²⁹ (...) It strikes me as appropriate that an invented religion should serve to sacralise a space of invented memory.³⁰

As said, the absence of positive references to the Christian faith is striking against the background of the large following that Christianity has in South Africa. The mixed shapes of Christianity and TARS, particularly in the growing number of African Independent Churches, are neglected. This choice reflects the exclusive emphasis on Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the //hapo Museum. Different from the Wall of Remembrance and the Garden of Remembrance, here, boundaries between Indigenous Knowledge Systems and 'academic' Western knowledge and between TARS and Christianity are solidified. Paradoxically, the modern, even Western, academic concept of TARS has been leading in the construction and design of //hapo. In conclusion, the ambivalences between different belief and knowledge systems, which in practice exist in mixed forms, are written out of the narrative of Freedom Park, although such a paradox underlies the design, especially of //hapo.

4.4. The counter narrative of the mission station in Olukonda

Here, we introduce a counter narrative from a bottom-up initiative in the neighboring country of Namibia, which for a large part of the twentieth century was occupied by South Africa and suffered equally from apartheid. The narrative is told by the British social-anthropologist Ian Fairweather.³¹ At the level of a village community, it shows how an inextricable assembly of heritage, indigenous traditions, and Christianity in the perception of the villagers represents modern Africa. Fairweather investigates the way inhabitants of the northern-Namibian village of

²⁹ T. ASAD: *Genealogies of religion. Discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore 1993). D. DABUSSION: *The Western construction of religion. Myths, knowledge, and ideology*, transl. W. SAYERS (Baltimore 2003).

³⁰ R. MÜLLER: 'Response to Marcel Barnard, "Fixing boundaries in Freedom Park, Pretoria"', at the conference "Compassion?" (Protestant Theological University, the Netherlands, and Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, Stellenbosch 6-7 May 2015).

³¹ I. FAIRWEATHER: 'The performance of heritage in a reconstructed post-apartheid museum in Namibia', in M. BOUQUET & N. PORTO (eds.): *Science, magic and religion. The ritual process of museum magic* (= New Directions in Anthropology 23) (New York 2005) 161-181.

Olukonda ‘perform’ heritage in their Nakambale museum, an old Finnish Lutheran mission station. The inhabitants that run the museum welcome visitors of international tour agencies that are brought to the village by bus to experience ‘real African’ experiences; they show visitors around and dance for them and eat with them. The museum, next to the restored church, is in the – also renovated – mission house. To the apparent embarrassment of the researcher in Olukonda, the villagers tell their story on their own unexpected terms: they welcome the arrival of Christianity and see it as their connection with global culture and modernity, and they see apartheid as an impediment to that connection with global culture. Whereas Christianity connected them to global culture, apartheid forced them into locality. (One is involuntarily reminded of the typical Afrikaans apartheid notion of the ‘location’ or *lokasie*.) The article by Fairweather addresses the ambivalences of colonialism and Christianity, as the villagers do in their cultural and touristic offerings.

We are well aware that a local museum in Namibia and a national memorial park in South Africa cannot be directly compared. Nevertheless, the report of Fairweather evokes a completely different elaboration of the memory of the past of the local people in Namibia and the government in South Africa. Is the government really on the side of the people in this regard?

It is only a short step from the narrative of Freedom Park and //hapo to the real South Africa and its mixture of hypermodern and indigenous values and of traces of the colonial past and the power relations of the new South Africa. Outside the fences of Freedom Park, Pretoria and, a little further away, Johannesburg are ultra-modern cities that include the ambivalences of the global and local, of the modern global economy, culture, and science on the one hand, and different shapes of African local cultures, religions, and knowledge on the other. By its emphasis on the local, Freedom Park lies in splendid isolation.

4.5. An ingrained Christian God lives across the street

Does Freedom Park lay in splendid isolation, or not? As mentioned, Freedom Park and the *Voortrekker Monument* can be accessed using the same ticket, and they are even linked by a road called Reconciliation Road, which was built in 2011. However, the road is the subject of discussion between both monuments and was closed for some time after its opening for unclear reasons.

In contrast to the state-funded Freedom Park, the *Voortrekker Monument* is run as a private company and attracts at least five times as many visitors as Freedom Park.³² It is at the same time a reference to the colonialists' supposed heroic acts and a reference to 'their' God, as Johan Cilliers makes clear:

The religious overtones are clear: the ray of light symbolises God's blessing on the lives and endeavours of the Voortrekkers, and commemorates 16 December 1838 as the date of the Battle of Blood River.³³ But there is an even deeper religious meaning given to this illumination by light from above: not only does it represent a vow made by (white) people, as an expression of patriotism; it also expresses the vow of the God of the Voortrekkers, in fact saying "*We (as the Trinitarian God) for thee, South Africa.*"³⁴ God's Revelation, i.e. God self, is ingrained in granite.³⁵

This theological narrative of an ingrained God is contradicted on the other side of the street in Freedom Park by a narrative that has crossed out the Christian God.³⁶ A further religious difference is that the God, or gods, of Freedom Park is the God (of) the Spirit and the spirits, which fits in the spiritual ontology of Africa. This is not the case at the *Voortrekker Monument*, where the monument's religious dimensions are rooted in theistic understandings of a Christian God. In addition to the references to different religions represented by the two sites, namely TARS and Christianity, they also work with two very different God concepts.

³² It is difficult to obtain exact numbers for the *Voortrekker Monument*. The weekly *Mail and Guardian* (24-29 April 2015), speaks of 250,000 visitors for the *Voortrekker Monument* and 54,000 for Freedom Park.

³³ This day was commemorated in South Africa before 1994 as the Day of the Vow; currently as Day of Reconciliation.

³⁴ The monument has been criticized inter alia as a mythical expression of a distinct form of religiosity, wherein direct analogies are postulated between biblical events and persons and some of the features of the monument. Cf. I. VERMEULEN: *Man en monument. Die lewe en werk van Gerard Moerdijk* (Pretoria 1999) 138.

³⁵ J. CILLIERS: 'God in Granite? Aesthetic-theological perspectives on the monumentalisation of religion', in *Scriptura* 114/1 (2015) 1-14, p. 4.

³⁶ For a comparison of Freedom Park and the *Voortrekker Monument*, see C. WEPENER & T. VAN WYK: "'n Magtige dreuning. Dit is die lied van die ou én die nuwe Suid-Afrika' (2020), <https://www.litnet.co.za/n-magtige-dreuning-dit-is-die-lied-van-die-ou-en-die-nuwe-suid-afrika> [last accessed 2 June 2020].

5. CONCLUSIONS

Central to the aim of this contribution is to explore what coping strategies, resilience strengthening, and social reconstruction take shape in Freedom Park. A first source that the site deliberately taps into in this regard is that of African religion. Jacob Olupona states that

“African religions continue to be a source of social stability and cohesion in African communities, especially in the midst of rapid socio-economic change”.³⁷ In this regard, the way in which Freedom Park also connects the names of the dead and the spirit world of Africa by means of remembering and thus assisting the living-dead to remain in the Sasa is important. In this way, the living-dead acts as a source of spiritual power for the living.³⁸ This is commendable; however, there is also some ambivalence when compared to the nearby *Voortrekker Monument*. The *Voortrekker Monument* also assisted Afrikaners with coping after the South African War, the Depression, and other hardships during the twentieth century, but this coping was of a political-religious nature, which included some South Africans and excluded and oppressed others. One question we have after our investigation of Freedom Park is how Freedom Park can ensure that the coping it generates, the spiritual power that can become spiritual capital, is not a spiritual-political capital that also excludes some South Africans? There are signals, such as the somewhat military tone and impossibility of contacting the administration, which we interpret as warning signs in this regard. This being said, there is also much that can be commended.

The space and the ritualization made possible at memorials such as Freedom Park serve the formation of narratives, which is very important in the ongoing processes of identity formation of individuals and groups. The narrative of Freedom Park is much needed in the first decades of democracy, as it is a narrative that includes more people than the nearby *Voortrekker Monument* does and serves in this regard to foster a national group identity. However, Freedom Park also excludes some people and groups; we showed, for example, how it excludes Christianity as an

³⁷ J. OLUPONA: ‘Introduction’, in J. OLUPONA (ed.): *African spirituality. Forms, meanings and expressions* (New York 2000) xvii.

³⁸ For spiritual power and spiritual capital connected to a specific ritual space, see C. WEPENER & G. TER HAAR: ‘Sacred sites and spiritual power. One angle, two sites, many spirits’, in P. POST, P. NEL & W.E.A. VAN BEEK (eds.): *Sacred spaces and contested identities. Space and ritual dynamics in Europe and Africa* (Trenton 2014) 89-104.

important part of the South African story. Masoga claims that Freedom Park runs the danger of monopolizing certain memories by certain segments of society who are in positions of power. In this regard, he refers to annual rituals performed at Freedom Park by the president of South Africa acting like a national priest on behalf of the nation.³⁹

In our opinion, Freedom Park is an important space for disaster ritualization that serves coping; however, in light of our exploration, we remain critical regarding the extent to which the memorial includes some people and groups, but excludes others. As the South African theologian John de Gruchy states, “If we are to erect memorials, they must be memorials that redeem the past, not monuments that continue to glorify a triumphant nation or keep alive ethnic hatred.”⁴⁰

³⁹ MASOGA: ‘Constructing “national” sacred space(s)’ 277.

⁴⁰ J.W. DE GRUCHY: *A theological odyssey. My life in writing* (Stellenbosch 2014) 127.

MAKING A SPACE FOR RITUAL: REGIME LOYALISTS AFTER
THE END OF THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

DAVID CLARKE

1. INTRODUCTION

In the summer and autumn of 1989, as it approached the fortieth anniversary of its founding, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) faced a crisis that threatened the power of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, or SED), the state socialist system, and, ultimately, the continued existence of the GDR state itself. The reasons for the crisis were manifold and have been discussed at length by scholars.¹ However, its outcome (the fall of the Berlin Wall, democratic elections, and the unification of the two post-war German states as a capitalist liberal democracy under the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany) provides ample evidence of the socially constructed nature of crisis and disaster.² For the vast majority of German citizens, the end result of the crisis of state socialism was not, in fact, a disaster, even if the country faced numerous challenges in the post-unification period, particularly in terms of the collapse of many formerly state-owned industries and the high unemployment attendant on that development. Despite these setbacks, most Germans retain a positive relationship to the demise of state socialism.³

¹ For an overview, see C. ROSS: *The East German dictatorship. Problems and perspectives in the interpretation of the GDR* (London 2002) 126-148.

² E. QUARANTELLI [et al.]: 'A heuristic approach to future disasters and crises. New, old, and in-between types', in H. RODRIGUEZ [et al.] (eds.): *Handbook of disaster research* (New York 2007) 16-41.

³ For example, twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, 77% of Germans felt either mostly or very happy with subsequent developments. BUNDESZENTRALE FÜR POLITISCHE BILDUNG: 'Die Stimmung zur deutschen Einheit', available at <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-einheit/zahlen-und-fakten-zur-deutschen-einheit/211265/die-stimmung-zur-deutschen-einheit> [last accessed 23 August 2019].

In the context of the dominant memory regime of post-unification Germany, to use Eric Langenbacher's term,⁴ the GDR and its demise have been framed by what Andrew Beattie has called a 'state-mandated memory':⁵ state-funded museums, memorials, commemorations, educational projects, etc., focus on state oppression in the GDR, the victims of the regime, and resistance to SED rule, which is understood as having led to the 'peaceful revolution' of 1989 and German unity. There is nevertheless a minority, composed of individuals whom I will refer to as regime loyalists, who offer a radically different interpretation of the outcome of the crisis of state socialism in the GDR and seek to preserve an alternative memory of the GDR's achievements in light of capitalism's contemporary failings. In this chapter, I will focus on organizations and activists operating under the umbrella of the *Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden* (Committee of East German Organizations, or OKV), first founded in the summer of 1992. These organizations present unification and the victory of capitalism in unremittingly negative terms, and seek to defend what they see as the rights of their members as those unjustly persecuted for their role in the state socialist system and their continued loyalty to the socialist cause. For these former GDR citizens, then, unification was not a triumph, but a disaster.

It will be the task of my analysis to consider what function this reinterpretation of the collapse of the GDR as disaster might have for those who participate in these organizations, and (in line with the theme of this volume) to identify certain ritualized elements in their memory practice. To this end, I will focus in particular on the OKV's annual alternative commemoration of the German Unification Day (3 October), the official public holiday that marks the political union of the two post-war German states. While the OKV and its sympathisers are certainly marginal figures in today's Germany, and have consequently attracted little academic attention,⁶ the value of this case study for our understanding of the relationship between ritual and memory after significant social and

⁴ E. LANGENBACHER: 'Collective memory as a factor in international relations', in E. LANGENBACHER & Y. SHAIN (eds.): *Power and the past. Collective memory and international relations* (Washington, DC 2010) 13-50, p. 31.

⁵ A. BEATTIE: 'The politics of remembering the GDR. Official and state-mandated memory since 1989', in D. CLARKE & U. WÖLFEL (eds.): *Remembering the German Democratic Republic. Divided memory in a united Germany* (Basingstoke 2011) 23-34.

⁶ An exception is J. BOUMA: *Epistemic nostalgia. Associations of former GDR cadres in post-socialist Germany* (PhD Dissertation: Free University of Amsterdam 2017).

political upheaval is to highlight the significance of ritualized commemorative practice among those who are (or feel themselves to be) both outside of and stigmatized by the dominant memory regime.

2. THE SPOILED IDENTITY OF REGIME LOYALISTS

In his classic study of stigma, sociologist Erving Goffman discusses the various ways in which individuals and groups within society ‘manage’ their deviance from social norms. ‘Spoiled’ identities, in Goffman’s analysis, are always defined by their relationship to the society of the ‘normal’, and those marginalized by that society may develop a range of strategies to cope with their deviance from the norm. Although Goffman does not talk about political or ideological deviance, his category of ‘moral’ stigmatization would seem to apply to GDR regime loyalists, who have been subject to a range of measures to delegitimize their activities under state socialism and their commitment to socialist ideology.⁷

Many of these individuals held state or party functions in the GDR, and experienced not only a loss of status following the collapse of state socialism, but were also subject to retributive measures following unification. For example, not only did those who worked for the Ministry of State Security (*Mfs/Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, or *Stasi*) lose their jobs with the demise of the regime, but they were also subsequently subject to a process of lustration, in which they were excluded from certain kinds of public office.⁸ Private individuals who had informed on friends, colleagues and neighbours for the Mfs found that their files were made accessible to their victims and, where those victims were public figures, the activity of informants became the subject of negative media attention.⁹ The GDR’s armed forces were amalgamated with those of the Federal Republic, but in practice few senior officers were taken on by the *Bundeswehr*, on the grounds that they were regarded as political rather than simply professional warriors.¹⁰ In academia, many university

⁷ E. GOFFMAN: *Stigma. On the management of spoiled identity* (New York 1986) 175.

⁸ K. JARAUSCH: ‘Between myth and reality. The Stasi and its legacy in Germany’, in *GHI Bulletin Supplement 9* (2007) 73-83, p. 78.

⁹ B. MILLER: *The Stasi files unveiled. Guilt and compliance in a unified Germany* (New York 2004).

¹⁰ A. BICKFORD: ‘Red radiation. East German army officers in post-unification Germany’, in D. CLARKE & U. WÖLFEL (eds.): *Remembering the German Democratic Republic. Divided memory in a united Germany* (Basingstoke 2011) 169-181.

teachers and researchers who had identified with the GDR regime lost their positions in restructuring processes that aimed to make universities in eastern Germany more 'democratic'.¹¹ Former GDR state functionaries as a wider group were also targeted by measures designed to reduce the level of their old age pensions. In the GDR, such pensions were partially determined by the ideological value of the work carried out for the state and the party, and post-unification legislators sought to reduce these benefits on the grounds that the recipients had worked to perpetuate a dictatorship.¹² Finally, there were (largely unsuccessful) attempts to prosecute former GDR state functionaries in the post-unification period.¹³

Such measures were experienced by those affected as an illegitimate attack on individuals who had honestly served what they had understood to be a noble cause. It is, of course, a key feature of what has become known as transitional justice that the former victims of the defunct regime are honoured for their suffering and sacrifice, while the actions of the perpetrators are subject to exposure and criticism. Nevertheless, from the point of view of those who remain loyal to the former regime, this can lead to a sense of stigmatization that is managed in what Goffman would call a 'militant' fashion, namely by defensively rejecting the values of 'normal' society and insisting upon the validity or even the superiority of one's otherness.¹⁴

The groups organized within the OKV represent individual constituencies among a wider milieu of regime loyalists, including organizations that represent former MfS officers and GDR army officers, as well as more general associations that discuss threats to pensions and property rights and exclusion from previous professions. The OKV is also home to a number of special interest groups, focused on a variety of social and political causes.¹⁵ As well as organizing events for their members and producing a range of internal publications, activists also frequently

¹¹ P. PASTERNAK: *„Demokratische Erneuerung“. Eine universitätsgeschichtliche Untersuchung des ostdeutschen Hochschulumbaus 1989-1995* (Weinheim 1999).

¹² K.A. HEINE: *Die Versorgungsüberleitung* (Berlin 2003) 99-113. BOUMA: 'Epistemic nostalgia' 165-166.

¹³ A.J. MCADAMS: *Judging the past in unified Germany* (Cambridge 2001). K. MARXEN [et al.]: *Die Strafverfolgung von DDR-Unrecht. Fakten und Zahlen* (Berlin 2007).

¹⁴ GOFFMAN: *Stigma* 144.

¹⁵ For a full list, see <https://www.okv-ev.de/mitglieder.htm> [last accessed 23 August 2019].

author publications that appear with a network of sympathetic small publishing houses, and which are designed to influence the wider public debate on the history of the GDR.

As Wolfgang Schivelbusch has shown, those who find themselves on the losing side in history not only seek to resist the (perceived or actual) moral judgement of the victors, but may also attempt to transform the fact of defeat into a kind of moral victory, in which the experience of disaster sows the seeds for a future ascendancy over the unworthy victor of the present.¹⁶ In the discourse of former regime loyalists to be found in publications distributed through the outlets mentioned above, and in statements by the OKV and its constituent organisations, we find both ‘militant’ strategies of stigma management and allied attempts to reframe the legacy of the GDR in positive terms as a resource for resistance to capitalism in the present.

The first issue to be dealt with by regime loyalists is the question of responsibility for the GDR’s collapse. In the wake of unification, there was a marked tendency among these groups to critique the perceived incompetence of the (now largely deceased) leadership of the GDR, including men like SED general secretary Erich Honecker and the MfS chief Erich Mielke, for the failures that led to the end of the state socialist system. In this version of history, regime loyalists portrayed themselves as having recognized the need for greater democracy in the GDR, while the party leadership remained locked in its rigid authoritarian thinking.¹⁷ Writing in 1996 in the magazine *Icarus*, one of the organs of the *Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Bürgerrecht und Menschenwürde* (Society for the Protection of Civil Rights and Human Dignity, or GBM), former East German history professor Eckart Mehls provided the following typical analysis:

The collapse of the GDR was precipitated not least by the failure or unwillingness of the political leadership to respond to the justified demand for and expectation of positive change in relation to democracy and human rights in the GDR, which reached into all echelons of the political supporters of the system.¹⁸

¹⁶ W. SCHIVELBUSCH: *Die Kultur der Niederlage. Der amerikanische Süden 1865, Frankreich 1871, Deutschland 1918* (Reinbek bei Hamburg 2012).

¹⁷ For example, W. HARTMANN: *Mit Leidenschaft und Verstand. Texte von Wolfgang Hartmann (1929-2009)* (Berlin 2009) 67.

¹⁸ E. MEHLS: ‘Menschenrechte und Politik im vereinten Deutschland’, in *Icarus. Zeitschrift für soziale Theorie und Menschenrechte* 2/1 (1996) 19-21. All translations by the author.

This has the effect of putting regime loyalists back on the right side of history: those who went onto the streets for greater democracy in 1989, it is implied, were not the only ones who wanted reform in the GDR, contrary to what Germany's state-mandated memory of the collapse of the GDR would suggest.

Questions of victimhood are also central to the discourse of the OKV and its related subculture. The state-mandated memory of the post-unification Federal Republic and its institutions is criticized for creating an atmosphere of 'all-pervasive denunciation' against regime loyalists and for propagating a caricature of the GDR as a totalitarian dictatorship.¹⁹ In contrast, regime loyalists emphasise the GDR's supposed legacy of defending peace and justice, which OKV members are committed to carrying forward against the forces of historical distortion. This sense of historical mission effectively manages the stigmatization that the group's members claim to experience in post-unification society. As one activist writing in *Icarus* in 2006 affirmed, "we owe it to ourselves and those who come after us to be expert witnesses to the historical truth – who will do it, if not us?"²⁰

A key theme for the OKV is that of human rights. This provides a framing context in which this fight against the stigmatization of regime loyalists can be elevated from a partisan defence of particular rights to a more universal struggle on behalf of all 'East Germans'. In its 'East German Memorandum', a kind of manifesto that first appeared in 1992 and was then updated in 2003, the organization makes the case for an East German identity, founded in a historical experience of state socialism that challenges the capitalist values of the West. Rather than allowing the East Germans to incorporate their perspectives and values into the political and economic order of the Federal Republic, the OKV claims, the integration of former GDR citizens has been understood purely in terms of their assimilation to the values of materialism and capitalist competition.²¹ In a publication to mark the twentieth anniversary of unification, the OKV stressed that the East Germans' experience of another kind of social order, affording other

¹⁹ For example, H. KIERSTEIN & G. SCHRAMM: *Freischützen des Rechtsstaats. Wem nützen Stasiunterlagen und Gedenkstätten?* (Berlin 2009).

²⁰ G. FINDER: 'Wer, wenn nicht wir? 15 Jahre Kampf gegen Geschichtsfälschung', in *Icarus. Zeitschrift für soziale Theorie und Menschenrechte* 12/2 (2006) 5-7, p. 7.

²¹ OSTDEUTSCHES KURATORIUM VON VERBÄNDEN: *Ostdeutsches Memorandum 2003* (Schkeuditz 2003) 8.

kinds of rights, was feared by the elite of the capitalist system as a potentially destabilising element:

The re-education of those citizens who ‘joined’ the Federal Republic is failing across the board. They compare their experience of social justice in the GDR, the security of employment and training, free healthcare and education with the current situation. The current economic and political elite senses the danger that people are beginning to think more deeply about the current social order and that this could lead to action to overcome it.²²

The notion of human rights is strategically useful to the OKV, as it can be made to encompass a variety of phenomena, some of which are specific to OKV members, some of which are more general features of the capitalist system as the OKV understands it. So, for example, the ‘East German Memorandum’ in the version of 2003, while implying that the OKV was initially more interested in issues directly affecting its own members, portrays itself as having come to realise that these issues need to be seen in the wider context of human rights abuses under capitalism:

The fact that one-and-a-half million East Germans had to suffer (and continue to suffer) from discriminatory bans from particular professions, political prosecution and associated punitive reductions in their pensions meant that for a time it was more difficult to recognise that at the same time other massive human rights abuses were affecting and continue to affect many more people: including the preparations for Germany’s participation in a war of aggression and the accompanying attack on the right to life, racial discrimination against foreigners, the stoking of antisemitic resentment, and what we can call the many social human rights abuses, such as the denial of the right to work and education.²³

The theme of human rights thereby allows the OKV to stress a shared victim status between regime loyalists and East Germans in general, presenting the OKV as the champion of such rights and associated East German sensibilities. It also allows the OKV to make the claim that East Germans, with their different political socialization, are automatically more open to the socialist alternatives the OKV proposes. While the OKV acknowledges its

²² S. MECHLER [et al.]: *Staatlich vereint – politisch, wirtschaftlich und sozial gespalten. Die deutsche Einheit erfordert neue Perspektiven* (Berlin 2009). Available at https://www.okv-ev.de/Dokumente/Broschueren/Broschur_Staatlich%20vereint.pdf [last accessed 19 August 2019].

²³ MECHLER: *Staatlich vereint* 11. The war mentioned here is Germany’s participation in NATO operations in Afghanistan from 2003.

lack of political power, this strategy offers members a new role as the virtuous champions of the true interests of former citizens of the GDR, but also as members of global network of leftists movements, thereby alleviating the stigmatized status imposed on them by the post-unification order.²⁴

3. MAKING A SPACE: THE OKV'S ALTERNATIVE COMMEMORATION OF GERMAN UNIFICATION

The OKV and its constituent organizations engage in a wide range of activities, including protests and conferences, as well as social, charitable, and artistic events. Faced with such diversity of action, as Ronald Grimes notes, scholarship has yet to agree on a definition of what ritual is or could be:

Current writing about ritual tempts one to conclude that the phenomenon is either everywhere or nowhere. On the one hand, scholars expand the term until it excludes no human activity. On the other, they become so preoccupied with the history and politics of the term that ritual itself appears to be a mere scholarly construction or invention.²⁵

Grimes's solution to this conundrum is to propose that we should ask how we should use the term 'ritual' in a specific circumstance.²⁶ This is close to Catherine Bell's proposal of a practice-based approach to ritualization, in which we "address how a particular community or culture ritualizes (...) and then address when and why ritualization is deemed to be the effective thing to do".²⁷ In the case of the OKV, it will be my argument that the deliberate development of a 'tradition' of counter-events to the official celebration of German unification serves as a means to create a space in which the political heritage, experiences, and commitments of its members can receive a symbolic acknowledgement that is, for the most part, denied to them in the public sphere on account of the stigmatized status of the individuals involved and of their ideology. However, the ritualization of the ceremony also has a strong affective element. Whereas the participants feel alienated from official public commemorations of unification, their engagement in a participatory and performative event with like-minded individuals allows them to occupy a space in which others (seem to) feel as they do.

²⁴ MECHLER: *Staatlich vereint* 10 and 74.

²⁵ R.L. GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* (Oxford 2014) 188.

²⁶ GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies*.

²⁷ C. BELL: *Ritual. Perspectives and dimensions* (Oxford 2009) 81.

There are parallels here (although not automatically moral equivalences) with Steffen Werther and Madeleine Hurd's account of the commemorative activities of former Waffen-SS soldiers, whose attempts to establish commemorative rituals have taken them as far afield as Ukraine, in order to escape the hostile German public sphere in which their commemorative ceremonies are often disrupted by antifascist protesters. Werther and Hurd's key point is that such exclusion from public space creates a feeling of ostracism, which then leads to the search for alternative spaces in which the group's sense of its own (heroic) identity can be expressed, and in which sacrifices can be mourned and celebrated.²⁸

The OKV and its constituent organizations face inherent difficulties in engaging with the dominant memory regime in public space. Given that their view of history is fundamentally opposed to that memory regime, any attempt to intervene publicly in memory debates on the part of OKV members is pre-programmed to attract scandal and opprobrium. The most well-known example of this was the attempted intervention by members of the Insider Committee for the Promotion of a Critical Approach to the History of the MfS (*Insiderkomitee zur Förderung der kritischen Aneignung der Geschichte des MfS*) at a public event at the former MfS remand prison at Hohenschönhausen, Berlin in the spring of 2006. The Insider Committee was particularly active from the early 1990s to 2008, existing from 1997 as a working group of the GBM. Members of the Insider Committee sought primarily to challenge the notion that the MfS has been an instrument of terror, preferring a version of *Stasi* history that portrayed the Ministry as a normal security agency, legitimately fighting the enemies of the GDR state using the usual means. However, their attempt to intervene publicly at Hohenschönhausen and challenge the testimony of *Stasi* victims was widely perceived as a cynical denial of the suffering of those victims.²⁹

The OKV is nevertheless able to draw on some traditions of socialist public commemoration that have survived into the post-unification period, such as the annual march to the Central Cemetery in Friedrichsfelde Berlin to remember the dead of the socialist movement, who have been memorialized there since before the Second World War. This

²⁸ S. WERTHER & M. HURD: 'Go east, old man. The ritual spaces of SS veterans' memory work', in *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 6/2 (2014) 327-359.

²⁹ H. KNABE: *Die Täter sind unter uns. Über das Schönreden der SED-Diktatur* (Berlin 2007) 253-255.

march, held on 13 January in remembrance of the murders of socialist revolutionaries Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in 1919, is nevertheless not an uncontested ritual space, given that the OKV must share it with a range of other left-wing groups. Furthermore, in the post-unification period questions have been raised about the need to take account also of the victims of Stalinism when remembering the (largely) communist Left at Friedrichsfelde,³⁰ and civil society groups representing victims of the GDR regime have also staged counter-demonstrations in order to draw attention to what they see as the dangers of communist ideology.³¹ In contrast, the commemoration to be considered in more detail below takes place in a space entirely within the OKV's control,³² in which important ritual functions can be achieved without such dissonance.

What was originally known simply as the OKV's 'Protest Event for the 3 October' has been staged by the organization every year since 2007, evolving into an 'Alternative Commemoration of German Unification' (*alternative Einheitsfeier*) in 2015. This event is explicitly conceived as a riposte to the annual official 'central celebration of unification' (*zentrale Einheitsfeier*), held each year in a different regional capital, depending on which German *Bundesland* currently holds the rotating presidency of the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*).³³ As Vera Simon observes, this centrally organized ceremony is characterized above all by its avoidance of national pathos and symbolism, preferring instead to promote a vision of 'constitutional patriotism', understood in terms of a 'rational identification with and participation in the political system, which guarantees citizenship with all its rights'.³⁴ The 'central celebration' thereby provides an apt foil for an organization such as the OKV that seeks to challenge the

³⁰ T. OPPELLAND: 'Rituals of commemoration – identity and conflict. The case of *die linke* in Germany', in *German Politics* 12/4 (2012) 429–443.

³¹ ANON: 'Tausende Menschen erinnern an Luxemburg', in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 13 January 2013. Available at <https://www.fr.de/panorama/tausende-menschen-erinnern-luxemburg-11356361.html> [last accessed 23 August 2019].

³² Although the OKV does not own a suitable venue, the private spaces it hires for these occasions are not subject to any outside interference and are only accessible to ticketholders.

³³ The German term *Feier* can be translated as a commemoration, a ceremony, or a celebration, but the OKV's event is clearly not intended to celebrate German unification.

³⁴ V.C. SIMON: 'Reunification Day – Day of German Unity', in D. MCCRANE & G. MACPHERSON (eds.): *National days* (Houndmills 2009) 151–165, p. 153.

belief that the post-unification state is a meaningful guarantor of citizens' rights.

Furthermore, as Michael Geisler notes, such national days provide a potential opportunity for the kind of contestation the OKV has in mind, given that they are relatively infrequent events that are not open to the naturalization common to many other nationalist symbols. Given the 'intrusive' nature of these events, they become 'unstable signifiers', Geisler proposes, which 'rise to the level of conscious contemplation' and require of citizens that they adopt a conscious stance towards them.³⁵ In this respect, such national days also provide a strategically significant moment for those who wish to challenge the values that are explicitly foregrounded by the official celebrations.

The first of the OKV's alternative commemorations of German unification took place with over one thousand participants, although subsequent events have generally been organized at venues suitable for five hundred participants. The 2007 ceremony was complemented by a petition against a wide range of perceived injustices in the Federal Republic (including 'defamation of the GDR') that was reportedly signed by over fourteen thousand people.³⁶ Whether this qualifies as a 'mass protest', as the OKV claimed, is open to debate, but the organization was encouraged enough to establish the event as a 'tradition of protest' with a repetition of the commemoration the following year.³⁷ Clearly, there was a sense within the organization of the need to 'invent' tradition in response to the (equally invented) tradition of the official celebrations.³⁸

By the time of the third commemoration in 2009, only a few weeks before the high-profile official celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall,³⁹ the OKV planned not only to hold an event indoors, but to then follow this with a public protest to be held at the memorial in Friedrichshain for communists who had participated in the Spanish civil war (*Spanienkämpferdenkmal*), one of the GDR era memorials

³⁵ M. E. GEISLER: 'The calendar conundrum. National days as unstable signifiers', in McCrane & MacPherson: *National days* 10-25, p. 17-18.

³⁶ K. BLESSING: 'Das OKV lädt ein zur Alternativveranstaltung anlässlich des „Tages der Deutschen Einheit“', in *OKV Nachrichten* 1 (2008) 1-2, p. 1.

³⁷ BLESSING: 'Das OKV' 2.

³⁸ E.J. HOBSBAWM & T. RANGER (eds.): *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge 1992).

³⁹ H.M. HARRISON: 'The Berlin Wall and its resurrection as a site of memory', in *German Politics and Society* 29/2 (2011) 78-106, p. 93-96.

that has survived the unification process.⁴⁰ The addition of this further element to the day does not seem to have been a resounding success, however, with the OKV complaining that attendance was lower than expected: only around five hundred people, presumably the participants of the initial indoor event, were present. Furthermore, the OKV noted that only those media sympathetic to their cause, such as the former GDR newspaper *Junge Welt*, gave the protest any coverage.⁴¹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, this public element did not feature in subsequent years.

Apart from this misstep, a clear pattern was already emerging for the ceremony, which included artistic elements (performances of socialist songs, poems, and cabaret sketches), and speeches by OKV officials and representatives of affiliated organizations. Notable in the 2009 programme was the inclusion of speeches by two students, which implicitly bolstered the OKV's claim to be speaking for the future of the country.⁴² The report published by the OKV on the fifth event in 2010 marks a noticeable shift in tone, however. Here the emphasis is placed firmly on the affective aspect of participation in the commemoration, which focused again on various kinds of human rights abuse under the capitalism of the Federal Republic. Beginning with the opening bars of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (the last movement of which, with Schiller's text, also provides the EU with its anthem), participants were presented with a range of content whose emotionality was emphasized. So, for example, a montage of photographs of dead German soldiers was shown against the words of the German chancellor Angela Merkel about the pursuit of Christian values, which apparently 'sent a shiver down the spine' of audience members. Another 'emotional high point' was the account by a single mother of her battle for welfare benefits against a hostile bureaucracy.⁴³

The emotional force of the event as it has developed over time has been underpinned by a broadening of the audio-visual aspect of the presentation. At recent ceremonies, videos have been created to open the proceedings and to introduce or illustrate individual items. Equally, the musical aspects of the programme often encourage the participants to

⁴⁰ K. BLESSING: 'Alle Jahre wieder', in *OKV-Nachrichten* 3 (2009) 2.

⁴¹ H. HOFFERT: 'Einige Gedanken zur Protestkundgebung', in *OKV-Nachrichten* 4 (2009) 1.

⁴² Cf. programme advertised in *OKV-Nachrichten* 4 (2010) 2.

⁴³ OSTDEUTSCHES KURATORIUM VON VERBÄNDEN: 'Erweiterte Presseinformation über die Protestveranstaltung 2011', in *OKV-Nachrichten* 3 (2011) 1.

sing along. In particular, it has become a tradition that Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler's 'Children's Anthem' of 1950 is sung by the audience while standing at the end of the programme. The song, which was originally intended as a riposte to West Germany's adoption of the nationalist *Deutschlandlied* (in a shortened version) as its anthem, speaks to a resistance to the status quo, but also emphasizes the hope for a better Germany, implicitly calling on the participants to commit themselves to continued struggle, as in the first stanza of Brecht's text:

Grace spare not and spare no labour
 Passion nor intelligence
 That a decent German nation
 Flourish as do other lands.⁴⁴

This emotional element is clearly important to participants. For instance, one audience member from the 2013 event wrote of her feelings at being able to participate in the ceremony and experience its musical elements in the following terms:

I have often left Berlin on this day. But in the 23rd year [after unification, DC], I wanted to spend the day among like-minded people again. That was good and right. I didn't just feel sadness on hearing the wonderful songs of the 'Quijote' group from Chemnitz, I also felt that there is hope for change if we all pull together.⁴⁵

Here we get a sense of the experience of exclusion or stigma among OKV members, who feel themselves to be unwelcome in public space while mainstream commemorations of 3 October are taking place. However, rather than hide themselves away, the ceremony allows them to come together and undergo a series of emotional experiences that they understand to be shared. Such feeling can also encompass a common sense of outrage: for example, at the 2014 event, which tackled the theme of militarism, the audience was reportedly gripped by 'a static charge of resistance' (*knisternden Widerstand*) while watching a video montage of comments by the then Federal President, which were

⁴⁴ B. BRECHT: 'Children's Anthem', in J. WILLETT & R. MANNHEIM (eds.): *Bertolt Brecht. Poems 1913-1956* (London 1987) 423.

⁴⁵ R. WEISS: 'Meinungen zur OKV-Protestveranstaltung am 3. Oktober 2013'. Available at https://www.okv-ev.de/images/report_oktoberprotest%202013/Meinung_Weiss.pdf [last accessed 19 August 2019].

ironically juxtaposed with a key symbol of the East German peace movement.⁴⁶

Although many of the activities of OKV might be said to fulfil the function of creating an alternative space for dissenting views, its annual commemoration of German unification has important characteristics associated with ritual. Although it is a relatively recent 'invention of tradition' (and self-consciously so), it follows a regular format and differs from, for example, a conference or discussion in that the discursive elements (in this case, mostly speeches) do not offer new interpretations or provoke debate, but largely seek to reiterate truths assumed to be universally held by the participants. On one level, following Grimes, its ritual mode might be described as ceremonial, but of the declarative type.⁴⁷ However, it should also be noted that the very fact of meeting not only to hear such declaration, but also to experience the emotionally charged aspects of the multi-media presentation and, to some extent, to participate in the performance of aspects of the ceremony, is also central to the ritualizing effect evident in this case study.

What matters here, in line with Edward Casey's account of such commemorative ritual, is not so much the content of the texts of the various speeches and declarations themselves, but the physical emplacement of the individual participants, who are co-present in that space where the texts can be heard and who can thereby experience a moment of 'intensified remembering' for the lost cause of socialism.⁴⁸ Within that ritual space, there are also a number of what Bell calls 'performative elements', including music and visuals, which are designed to have an emotional effect on the audience. This emotion is implicitly understood by those present as a shared experience.⁴⁹ At various points, they are called upon to participate more directly in the performance, whether by joining in with revolutionary songs, by standing to sing an alternative national

⁴⁶ See OSTDEUTSCHES KURATORIUM VON VERBÄNDEN: 'Ein Report'. Available at https://www.okv-ev.de/report_Oktoberprotest%202014.htm [last accessed 23 August 2019]. The symbol in question is the 'Swords into Ploughshares' logo popular among dissidents close to the Protestant church in the GDR. There are two ironies here: first, as intended by the OKV, that President Joachim Gauck had once been a pastor in that church; second, and unintended, that the members of the OKV had been supporters of the regime that persecuted these earlier peace protesters.

⁴⁷ GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* 204.

⁴⁸ E.S. CASEY: *Remembering. A phenomenological study* (Bloomington, IN 2000²) 404-454.

⁴⁹ BELL: *Ritual* 160.

anthem, or by signing a collective ‘Statement of Intent’ (*Willenserklärung*), which has been a regular feature of these ceremonies since their inception. Such statements commit the signatories to fight the various injustices that have been thematized during the commemoration, but also have the performative effect of again stressing shared feeling and, indeed, purpose. This feeling and purpose is highlighted as emerging from the GDR’s political and moral traditions, in contrast to the ‘hollow phrases and empty claims’ of mainstream politicians in the Federal Republic.⁵⁰

4. CONCLUSION

The OKV is doubtless a marginal organization set within a marginal subculture, which lacks prestige and recognition in wider German society. In seeking to develop strategies to challenge the dominant memory regime in the Federal Republic today, the OKV and its constituent organizations have developed a range of activities in order to undermine the notion that the collapse of the GDR and German unification were positive outcomes for East Germans. In presenting this alternative view, namely of German unification as disaster, the OKV and its membership seek, as I have argued, to manage the stigma of their own association with a now discredited political regime. Much of this activity purports to be outward facing, in that the stated aim is to change the views of wider society. In the case of the OKV’s alternative commemoration of German unification, however, processes of ritualization appear to serve a need among OKV members themselves: namely, to be co-present with others who think and feel alike, in a space they have created where they will not experience moral stigma. Therefore, rather than suggesting that ritual is either something happening in a special place or the result of a special action,⁵¹ this example shows how the purpose of ritualizing action can be to create a special place (if only temporarily) in an otherwise hostile environment. It is notable in this respect that the OKV soon retreated from its early attempt to take this event onto the streets, where

⁵⁰ OSTDEUTSCHES KURATORIUM VON VERBÄNDEN: ‘Willenserklärung anlässlich der „Alternativen Einheitsfeier“ des Ostdeutschen Kuratoriums von Verbänden e.V. am 3. Oktober 2016’. Available at https://www.okv-ev.de/images/report_oktoberprotest%202016/Willenserklaerung.2016.pdf [last accessed 18 August 2019].

⁵¹ B. STEPHENSON: *Ritual. A short introduction* (Oxford 2015) 29.

it only found itself ignored by the wider public and the media. Creating an exclusive ritual space for this stigmatized group is clearly the safer option, as dissent, contestation, or simply indifference are ruled out.

However, as Goffman also noted of such 'militant' identities among the stigmatized, there is an irony in the fact that, in order to achieve the desired experience of (again, temporary) de-stigmatization, the group in question has to imitate or respond to ritual forms dominant in the mainstream culture that is perceived as oppressing them. Ultimately, without the state-mandated memory of the 'central unification celebration', there would be no ritual form for the OKV to react against. This is arguably also the case for its other activities, which are often reactive to the actions of official memory institutions. In other words, as Goffman puts it, the stigmatized militant "may find that he is necessarily presenting his militant efforts in the (...) style of his enemies".⁵²

⁵² GOFFMAN: *Stigma* 144.

#METOO AS A RITUAL RESPONSE TO THE SLOW-MOVING DISASTER OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

HELEEN E. ZORGDRAGER

1. INTRODUCTION

It all started when the American actress Alyssa Milano posted on Twitter:

Me Too.

Suggested by a friend: “If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me Too’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem”.

(@AlyssaMilano, 15 October 2017)

The message launched a worldwide outpouring of testimonies about sexual harassment and assault. The movement became known as #MeToo. The simple and powerful statement of #MeToo enabled victims of sexual abuse (both female and male), to speak out and to share their individual stories through social media.

The #MeToo movement can be understood as a ritual response to the slow-moving, diffusive disaster of continuous sexual harassment and assault. In this chapter I will first explain why structural sexual violence is a slow-moving disaster and what that means exactly. Then I will explore how the #MeToo movement can be regarded as a post-disaster ritual response. I will describe the ritual qualities, dimensions, and functions of the #MeToo movement, both in its online and offline activism, as well as the symbols and rites it has produced. Several case studies of public memorials and monuments in the context of #MeToo will be presented. Finally, I will show how the secular #MeToo movement also generated specific ritual practices in faith-based communities.

The concept of a slow-moving disaster is derived from Eric L. Hsu.¹ In contrast to Charles Fritz's influential definition² of a disaster, in which speed is considered to be a key characteristic, Hsu argues for a typology of disasters that encompass slow-moving and recurrent breakdowns. Hsu proposes to include in the definition temporally diffusive disruptive phenomena as well. With Matsumoto³ and Matthewman,⁴ he expresses concern about focusing merely on the rapid onset and the spectacular and stresses the need to move away from an event-based view of disasters to a framing of disasters as processes that can have a structural character. The "slow violence" of disasters is "incremental and invisible, deferred and dispersed", "ambient rather than spectacular", and the "result of ongoing processes rather than their rupture".⁵ Against this backdrop, Hsu divides disasters into different temporal registers: sudden, gradual, and/or chronic. Furthermore, he emphasizes the necessity of a relational approach; disasters that fall into different temporal categories may in fact be interconnected in some way.⁶

2. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS A SLOW-MOVING DISASTER

Before Alyssa Milano posted her tweet, the phrase *Me Too* already had a history. In 2006, New York social worker Tarana Burke, moved by the stories of sexual abuse she had heard from Afro-American girls in the Bronx, began using the phrase *Me Too* on a website to help other women with similar experiences stand up for themselves and raise

¹ E.L. HSU: 'Must disasters be rapidly occurring? The case for an expanded temporal typology of disasters', in *Time & Society* 28/3 (2019) 904-921.

² C. FRITZ: 'Disasters', in R.K. MERTON & R.A. NISBET (eds.): *Contemporary social problems. An introduction to deviant behavior and social organization* (Riverside 1961) 651-694. Also, Paul Post in P. POST, R.L. GRIMES, A. NUGTEREN, P. PETTERSON & H. ZONDAG (eds.): *Disaster ritual. Explorations of an emerging ritual repertoire* (Leuven 2003) 20-27 followed Fritz in defining disaster in terms of a sudden, unexpected and fast-moving event: "A disaster is instantaneous in nature and not chronic" (25). On the basis of newer research, Post changed the working definition; see his introduction to this handbook.

³ M. MATSUMOTO: 'Structural disaster long before Fukushima. A hidden accident', in *Development & Society* 42/2 (2013) 165-190.

⁴ S. MATTHEWMAN: *Disasters, risks and revelation* (New York 2015).

⁵ MATTHEWMAN: *Disasters, risks and revelation* 144-145, quoted in HSU: 'Must disasters be rapidly occurring' 911.

⁶ HSU: 'Must disasters be rapidly occurring' 914.

awareness about the pervasiveness of sexual abuse.⁷ A decade later, Milano revitalised MeToo as a Twitter hashtag, prompted by allegations made by colleague actresses against film tycoon Harvey Weinstein. The response was overwhelming.

#MeToo is a form of feminist discursive activism.⁸ The tools of discursive activism are texts contesting the existing dominant discourse, revealing the underlying power relations and denaturalizing what appears as natural.⁹ Social media are the main platforms for the #MeToo discursive activism. There is no formal organization. With its spontaneous, decentralized online mobilization, it fits into the phenomenon of networked feminism.¹⁰

Through her statement, Milano situated herself within a community of victims and survivors and reached out to others to share. Her explicit intent was, in her own words, “to give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem”.¹¹ The result was a collectively produced story about sexual harassment and assault. As Karen Boyle writes:

placing experiences of *different* types of sexual violation alongside one another (‘sexual harassment and assault’) as well as using the affordances of social media to place the experiences of *different* women alongside one another in order to get ‘a sense of the magnitude of the problem’ [made it possible] (...) to identify a basic common character underlying many different events.¹²

Liz Kelly, in her book *Surviving Sexual Violence* (1988), coined the important notion of the *continuum* of sexual violence. The notion of the continuum helps to lay bare the structural and chronic character of sexual violence in women’s individual lives and to identify it as ‘slow violence’ and as a ‘slow, diffusive disaster’. Kelly argues that the pervasive nature of men’s sexual violence means that women make sense of individual actions in relation to a continuum of related experiences across a lifetime. Seeing individual acts on a continuum means seeing how they

⁷ K. BOYLE: *#MeToo, Weinstein and feminism* (Cham, CH 2019) 4-5.

⁸ R. CLARK: “Hope in a hashtag”. The discursive activism of #WhyIStayed’, in *Feminist Media Studies* 16/5 (2016) 788-804; BOYLE: *#MeToo* 1.

⁹ M. FINE: ‘Passions, politics, and power. Feminist research possibilities’, in M. FINE (ed.): *Disruptive voices. The possibilities of feminist research* (Ann Arbor 1992) 221.

¹⁰ BOYLE: *#MeToo* 3.

¹¹ BOYLE: *#MeToo* 3.

¹² BOYLE: *#MeToo* 53.

work together – in the context of a gender-unequal society – to produce particular effects on women’s lives. Each act separately may not be disruptive or straightforwardly destructive; however, it ‘builds up’. Boyle quotes the comedian Jo Brand: “And actually, for women, if you’re constantly being harassed, even in a small way, that builds up. And that wears you down.”¹³

The violations come in many forms. Catcalling is clearly in no way equivalent to child rape. Yet there is a basic common character underlying many different events. Individual acts of sexual denigration, harassment, and assault are embedded within existing relationships and power structures. This qualifies sexual violence as structural violence and as a slow-moving disaster, both for individual women and for women collectively. The qualifications of slow violence – “incremental and invisible, deferred and dispersed”, “ambient rather than spectacular”, and the “result of ongoing processes rather than their rupture” – perfectly fit with the pervasive and recurrent nature of sexual violence. The effect on women’s lives of this ‘slow violence’, in the end, is a violation of sexual agency, of subjectivity, of the will, and the loss of a healthy sense of self.¹⁴

Boyle acknowledges that the experiences shared in #MeToo are not equivalent. Yet there is a continuum of women’s experiences, in which the sheer threat or real experience of one event (e.g., rape) shapes the context in which the other (e.g., catcalling) is made meaningful and has a harmful impact on women’s well-being. The shared stories in #MeToo have demonstrated that sexual harassment does not need to involve physical violence or sexual assault for it to have both material and psychological impacts on women. Most women routinely make calculations about their safety with the knowledge of sexual violence, whether they have personally experienced it or not. Boyle’s ‘continuum thinking’ implies that there is not only a continuum of women’s experiences, but also a continuum of men’s sexual entitlement and gendered power in which apparently quite distinct individual acts like catcalling and rape are linked.

¹³ Comedian Jo Brand on BBC1, 3 November 2017, quoted in BOYLE: *#MeToo* 59.

¹⁴ L. MARTÍN ALCOFF: *Rape and resistance. Understanding the complexities of sexual violation* (Cambridge/Medford 2018) 12; L. DU TOIT: *A philosophical investigation of rape. The making and unmaking of the feminine self* (New York 2009).

3. #MeToo AS RITUAL RESPONSE TO DISASTER

In what way can we see #MeToo as a ritual? In what ways does it have the qualities of ritual, and how can we analyse its ritualistic function(s)?

Paul Post understands ritual as “a more or less repeatable sequence of action units, which take on a symbolic dimension through formalization, stylization, and their situation in place and time”.¹⁵ Indeed the #MeToo testimonies show a more or less repeatable sequence of action units, and the messages are in a loose manner formalized and stylized. In tweets, in posts on Facebook, and on YouTube, women speak out by saying ‘I’ and ‘Me Too’ followed by a story of sexual violation and the impact it had on them. An important aspect of #MeToo as a ‘sequence of action units’ is the affirmation by others. Classic rituals, such as confession and apology, are recognizable in #MeToo.

However, in the case of #MeToo it is more apt to speak of ritualisations instead of ritual. Ritualisations, as Catherine Bell describes, are practices with a ritual dimension, or ‘ritual-like activities’.¹⁶ The various ritualized practices in the #MeToo movement are too manifold and heterogeneous to be captured by the concept of ritual as such. #MeToo is hashtag activism in the online space of social media flowing over into offline activism, creating in both spaces symbols and ritual-like activities.

Ronald Grimes listed ‘qualities of ritual’, and the more of these qualities present in a concrete ritual act, the higher one could say its ‘ritual calibre’ is.¹⁷ In the qualities Grimes has distinguished, performed action, chiefly gesture is considered central. From this perspective, #MeToo as online activism, in which words, thoughts and images¹⁸ take centre stage, would possess a low ‘ritual calibre’, whereas the offline pendant of #MeToo would have an intense ‘ritual calibre’. Our analysis will show that such a differentiation is not really adequate or helpful to understand the ritualistic power of the #MeToo movement.

¹⁵ Cf. Paul Post in the Introduction of this handbook, p. 3.

¹⁶ C. BELL: *Ritual, perspectives and dimensions* (New York/Oxford 1997) 138-169.

¹⁷ R.L. GRIMES: *Ritual criticism. Case studies in its practice, essays on its theory* (Columbia 1990) 13ff.; Cf. POST [et al.]: *Disaster ritual* 39-40.

¹⁸ Women posted their bruised faces caused by domestic violence on the internet. For an example from Egypt, see <https://stepfeed.com/egyptian-tv-host-appears-with-bruises-on-face-to-protest-domestic-violence-1539> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

4. CONFESSION AND APOLOGY

As feminist discursive activism, #MeToo can be termed a *media ritual*.¹⁹ Media ritual is based on a 'ritual' view of communication; personal stories are told in a highly mediated context. From social media such as Twitter and Facebook, the testimonies are multiplied, amplified, and disseminated by mainstream media.

As for its form, the personal stories shared under #MeToo are structured in the narrative frame of *confession*. Originally, confession was a religious ritual. According to Foucault, "Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth".²⁰ He analysed how the ritual of confession is structured by the power differential between the confessor and the interlocutor (the priest, the psychoanalyst, the doctor). Confessions, as we encounter them in #MeToo testimonies, are cast in a ritual form, structured around certain category differences, which only make sense because of the power differential.²¹ Who is the interlocutor in the case of #MeToo? Who hears the confession and has the power to respond to it, in this case not by granting absolution (because women do not plead guilty) but by an unequivocal recognition of the pain of the inflicted wounds and the systemic nature of sexual violence? First, the interlocutors are other women, who hear the stories, are emotionally affected, recognize their own hidden and repressed experiences of sexual violation, and feel empowered to affirm other women's testimonies by speaking out for themselves. Second, it is wider society, which through the impressive amount of personal testimonies gets a sense of the magnitude of the problem and isn't able to look away any longer.

Critics of #MeToo compare the movement to medieval rituals of publicly 'naming and shaming' without a fair judicial process and of launching a 'witch hunt' against suspected perpetrators. However, the testimonies of the victims usually do not aim at retribution against perpetrators. Although most of the stories of abuse are very concrete and detailed, they rarely mention the name of the perpetrator or reveal their identity. Exceptions are the cases of public celebrities, like Harvey Weinstein or Bill Cosby, against whom official indictments had been submitted.

¹⁹ The concept of 'media ritual' is presented by N. COULDRY: *Media rituals. A critical approach* (London 2003).

²⁰ M. FOUCAULT: *The history of sexuality. An introduction* (New York 1978) 58.

²¹ Cf. COULDRY: *Media rituals* 52.

Nevertheless, it is true that in contemporary societies mass mediated humiliation has emerged as a viable and symbolically rich vehicle for punishment and social control. According to Steven Kohm, expressive and emotive forms of punishment have been on the rise since the late twentieth century.²² He connects this to the emerging restorative justice practices in Western criminal justice. Restorative justice works on the principle that offenders must be made to feel guilt and remorse for their actions in an effort to build consciousness. Shaming becomes “a formal tactic of punishment itself”.²³ The rise of public access to the Internet opened up a vast frontier for those determined to shame and humiliate others outside of judicial practices, with a preference for naming and shaming sexual predators, especially paedophiles. The hashtag of the movement #MeToo, however, clearly focuses on the victim, and thus ‘naming and shaming’ of the perpetrator is not an intentional part of the practiced ritual forms. The central concern is with how women sharing their experiences can allow for a fuller understanding of those experiences and build a community of solidarity across all differences.²⁴

Another ritual with religious roots becoming visible in the slipstream of #MeToo is the *public apology*. In response to sexual misconduct allegations, some men have publicly apologized for their behaviour.²⁵ Under #ItWasMe some men posted admissions of guilt, and under #HowIWill-Change they demonstrated their intention to be better allies.²⁶ A public apology has the potential to heal and redeem both the accused and the accuser. However, in many cases provoked by #MeToo, there is rather non-apology, attempts to downplay the event, a focus on mitigating circumstances (drunkenness, the ‘liberal seventies’, the minor age at that time), blaming the victim, and/or fury about being accused.

²² S.A. KHOM: ‘Naming, shaming and criminal justice. Mass-mediated humiliation as entertainment and punishment’, in *Crime, Media, Culture* 5/2 (2009) 188-205.

²³ J. PRATT: ‘Emotive and ostentatious punishment. Its decline and resurgence in modern society’, in *Punishment & Society* 2/4 (2000) 417-439, p. 418, cited in KOHM: ‘Naming, shaming and criminal justice’ 190.

²⁴ BOYLE: #MeToo 61.

²⁵ M. KHUTORETSKY: ‘The perspective on the public apology’, *The Perspective*, n.d. 2018, <https://www.theperspective.com/debates/living/perspective-public-apology-metoo-era/> [last accessed 6 June 2021].

²⁶ ‘Confessions to sexual assault are rare: #ItWasMe’, in *The Conversation*, 11 October 2018, <https://theconversation.com/confessions-to-sexual-assault-are-rare-itwasme-103502> [last accessed 6 June 2018].

A telling example are the hearings in September 2018, in which psychologist Christine Blasey Ford and judge Brett Kavanaugh gave televised testimonies for the US Senate Judiciary Committee.²⁷ It had to assess the suitability of Kavanaugh, nominated by President Trump, to sit on the Supreme Court. Blasey Ford accused Kavanaugh of attempting to rape her when they were both in high school. While Blasey Ford remained calm and respectful, Kavanaugh lost himself in aggressive emotions, accused the Democrats of attempting ‘character assassination’, denied categorically, and constructed a narrative of male victimization with himself in the centre. Kavanaugh built up his line of defence by repeatedly emphasizing that this was an attack on his good name. His supporters launched the campaign #HimToo (next to #BeersforKavanaugh, #BeersforBrett) as an expression of solidarity, recasting the accused perpetrator of sexual assault as the victim. Kavanaugh successfully obtained ‘himpathy’, defined by Kathe Manne as, “the inappropriate and disproportionate sympathy powerful men often enjoy in cases of sexual assault, homicide and other misogynistic behaviour”.²⁸ Although the sympathy of many was with Blasey Ford, in crucial ways the ‘himpathic’ response won: Kavanaugh was confirmed to a lifetime position on the Supreme Court. Kavanaugh’s categorical denial in public court and his strategy of self-victimization is a typical example of a post-disaster ritualized practice enacted by accused perpetrators of sexual assault in order to exonerate themselves.

5. FUNCTIONS OF #MeToo AS A POST-DISASTER RITUAL

If we can consider #MeToo a post-disaster ritual response, what then are the functions of the ritual? In the first place, speaking out publicly under a common hashtag about one’s experiences with sexual violence, knowing that one is listened to with empathy, is therapeutic.²⁹ Often for

²⁷ D. CRARY: ‘Analysis. How the Kavanaugh-Ford hearing gives a dramatic lesson on gender roles’, in *Global News*, 28 September 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4495589/brett-kavanaugh-christine-blasey-ford-hearing-gender-roles/> [last accessed 6 June 2020]; S. PAGE: ‘Analysis. On Kavanaugh vs. Ford, a Supreme Court showdown hinges on whom you believe’, in *USA Today*, 14 December 2019,

<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/09/27/analysis-kavanaugh-ford-comes-down-test-credibility/1440493002/> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

²⁸ K. MANNE: *Down girl. The logic of misogyny* (New York/Oxford 2018) 108-114, cited in BOYLE: #MeToo 108-114.

²⁹ Cf. BOYLE: #MeToo 23.

the first time, these traumatizing experiences and repressed memories are shared and can become reintegrated into a woman's narrative of self. Being listened to by others and having one's pain acknowledged is comforting; it softens the pain and helps to restore a sense of identity. In ritual theory, this is the *discharge function* or dimension – rituals assist in channelling feelings and emotions.³⁰

The *social function* of a ritual is visible in how #MeToo enables community building. Women with an impaired sense of self who are often ashamed about what has happened to them, position themselves within a community of victim/survivors. With Boyle, I use the term victim/survivor as a means of acknowledging that experiences of victimization and survival often interact in one and the same person; the identities of victim and survivor are dynamic and contextual.³¹ The shared pain unites different women in very different contexts and circumstances across large geographical spaces in a virtual community.³² Ritualized practices of story-telling help women find identity in 'group survivorship'.

The goal of awareness raising indicates the *ethical function*. #MeToo's repetitiveness and endlessly amplified narrative of sexual misconduct and its long-term impact on victims gives society a sense of the magnitude of the problem.

Finally, #MeToo can be regarded as a transformative political practice.³³ It consists of breaking the silence, raising awareness of topics and experiences that have been excluded from the political agenda, and calling for change.³⁴ I connect this political character of #MeToo with what is termed in ritual theory the *prophylactic function*. The prophylactic function of a ritual entails helping people get a grip on the contingencies of life, on disaster, on senseless violence, on threats of every kind. Speaking out on the shame and pain of sexual violence has a prophylactic function for

³⁰ For the classic list of functions in ritual theory, see POST [et al.]: *Disaster ritual* 41, reference to G. LUKKEN: *Rituals in abundance. Critical reflections on the place, form and identity of Christian ritual in our culture* (Leuven 2005).

³¹ BOYLE: #MeToo 15-17. See also K.M. BOYLE & K.B. ROGERS: 'Beyond the rape "victim-survivor" binary. How race, gender, and identity processes interact to shape distress', in *Sociological Forum* 35/2 (2020) 323-345.

³² H. RHEINGOLD: *The virtual community. Homesteading on the electronic frontier* (Reading, MA 1993).

³³ BOYLE: #MeToo 22.

³⁴ BOYLE: #MeToo 23.

women. It builds resilience. The collective narrative helps create a safe space, a discourse in which the truth of individual stories is validated. Famous celebrities, who profiled the movement, use their media power to prevent the narrative from being ignored or denied. The multiplied act of speaking out works almost like a mantra or perhaps better as a drum roll in battle. The goal is to hold the perpetrators and institutions that structurally protect them accountable and to change legislation accordingly.

All these functions in one way or another attest to the ritual repertoire of #MeToo, which is above all a repertoire of 'practices of victimhood'. As Martha Kempny defines, "here the identity and profile of the ritual repertoire are based on the victim's perspective".³⁵ Central to these practices are victimhood themes like mourning, coping with trauma, healing, commemoration, calling for justice, restoration, reconciliation, protest, starting a new life, etc.³⁶ This applies to the truth-telling practices of #MeToo, albeit from women's self-identification it is more appropriate to speak of 'practices of *victim/survivorhood*'.³⁷

6. RITES AND SYMBOLS IN OFFLINE #METOO ACTIVISM

The #MeToo movement spread beyond hashtag activism to physical social life and created new symbols and rites.

One new rite was the Women's March.³⁸ The first Women's March took place on 21 January 2017, the day after the inauguration of President Trump.³⁹ Although this first Women's March predated #MeToo, its energy, content, and purpose is closely interlinked with the #MeToo movement. The 2017 Women's March in a sense heralded the era of #MeToo. Resisting Trump's political agenda and claiming women's

³⁵ M. KEMPNY: 'Interpretative repertoire of victimhood', in *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 20 (2011) 132-151.

³⁶ See Paul Post in the introduction to this handbook, p. 33; M. HOONDEERT, P. MUTSAERS & W. ARFMAN (eds.): *Cultural practices of victimhood* (London/New York 2018).

³⁷ See note 31.

³⁸ Website of the movement Women's March, <https://womensmarch.com> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

³⁹ S. CHIRA: 'The Women's March became a movement. What's next?', in *The New York Times*, 20 January 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/20/us/womens-march-metoo.html> [last accessed 6 June 2020]; H. WEAVER & K. RICH: 'Galvanized by #MeToo and a year of Trump, the Women's March returns to the streets', in *Vanity Fair*, 21 January 2020, <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2018/01/womens-march-2018> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

rights as human rights, women joined in massive street protests across the globe. The Women's March now has established itself as a movement, annually organizing worldwide street protests.

Backed by online activism, large-scale protest rallies took place in the metropolises of India, for instance after the cruel gang rape and murder of a young woman in Hyderabad in November 2019.⁴⁰ The Indian #MeToo movement, which started with high-ranking women in Bollywood's film industry, in journalism, and in politics,⁴¹ became a platform for outraged women demanding punishment for the perpetrators and structural measures to prevent violence against women.

Silent marches belong to the ritual repertoire of mourning rituals. In silent marches related to #MeToo, people mourn for the victims and protest against sexual violence and inadequate responses from authorities. To name just a few examples, in the annual Silent Protest at Rhodes University in South Africa, students protested against rape and sexual violence of women and transgender people,⁴² and in the Silent March against sexual violence in Rotterdam on 1 August 2018, people demonstrated their solidarity with an Indonesian exchange student who was brutally raped right in front of her house.⁴³

New symbols were created in the context of #MeToo both by professional artists and others. The visual symbol of #MeToo (hashtag and words) is powerful itself.⁴⁴ It was accompanied by the wearing of black (for instance at the Golden Globe Awards in 2018⁴⁵ and in the 'Thursdays in Black'

⁴⁰ H. ELLIS-PETERSON: 'Protests in India after woman gang raped and burned to death', in *The Guardian*, 1 December 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/01/protests-india-woman-gang-raped-burned-to-death-hyderabad> [last accessed 1 December 2019].

⁴¹ R. AYYUB: 'In India, women are no longer prepared to stay silent', in *The Guardian*, 21 October 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/21/india-women-silent-metoo-movement-battle> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁴² Rhodes University, movement Silent Protest, <https://www.ru.ac.za/studentrepresentativecouncil/latestnews/silentprotest.html> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁴³ J. PIETERS: 'Hundreds participate in Silent March for Rotterdam rape victim', in *NLTimes*, 1 August 2018, <https://nltimes.nl/2018/08/01/videos-hundreds-participate-silent-march-rotterdam-rape-victim> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁴⁴ It won the Symbol of the Year 2017 Award of the Stanford University, <https://news.stanford.edu/thedish/2018/02/05/metoo-wins-symbol-of-the-year-for-2017/> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁴⁵ B. BARNES & C. BUCKLEY: 'A Golden Globes draped in black addresses #MeToo', in *The New York Times*, 7 January 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/07/movies/golden-globes.html> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

campaign of the World Council of Churches⁴⁶). An original #MeToo symbol is the pink ‘pussyhat’ that women wore en masse at the annual Women’s Marches from 2017 onwards.⁴⁷ By wearing the pink hat with cat ears, women reclaim the term ‘pussy’, playing on the remark Donald Trump made in 2015 that women would let him “grab them by the pussy”. Symbols from feminist tradition that re-emerged in the marches were the raised middle-finger, the ‘MeToo fist’ (in all skin colours), the Woman Power symbol (the well-known Venus symbol with raised fist), and the taped mouth.

Numerous artists have been inspired by #MeToo to produce often provocative pieces of art. In January 2018, the *New York Times* collected a series of such artworks.⁴⁸ The works demonstrate how the movement connects to iconography of former feminist activism but also how new visual strategies are applied. An interesting piece is the cartoonish video by Libby VanderPloeg showing how, by the sheer power of their numbers, women can destroy patriarchy.⁴⁹ The Spanish photographer Laia Abril depicts the clothes of rape victims – women, girls, and some men – showing the systematic nature of rape in institutions such as marriage, military, and church.⁵⁰

6.1. Survivors Memorial, Minneapolis

We now turn to commemorating rituals and more specifically to monuments. The first permanent, large-scale monument for survivors of sexual violence is planned in Minneapolis.⁵¹ The initiator is Sarah Super,

⁴⁶ The WCC campaign against sexual and gendered violence was already launched in the 1980s, then revived in 2013, and received a new push by the global #MeToo movement in 2017. See <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/get-involved/thursdays-in-black> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁴⁷ Website of the Pussyhat Project: Design Interventions for Social Change, <https://www.pussyhatproject.com> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁴⁸ J. BENNETT: ‘The #MeToo movement. Art inspired by the reckoning’, in *The New York Times*, 12 January 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/12/us/reader-art-inspired-by-the-metoo-moment-sexual-harassment.html> [last accessed 6 June 2018].

⁴⁹ BENNETT: ‘The #MeToo movement’.

⁵⁰ S. MOORE: ‘Laia Abril. The photographer bearing witness to rape’, in *The Guardian*, 19 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/feb/19/laia-abril-epidemic-rape-abuse-photographs>.

⁵¹ Website of the Survivors Memorial, <https://www.survivorsmemorial.org> [last accessed 6 June 2020]; D. RAZA: ‘Memorial in Minneapolis will offer a place of healing for sexual assault survivors’, in *Star Tribune*, 26 April 2019, <https://www.startribune.com>.

a thirty-year-old rape survivor and founder of the organization Break the Silence.

The Survivors Memorial, planned in Boom Island Park, features a stone brick circle with benches around it, to make space for truth-telling and dialogue, and three colourful mosaic panels alongside. The mosaic is meant to show that even broken pieces can be put together to create something whole and beautiful. The ripple effect of the brick floor of the circle represents the multiplying power of breaking the silence. The memorial thus will provide a dedicated space to honour the courage and strength of survivors, to stand in solidarity with them, to challenge the silencing of sexual violence, and to raise awareness about its pervasive nature.

6.2. AR project Dear Visitor, Stanford campus

Another interesting memorial project that combines online and offline activism is located on the campus of Stanford University in California. The memorial features augmented reality (AR) and was heavily contested.⁵² In 2015, student Chanel Miller was sexually assaulted on campus and found near a dumpster by fellow students. The area where it happened has been turned into a contemplative garden. A plaque was to be placed at the spot to remember the attack. However, there was serious disagreement between Miller and the university administration over the plaque's text.

Miller's proposed words were "You took away my worth, my privacy, my energy, my time, my safety, my intimacy, my confidence, my own voice, until today".⁵³ These were the words Miller used in her victim impact statement at court addressing her assaulter Brock Turner. For the Stanford provost, these words "expressed sentiments that would not be supportive in a healing space".⁵⁴ Instead, Stanford offered alternative

com/memorial-in-minneapolis-will-offer-a-place-of-healing-for-sexual-assault-survivors/509141912/?fbclid=IwAR0Kk6dMPcWtaUK0tiDGjJmDpFSwxCHNjx3seO5ThK8-dyeeuGvkUFOK7yg [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁵² M. CLARK: 'Stanford students use mobile AR for justice and healing', in *Torch*, 19 September 2019, <https://www.torch.app/blog/stanford-students-use-mobile-ar-for-justice-and-healing>; L. TURNER: 'Chanel Miller. Stanford University scheme projects her words on to assault site', *BBC News*, 30 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49858238> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁵³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49858238>.

⁵⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49858238>.

quotes for a plaque, among them “I’m right here, I’m okay, everything’s okay, I’m right here” – words Miller spoke to her sister after the assault, also taken from her victim statement, but the next sentences explain what she was trying to hide and that she was not at all okay.

After the university administration had decided in the spring of 2019 not to install a plaque at the place, students determined to support Miller designed an augmented reality project called Dear Visitor.⁵⁵ Students feared visitors would not know what the garden signifies. The AR project was launched in September 2019. Visitors with iPads and headphones could see and hear the chosen words of Miller with an augmented reality app. It allowed them to see what it would look like if a plaque had been installed in the garden. The AR project also captured and incorporated perspectives from students into the AR experience, giving the site a form of collective memory around this issue on campus. One of the students who designed it explained that the digital representation was not meant to be a replacement but an addition to a hoped-for physical plaque. Finally, in November 2019, Stanford administration, facing the public pressure, decided to install the plaque with the words chosen by Chanel Miller herself.⁵⁶

The case of the AR project Dear Visitor illustrates how crucial the victim/survivor perspective is for a ritual to become an effective response to the disaster of sexual violence.⁵⁷ If appropriated by the university administration, the memorial space would have completely lost its mediating potential as a place of coping and healing for the victims and of awareness raising about the structural evil of sexual violence.

6.3. Clareinch Post Office, Cape Town

Memorial spaces to honour and remember victims of sexual violence often emerge spontaneously. An example is the memorial place with flowers and ribbons erected at the Clareinch Post Office in Cape Town, South

⁵⁵ A video of the Dear Visitor exhibit can be watched on <https://www.dearvisitor.app> [last accessed 6 June 2020]. Initially, the words on the AR plaque were written under the pseudonym Emily Doe, but later Chanel Miller revealed her identity.

⁵⁶ E. KADVANY: ‘Facing public pressure, Stanford decides to install plaque with Chanel Miller’s words’, in *Palo Alto Weekly*, 12 November 2019, <https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2019/11/12/facing-public-pressure-stanford-decides-to-install-plaque-with-chanel-millers-words> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁵⁷ Cf. Paul Post in the introduction to this handbook, p. 9.

Africa to commemorate the rape and murder of the nineteen-year-old student Uyinene Mrwetyana on 24 August 2019.⁵⁸ She was raped and murdered by a post office employee inside the building during his lunch-break. The horrible event launched the protest movement Am I Next? which organizes marches and silent wakes. The family of the victim established the Mrwetyana Foundation. The foundation now wants to convert the Clareinch Post Office into a wellness centre, a place of safety for those affected by gender-based violence. The place of trauma should be converted into a place of healing.⁵⁹ In the wellness centre memorial we can recognise the recreative function of a ritual. According to Post, such a ritual “offers a contrast to daily life, interrupts it, and offers a moratorium”.⁶⁰ A wellness centre literally offers a moratorium for Cape Town women and girls who are surviving in the midst of systematic sexual violence.

All discussed memorials have a transformative function. They aim at restoring the honour of the victims of the disaster of sexual violence and strengthening survivor agency. They want to raise awareness by making known to society what happened at these places, and they do so in non-disguising language and with the self-chosen words and images of survivors. In the expressive and discharge (channelling) functions of the commemorative practices, crucial priority is given to the victims’ voices and agencies. If the representation is taken over by others and if they are falsely represented (as in the case of the Stanford memorial), the ritual is ineffective for victim/survivors. It then becomes an instrument in the dynamics of silencing them and looking away from their woundedness.

In the (planned) memorial spaces in Minneapolis, Stanford, and Cape Town, we see the social function in literally providing a place for women to gather, to speak out, be listened to, and to be recognized, comforted,

⁵⁸ C. KAHLA: ‘Am I next. Gender-based violence protesters take to the streets’, in *The South African*, 9 April 2019, <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/am-i-next-gender-based-protest-photos/> [last accessed 6 June 2020]; R. LYSTER: ‘The death of Uyinene Mrwetyana and the rise of South Africa’s “Am I Next?” movement’, in *The New Yorker*, 12 September 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-death-of-uyinene-mrwetyana-and-the-rise-of-south-africas-aminext-movement> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁵⁹ <https://ewn.co.za/2019/12/02/mrwetyana-foundation-wants-to-convert-clareinch-post-office-into-wellness-centre> [last accessed 6 June 2020]; <https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/society/2213012/uyinene-foundation-launch-a-symbol-of-where-her-memories-will-live-uyinenes-mother/> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁶⁰ Paul Post in the introduction to this handbook, p. 5; POST [et al.]: *Disaster ritual* 42.

and healed. In an ethical sense, the monuments call for reflection and transformation. The Stanford case makes clear that there can be no healing without justice being done. Justice begins with truth telling and listening to inconvenient testimonies. The contested nature of the Stanford memorial plaque reveals the problem society has with the act of listening first to the unsettling messages of victim/survivors.

I see the prophylactic potential in the simple fact that these monuments will be there, approved by authorities in public spaces. Their presence can increase women's feeling of safety. The monuments may act as a warning sign and offer a "window into an alternative world", as one of the Stanford students phrased it.⁶¹ The memorial spaces are constructed in such a way as to offer a hospitable meeting place that welcomes and inspires women, and male allies as well, to continue working for a safer society for all.

7. #MeToo RELATED RELIGIOUS RITUALS

#MeToo has also generated rituals within a specific religious context. I offer a few examples. The first is from the Episcopal Church in the United States, and the second is from a collective of Jewish women in the United States.

At the Episcopal Church's General Convention in Austin in 2018, there was a special 'listening liturgy' to acknowledge the #MeToo movement and hear personal stories of abuse, harassment, and exploitation. The stories, which were read by bishops, both male and female, during the liturgy, had been chosen from more than forty testimonial letters submitted by church members. Names and identifying information were redacted. According to the official report of the Episcopal News Service, the readings and silence within the liturgy were both dramatic and profoundly uncomfortable for those attending.⁶² Following the listening liturgy, the bishops adopted a covenant that committed them to seek changes. The document, *A Working Covenant for the Practice of Equity and Justice for All in The Episcopal Church*, is only meant as a first step.⁶³

⁶¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49858238>.

⁶² EPISCOPAL NEWS SERVICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS: 'Covenant is next step in response to abuse and exploitation', 10 July 2018, <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/presreleases/covenant-is-next-step-in-response-to-abuse-and-exploitation/> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁶³ EPISCOPAL NEWS SERVICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS: 'Covenant is next step'.

From a ritual perspective, I consider it particularly strong that the bishops themselves voiced the words of the victim/survivors. For a moment, the bishops took their places, identified with their stories, and solidarized with their pain. In doing so, the church leaders ‘authorized’ these narratives as a source of wisdom for the church and made an authentic step towards the adoption of the Working Covenant.

A collective of Jewish women wrote ‘Atonement Prayers in the #MeToo era’ for the Days of Awe in 2018.⁶⁴ The group proposed alternatives versions of two traditional confession prayers – *Al Chet* and *Ashamnu* – that are repeatedly prayed throughout *Selichot* (the penitential prayers) and Yom Kippur. The women aim at integrating complicity in sexual abuse into the repentance rituals of the faith community. In particular, *An Ashamnu for #MeToo* reads as a powerful text.⁶⁵

Throughout many faith communities, #MeToo propelled and energized the already initiated processes of uncovering clergy sexual abuse. The secular #MeToo movement generated its religious pendants under the names #ChurchToo in the Christian world, #MosqueMeToo in Islam, and #GamAni (‘me too’ in Hebrew) in the Jewish communities.⁶⁶

A multitude of liturgical resources have been provided by feminist working groups and church committees to address sexual abuse and violence in worship.⁶⁷ A special mention can be made of renewed theological reflection in the context of #MeToo on the symbol of the Christa,

⁶⁴ A. CITRIN [et al.]: ‘The atonement prayers we should all say, in the #MeToo era’, in *Forward*, 7 September 2018, <https://forward.com/life/faith/409841/the-atonement-prayers-we-should-all-say-in-the-metoo-era/> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁶⁵ Full texts to be found on <https://forward.com/life/faith/409841/the-atonement-prayers-we-should-all-say-in-the-metoo-era/>.

⁶⁶ See the website of FaithTrust Institute – Working together to end sexual and domestic violence, <https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/churchtoo> [last accessed 6 June 2020].

⁶⁷ Some examples: REFORMED CHURCH OF AMERICA: ‘Addressing sexual abuse and violence in worship resources’, <https://www.faithward.org/addressing-sexual-abuse-and-violence-in-worship-resources/>; FAITHTRUST INSTITUTE: ‘Resources. Liturgy’, <https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/liturgy>; IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE: ‘Liturgy of lament and repentance for the sexual abuse of children by priests and religious in St Mary’s Pro-Cathedral, Dublin’, <https://www.catholicbishops.ie/2011/02/20/liturgy-of-lament-and-repentance-for-the-sexual-abuse-of-children-by-priests-and-religious-in-st-marys-pro-cathedral-dublin/>; KATHOLISCHE FRAUENGEMEINSCHAFT DEUTSCHLANDS: ‘Gottesdienst: “Nein zur Gewalt gegen Frauen”’, https://www.kfd-bundesverband.de/fileadmin/Media/Themen/Gewalt/kfd_Gottesdienst_Nein_zur_Gewalt_gegen_Frauen_Gesamt.pdf [all last accessed 6 June 2020].

a famous sculpture by Edwina Sandys from 1974.⁶⁸ These resources for liturgy would require and deserve a special investigation and analysis. In general, we can say that, despite their great number, these texts, rituals, and symbols only seldom find their way into the main body of church-authorized worship resources.

8. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have analysed #MeToo as a ritual response to the slow-moving disaster of sexual violence. We can conclude that it is a very rich ritual response: multi-layered, decentralised, fluid, and crossing both the boundaries of class, race, and nation and of the secular and religious spheres. The online and offline forms of #MeToo activism are inextricably connected. The dynamics between these forms mark the movement's ritual character and increase its ritual power.

Throughout the analysed cases, I found how crucial it is that the victim/survivor perspective is represented in the memorials, the texts, the symbols, and the rites to make them 'work' as intended: to respond effectively to the disaster of sexual violence. In terms of ritual theory, it is the ritual repertoire of 'practices of victimhood' that prevails. I propose to alter the concept of 'practices of victimhood' into 'practices of victim/survivorhood', which is more appropriate for how women who suffered sexual violence see themselves and may want to be represented in ritualized practices and spaces.

The examples from the religious context illustrate that the secular #MeToo movement has generated new ritualistic energy in faith-based communities. It indicates that the #MeToo movement transgresses, questions, and redefines existing boundaries of secular and religious, building communities of 'victim/survivorhood' across borders. It will continue to call institutions, including religious ones, to in-depth conversion, transformation, and renewal to eradicate the evil of sexual violence.

⁶⁸ See the chapter '#MeToo. A Reflection on Edwina Sandys' *Christa*', in N. SLEE: *Fragments for fractured times. What feminist practical theology brings to the table* (London 2020) 231-237.

RITUALIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GLOBAL
FOOD CRISIS

MIRELLA KLOMP & MARCEL BARNARD

1. INTRODUCTION

Food in our times is a hotly debated topic, surrounded by ambiguities. The ways in which humanity has globally come to organize its food production, distribution and consumption have, on the one hand, solved problems and, on the other hand, introduced new problems. The global transportation of (raw) food, for example, has contributed to the reduction of hunger and malnutrition in some parts of the world; however, it has also increased environmental pollution that causes the quality of the air that we breathe to deteriorate. Or, as another example, ever-advancing techniques of genetic modification of crops offer possibilities (e.g., to better protect them against diseases or to increase their nutritional value), but at the same time raise serious concerns (e.g., antibiotic features built into food adversely affect the human body's ability to defend itself against illness). At the time of our writing this chapter, it seems that the outbreak of the coronavirus, which led to the global coronavirus pandemic, started at a food market in Wuhan in China, where live wild animals are sold to customers as food.

In this chapter, we examine what some call “the global food crisis” – the slow disaster caused by the current unsustainable, unaffordable and unhealthy food systems – and explore some ritualized practices relating to this diffuse disaster. As a preliminary remark, we will first present and discuss the construction of this issue as a global disaster. Next, we will offer a selection of three particular ritualized practices that, seen from a particular angle, each show what this global disaster looks like in their particular contexts. As theologians, we choose to interpret these three examples normatively from a theological perspective, which, by way of conclusion, will eventually result in a draft of some provisional new food laws.

2. CONSTRUCTING THE DISASTER

However ambiguously humanity deals with food, current global food systems undeniably have a major negative impact on Planet Earth and the health of human beings.¹ In *Eating well* (“Goed eten”), philosopher Michiel Korthals lays bare what we here identify as the slow disaster of the global food crisis: a deep gap between food production, agriculture and food consumption that leads to estrangement between people.² Global food chains have become longer and longer; food production has come to take place at a great distance from consumers’ plates; and every link in this chain can make its own decisions. The result of this process and of the gap between production and consumption is an estrangement that has cognitive, normative and expressive dimensions.³ Consumers no longer know where their food comes from and, at the same time, they are overwhelmed by confusing, inconsistent and complex information about foodstuffs, which makes them incapable of dealing with and integrating all this into their lives (cognitive estrangement). Producers and consumers seem to have lost their sensitivity for the fact that the production and consumption of (particularly animal-based) food is related to norms and values (normative estrangement). Consumers of food, according to Korthals, no longer really taste what they eat, as eating has often come to be combined with other activities: an inattentiveness to the taste of food has become normal and goes together with a loss of the meaning of taste (expressive estrangement). While Korthals’s is clearly a Western perspective, and although he focuses only on producers and consumers and thus on two categories of human beings at different ends of the food chain, the three dimensions of estrangement that he mentions also point to a broader gap between human beings. By transferring the production of food to other parts of the world, for example, producers not only create a gap between these foodstuffs and their eventual consumers, but sometimes also between themselves as production companies and the

¹ Many individual studies confirm particular aspects of this claim. A report published by an international group of 130 national academies of science and medicine worldwide supports this claim in full: INTERACADEMY PARTNERSHIP: *Opportunities for future research and innovation on food and nutrition security and agriculture. The InterAcademy Partnership’s global perspective* (Teutschenthal 2018).

² M. KORTHALS: *Goed eten. Filosofie van voeding en landbouw* (Nijmegen 2018). Korthals writes about the Netherlands, but this problem exceeds our country, as becomes clear in the report mentioned in the previous footnote.

³ KORTHALS: *Goed eten* 11-15.

local producers (farmers, for example). Thus, more generally, the gap may even be described as a gap between different groups of human beings. We will get back to this later.

The estrangement following from this disastrous gap leads to a variety of significant and often interrelated problems and challenges: hunger, health-related problems and diseases (ranging from malnutrition to diabetes and overweight), problems of food safety and food insecurity, concerns about animal welfare, environmental issues and the sustainability of Planet Earth's ecosystem, negative effects of technology and the industrialization of food production.⁴ Apart from the negative impact of current food systems on our planet and the health of human beings, it is becoming increasingly clear that food practices confirm inequalities with regard to race, gender, class and power.

Such large-scale problems provoke public reactions and ways to give this disaster a place. One of the resources used for coping with the crisis is what Paul Post, in line with Catherine Bell, calls 'ritualizations': "practices with a ritual dimension" that include activism and art projects.⁵ Food and food practices are inextricably linked to "hegemony and difference", as, for example, the anthropologists Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik make clear in their handbook *Food and Culture: A Reader*.⁶ In line with this, they demonstrate that globalization has placed consumers at the very end of the food production and distribution chain where they just pay attention to the price tag. However, they also show that this food system is now being challenged and contested by individual and collective activists.⁷ This food activism is surrounded by

⁴ KORTHALS: *Goed eten* 15. Translation by the authors.

⁵ Cf. Paul Post in the introduction to this handbook, p. 3-4, and cf. P. POST & M. HOONDEERT (eds.): *Absent ritual. Exploring the Ambivalence and Dynamics of Ritual* (= Ritual Studies Monograph Series) (Durham, NC 2019) 9f.

⁶ C. COUNIHAN & P. VAN ESTERIK (eds.): *Food and culture. A Reader* (New York/London 2013³) vi-vii. The second part of the book is titled 'Hegemony and Difference: Race, Class, and Gender'. It contains eight articles on, as the (sub-)titles of some of the articles say, 'The Power of Race, Class, and Food in American Consciousness', 'Mascu- linities in Japanese Food Programming', 'Televised Treatments of Masculinity, Femininity, and Food', 'The Lunch-Box as Ideological Status Apparatus', 'Mexicanas' Food Voice and Differential Consciousness', and 'Feeding Lesbian Families'.

⁷ COUNIHAN & VAN ESTERIK: *Food and culture* viii-x. The second part of the book, 'Food and Globalization', is already cracking though notes on the global food system by addressing themes such as colonialism and 'the exotic other', poverty, and 'standardization of meals'. The third part, 'Challenging, Contesting, and Transforming Food Systems',

complexities, as Counihan and Van Esterik explain: the challenges and disputes about the world food system are no less complex than the system itself. On the one hand, “food commodification (...) is deeply implicated in perpetuating and concealing gender, race, and class inequalities”, which in turn are at the root of problems such as obesity, an uneven distribution of food and the abundant availability of unhealthy food for the poor.⁸

These ritualized public reactions, like many ritualized practices surrounding slowly or gradually developing problems (e.g., climate change), raise the question of whether what we are looking at is really a crisis. As Paul Post writes in the introduction to this handbook, “a disaster (...) is always a construction”, depending on how different groups of people appropriate it.⁹ Counihan’s and Van Esterik’s *Food and Culture*, for example, is rather critical and (perhaps as a result) sometimes one-sided in its narrative. It makes little or no distinction between biotechnology and genetically modified organisms and explores both of these only from an economic perspective.¹⁰ Louise O. Fresco, President of the Executive Board of Wageningen University and Research (a Dutch agricultural university) and former Assistant Secretary-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome, warns against one-sided, unsophisticated opinions that are not based on empirical research. However, already in a publication in 2006, she acknowledges that biotechnology is the subject of fierce debate and that it has been highly politicized: “the history of technological improvements in agriculture is a series of resistance and mistrust: against new plants, mechanization and fertilizers, and now against genetic modification.”¹¹ Referring to anthropologist Mary Douglas, Fresco advocates new food laws that can help keep the debate pure and sharp (see below).

discusses such themes as ‘the mistreating of meatpacking workers’, ‘general problems of corporate food production’, ‘organic food production’ for ‘a gentrified commodity reserved for a privileged niche market’, ‘the commodification of baby food’, ‘the political economy of food aid’, ‘the political economy of obesity’, ‘poverty and inequality’, achieving ‘racial self-reliance through community food movements’ and ‘Learning Democracy Through Food Justice Movements’.

⁸ COUNIHAN & VAN ESTERIK: *Food and culture* 8-10. Quote at 8.

⁹ Cf. Paul Post in the introduction to this handbook, p. 9.

¹⁰ J. CLAPP: ‘The political economy of food aid in an era of agricultural biotechnology’, in COUNIHAN & VAN ESTERIK: *Food and culture* 531-545, p. 538-542.

¹¹ L.O. FRESCO: *Nieuwe spijswetten. Onze voedsel en verantwoordelijkheid* (Amsterdam 2009) 114. Translation by the authors.

The positions of Counihan and Van Esterik on the one hand, and of Fresco on the other, point to the fact that the food crisis is an example of a disaster that is not an eternal, fixed and empirically demonstrable fact, but rather a construct. The question of whether the food crisis is indeed a disaster arises in a battlefield defined by strong political divisions, in which slogans and framing are often more persuasive than sober facts based on empirical research. The call to return to small-scale organically and locally produced food, for example, ignores the fact that such methods of food production will in the end not be able to feed enough mouths in this world; as a somewhat romantic or mythic ideal, this could be considered an elitist standpoint. This makes clear that, first and foremost, the question will always have to be asked who speaks or defines for what purpose and in what context. The Chief Executive Officer of a large biotechnology company has a different interest and moves into a different language field than the alternative activist who only eats vegan food from their own vegetable garden. The official who wants to help solve a famine in the short term speaks a different language than the non-governmental organization that stands up for a transition to structural sustainability. A second factor in determining whether the food crisis is a crisis is that the perception of food in the broad sense has a high degree of non-simultaneousness. Awareness of food, its origin, production, transport, sales and effects on nutritiousness, health, the Earth and the climate exist only in a limited part of the population. Furthermore, the crisis is not always immediately visible, at least not in higher-income countries, where the abundance of food is often taken for granted in such a way that it is not a topic of reflection on a daily basis. In short, we may consider the gap and the consequent estrangement between food producers and consumers as a disaster, whereas others may not, depending on the perspective one takes. What exactly this disaster looks like also depends on local contexts: as authors of this chapter, we are aware that the problems we encounter, in our own Western social context, differ from problems in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, in the global handling of food, wholeness is hard to find.¹² The ambiguity characterizing the understanding and appropriation of such a disaster

¹² Many of the the United Nations' sustainable development goals, for example, are related to food, particularly the top three: no poverty (means that people can afford better food), zero hunger, good health and well-being. Cf. <https://sdg-tracker.org> [last accessed 19 June 2020].

leads to interesting ritualized practices that express clashing symbolic meanings and conflicting values.

3. THREE EXAMPLES RELATED TO THE FOOD CRISIS

We will present an exemplary selection of cases to explore ritualized practices (understood in the widest sense, i.e., practices that include some form of symbolization) and how they appropriate food-related problems. These ritualized practices comment on current global food systems, express concern over particular ways of food production and consumption or protest against them. Some of these implicitly or explicitly call for reform of the food systems, while others in turn comment on or protest against such reforms. As we will demonstrate, the symbolic meaning-making of these ritualized practices is complex, layered and surrounded by ambiguities: in each case a particular set of problems comes together. These are often food-related, but also related to other crises (e.g., poverty, war, forced displacement).

3.1. Meat consumption: the ritual of barbecuing

Cooking on a fire in the open air on a summer's evening is a practice of food preparation and consumption that occurs worldwide. That this is a very inefficient way of cooking food, and that people seldom barbecue alone, both point to the fact that barbecuing is more than just getting dinner ready. To barbecue is to feast (allocating time to celebrate the gifts of nature and the Earth: creating heat with coals, seeing the flames grow, smelling the scent of smoke mixed with the scent of the food on the grill) and to celebrate the gift of life (chatting and drinking with family, friends or colleagues while enjoying the first sausage or sirloin steak as it comes off the grill). Barbecuing is a highly ritualized practice: it follows a distinct pattern and is charged with several layers of symbolic meaning.

However pleasurable, this ritualized practice of consumption in contemporary Dutch and Western and partly also global society (think of the South African *braai* and Asian grill tables) is surrounded by ambiguities and by conflicting food values that are related to the consumption of meat. First of all, because the rate of global meat consumption has increased rapidly since the 1970s, today we are faced with a large-scale meat industry that is highly pollutive, as it leads to problematic amounts

of greenhouse gas emission worldwide. Scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds have claimed that our planet suffers because of the meat-based diet of so many people.¹³ Secondly, a meat-based diet is not necessarily healthy (because excessive intake of animal proteins harms the body; from a health and nutritional viewpoint, a plant-based diet with occasional consumption of meat is preferable, as research has shown¹⁴), and the more meat that is eaten, the unhealthier it is (even more so when it is red meat, processed meat or improperly prepared meat that has been undercooked or, as sometimes occurs on the barbecue, burnt), as nutritional scholars have demonstrated.¹⁵ Thirdly, the development of the bioindustry has made meat affordable for many more people today compared to the past. But the production of cheap meat has evoked persistent criticism by animal welfare organizations and has raised ethical questions on how human beings (wish to) relate to other living creatures. Here, the normative dimension of estrangement as described by Korthals seems to be at play.

Governments, scholars and health organizations in parts of the Western world have for some time been promoting a diet consisting of fewer meat and dairy products, in order to strive for a reduction of greenhouse gas emission and of deforestation caused by crop cultivation for the meat

¹³ THE LANCET COMMISSIONS: *Food in the Anthropocene. The EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems*, in *The Lancet* 393/10170 (2019) 447–492; F.W.H. KAMPERS & L. O. FRESCO: *Food transitions 2030* (Wageningen 2017); J. POORE & T. NEMECEK: ‘Reducing food’s environmental impacts through producers and consumers’, in *Science* 360/6392 (2018) 987–992; Z. PETROVIC, V. DJORDJEVIC, I. NASTASIJEVIC & N. PARUNOVIC: ‘Meat production and consumption. Environmental consequences’, in *Procedia Food Science* 5 (2015) 235–238; I. DJEKIC: ‘Environmental impact of meat industry – Current status and future perspectives’, in *Procedia Food Science* 5 (2015) 61–64.

¹⁴ Cf., for example, E. MEDEWAR, S. HUHNS, A. VILLRINGER [et al.]: ‘The effects of plant-based diets on the body and the brain: a systematic review’, in *Translational Psychiatry* 9 (2019) 226. Also cf. A. PAN, Q. SUN, A.M. BERNSTEIN [et al.]: ‘Red meat consumption and mortality. Results from 2 prospective cohort studies’, in *Arch Intern Med* 172/7 (2012) 555–563. In the directive of the World Health Organisation, fruit, vegetables and legumes are mentioned first as elements of a healthy diet. Cf. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/healthy-diet> [last accessed 18 June 2020].

¹⁵ Cf. V.W. ZHONG, L. VAN HORN, P. GREENLAND [et al.]: ‘Associations of processed meat, unprocessed red meat, poultry, or fish intake with incident cardiovascular disease and all-cause mortality’, in *JAMA Intern Med* 180/4 (2020) 503–512. Also cf. R. KOETH, Z. WANG, B. LEVISON [et al.]: ‘Intestinal microbiota metabolism of L-carnitine, a nutrient in red meat, promotes atherosclerosis’, in *Nature Medicine* 19 (2013) 576–585.

industry; however, the results are poor.¹⁶ Part of the problem is that consumers (still) hold meat in high esteem: it is taken to be a product, rather than an animal. The barbecue seems to be the ultimate symbol of this appreciation, and thus the ritual has an expressive function: it affords the possibility of expressing feelings, convictions and even (intended) identity. In barbecuing, people perform their individual and/or group identity as ‘meat-eaters’ or, by contrast, as ‘vegetarians’, as ‘sustainable’ or ‘healthy’ people.¹⁷ This points to the social function of the ritual of barbecuing. Meat is a symbol of wealth and of freedom: in countries with economies that have advanced towards industrialization, populations tend to take on Westernized diets, resulting in people eating much more meat in these countries. In the Netherlands, it was reported in 2019 that 30% of those who barbecue considered the barbecue as a status symbol.¹⁸ The barbecue ritual in contemporary Western societies has come to be associated with eating a lot of meat (during a long warm evening, there is a constant supply of food), associated with abundance (not just for the wealthy; supermarkets sell cheap meat, which enables the less well-off to buy and grill it). It symbolizes wealth and pleasure, freedom and feast, and thus has a recreative function as well: it interrupts the ordinary and forms a contrast with everyday life (e.g., when those who normally eat a

¹⁶ In 2019, even though the number of people self-identifying as ‘flexitarians’ had tripled, the Dutch ate at least as much meat, if not more, as they did in 2011. The notion seems to suffer from inflation. It has been suggested that the increase of meat consumption in 2019 was related to the heat wave, which possibly made them eat outside and turn to the barbecue even more than they used to do. In spite of all efforts to reduce people’s meat consumption, the Western food culture is still carnivore. Cf. H. DAGEVOS & M.J. REINDERS: ‘Flexitarianism and social marketing. Reflections on eating meat in moderation’, in D. BOGUEVA, D. MARINOVA & T. RAPHAELY (eds.): *Handbook of research on social marketing and its influence on animal origin food product consumption* (Hershey, PA 2018) 105-120.

¹⁷ This expressive function (cf. Paul Post in the introduction to this handbook, p. 5) is also related to gender. Extant research shows that barbecuing is a highly gendered food practice: through barbecuing people are able to perform their gender identity. <http://www.fao.org/3/t0562e/T0562E05.htm> [last accessed 11 November 2020]; <http://foodwaysinfocus.leadr.msu.edu/spring-2018/grilling-in-america-a-gender-based-study/> [last accessed 11 November 2020]. Also cf. A. WARNES: *Savage barbecue. Race, culture, and the invention of America’s first food* (Athens, GA 2008) vi.

¹⁸ Results of the annual barbecue-research among 1042 respondents in the Netherlands, published by the independent comparison website Kieskeurig: “Een derde grillers ziet barbecue als statussymbool”. <https://www.kieskeurig.nl/bbq-graadmeter-2019> [last accessed 11 November 2020].

vegetarian diet choose to eat meat when barbecuing¹⁹).²⁰ Nevertheless, over the last couple of years, it has also come to be associated with cheap meat, unhealthy eating, animal suffering and unsustainability.²¹ These ambiguities, relating to its expressive, social and recreative functions, are all tied together in the ritual of barbecuing.

Thus, the practice of barbecuing is an example of rediscovering, re-valuing and ritualizing eating together by means of (lots of) meat. It therefore also raises complex questions and is met with criticism, which in turn sometimes also makes it a ritual to express indifference or self-righteousness ('no-one is taking this away from me', or 'I'll be the judge of that'). The symbolic meaning and values that are expressed in this ritualized practice are manifold and contradictory.

3.2. The documentary *Dead Donkeys Fear No Hyenas*

How is it possible that a country with millions of hectares of agricultural land is dependent on food aid to feed its inhabitants? This question is raised in the documentary *Dead Donkeys Fear No Hyenas*, which drew a lot of attention at the 2017 edition of the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA).²² At the beginning of his film, Danish

¹⁹ A similar dynamic can be observed with regards to eating out. According to consumption-sociologist Hans Dagevos in a news article, so-called 'flexitarians' who do not (or hardly) eat meat at home sometimes order meat when eating out: just like barbecuing, eating in a restaurant is a ritualized practice that expresses wealth and pleasure, freedom and feast. The catering industry has remained a promotor of meat consumption. Cf. <https://nos.nl/artikel/2353275-opnieuw-meer-vlees-gegeten-in-nederland.html> [last accessed 11 November 2020]. It would be worthwhile to investigate whether or not the ritual and celebrative character of barbecuing is ultimately in the way of serious change when it comes to meat consumption: if it is set apart as the 'extra-ordinary', could it be the case that the barbecue ritual for some is a sacred practice (a 'carnival'), sacred perhaps to the extent that it seems unchangeable?

²⁰ To some people, barbecuing also seems to be a symbol of freedom over against being 'subordinate' to scholars, to a government, to health organisations that all criticize heavy consumption of meat. Cf. "En van de VK mag je ook geen vlees op de bbq, maar wel gemarineerde groentespiesjes met rozenblaadjes en korianderzaad. Gadverdamme." <https://www.geenstijl.nl/5148432/u-mag-niet-meer-barbecuen-van-de-volkskrant/> [last accessed 11 November 2020].

²¹ <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/de-barbecue-draait-ook-in-tijden-van-duurzaam-eten-nog-altijd-om-vlees-veel-vlees-b9ecfc9f/> [last accessed 11 November 2020].

²² <https://www.idfa.nl/en/film/90bac804-0abf-4754-9c3c-0ded88c2214e/dead-donkeys-fear-no-hyenas> [last accessed 11 November 2020].

filmmaker Joakim Demmer presents the complexity of current global food problems in one tragic image: at Addis Ababa airport, emergency food supplies are being unloaded from one aircraft, while another is being loaded for export with harvest produced on Ethiopian farmlands. As the story unfolds, it appears that the Ethiopian government, hoping to increase prosperity by gaining revenue from the export of food, sells and leases millions of hectares of (allegedly unused) farmland to foreign investors.²³ This comes at a cost: Human Rights Watch reported that local populations (particularly the Anuaks, a tribal minority who live in the fertile Gambela region of Ethiopia and Nuer), have been forcibly displaced from their lands without any proper form of compensation.²⁴ The villagization program is undermining the livelihoods and food security of indigenous people but, according to one of the Anuak farmers in the film, also taking away their future:

Starting from our grandfathers, they all lived on that land. They were born there, and they were buried there. Our dead are important for us, and they are buried on that land. Without land, we have nowhere to live. Without land, it is meaningless to live on this earth. In my culture land is everything. Without it, there is no future. As our land is taken away, our future is empty. We do not have hope. How can we live without land? Can we farm in the air? No, you can't farm in space, you can only farm on land. We need our land for our children, so they can have a future. We need our land back!²⁵

The displacement of locals and the practice of selling/leasing land for large-scale farming projects has caused serious conflicts and even the

²³ As a result of the food crisis of Saudi Arabia in 2007–2008, as Saudi Arabia's ministry of agriculture has termed it, King Abdullah developed a plan for National Food Security in order to be able to feed his own people. The food for Saudi people comes from oversees, in part from the farmlands of Ethiopia. See <https://www.farmlandgrab.org/uploads/attachment/8-AbdullaAlobaid.pdf> [last accessed 12 June 2020]. "In 2008 Ethiopia's ruling party, led by then-Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, signed a 60-year concession on 10,000 ha with the companies' head, Saudi billionaire Sheik Al-Amoud. The total area Saudi Star has under lease in Gambela is 140,000 ha, but the company aims to increase this to 500,000 ha." ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ATLAS: 'Saudi star agriculture and irrigation project in Gambela, Ethiopia', 24 June 2014, <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/saudi-star-agriculture-and-irrigation-project-in-gambela-ethiopia> [last accessed 11 November 2020].

²⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/01/16/ethiopia-forced-relocations-bring-hunger-hardship> [last accessed 11 November 2020].

²⁵ Dead donkeys fear no hyenas, at 52'25".

outbreak of violence.²⁶ The film makes painfully clear that the Anuak community is being violated: their relationship with the cosmos is being disturbed. Their ability to grow their own food is being obstructed, and the land of past and future generations is being taken away from them.

In his documentary, Demmer points to national practices of food production, distribution and consumption that constitute or contribute to the food disaster on the local level. On top of that, he also lays bare how the bigger system that supports or enables these practices plays a role in the food disaster on a global scale. An example of the latter is that in the film Demmer sheds light on the role of the World Bank, holding them accountable for their support, to the tune of billions of dollars, of the Ethiopian government's "development program" for locals, referred to as the "Protection of Basic Services". The film reveals that local inhabitants have been actively made dependent on food aid by their own government and gives voice to testimonies of violence, rapes, manipulation of local people and land grabbing.²⁷

Thus, this documentary – only one of many more films produced by WG Films that addresses social injustice in relation to food (and global politics)²⁸ – is an example of the genre of socially engaged or activist documentaries bearing an ethical function. It aims to reduce the cognitive dimension of the estrangement between production and consumption by generating knowledge of this particular production practice. Yet the documentary is a ritualized practice: it is not only

²⁶ In 2012, for example, the compound of *Saudi Star Agricultural Development Plc.*, an investor in agricultural land that has leased large amounts of land for rice farming in this region, was attacked. The Ethiopian military responded to this attack with arbitrary arrests, rape and other forms of abuse against the population. Cf. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/28/ethiopia-army-commits-torture-rape> [last accessed 11 November 2020].

²⁷ <http://www.ipsnews.net/2017/04/world-bank-ignores-land-grabbing/> [last accessed 11 November 2020].

²⁸ Another product of WG Films is the 2009 production *BANANAS!**, a film on workers, families and communities who are suffering from poverty as well as from the disaster of the chemicals used for the production of bananas, left on their soil and floating in their water. Cf. <https://www.wgfilm.com/bananas> [last accessed 12 June 2020]. Also cf. this ambiguous practice, made visible in a Dutch TV documentary: the Dutch government invests money in anti-migration campaigns in Senegal to discourage young fishermen to migrate to Europe, while at the same time European and Asian trawlers contribute to the depletion of fish stocks the Senegalese sea of which 14 million people are economically dependent. TV documentary *Dominee of Koopman?*, BNNVARA, broadcast on Dutch national television 7 May 2020. Also cf. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46017359> [last accessed 11 November 2020].

informative, but also a statement concerning the way we deal with food and food production; perhaps it is even an indictment. The documentary works as an interruption: it draws attention to this daily global practice of food production, brings this practice to a standstill and warns the viewer by directing, cutting and pasting images, sounds and video footage. In doing so, it constructs this food practice and stages it in a particular frame, as does the performance of any ritual. “Ritualization is the strategic manipulation of ‘context’ in the very act of reproducing it”, according to Catherine Bell.²⁹ The practice of injustice that is constructed and staged in this film can thus be considered a ritualization of protest against aspects of the food crisis that cause and support this injustice.

This ritualization of protest lays bare a normative estrangement caused by a lack of ethical reflection, but it also has dimensions of “the prophylactic, apotropaic function of rituals”³⁰: the banning of evil starts with addressing it, making evil practices visible, naming those who are involved in practices of injustice and bringing the story to a larger audience. In the case of the documentary, this protest relates not only to food or the absence of it for indigenous people in the Gambela region; it also relates to how several parties deal with the land of these tribes, their culture, their history and their future – in other words, their existence. In a similar way, a rediscovery of fasting via religious (e.g., Islamic or Christian) practices can be observed, which in its appropriation also acquires symbolic qualities relating to protest: ascetic abstinence from food consumption as a symbol of protest against abuses in food production. This is a way of physically (and thus also existentially, as hunger is the result) making a symbolic statement on how the gap between food production and consumption plays out in our world. Such ritualized practices do not, of course, (immediately) realize healing, but naming or facing the evil is a start that could eventually lead to healing and wholeness: it is a *conditio sine qua non* for positive change, for restored access to lands and food, for awareness of and perhaps change in one’s own food consumption and how the estrangement that Korthals mentions could be reduced.

²⁹ C. BELL: *Ritual theory, ritual practice* (New York 2009²) 100.

³⁰ Cf. Post in the introduction to this handbook, p. 16-17.

3.3. Angry farmers' protests

Governments and scholars have increasingly come to accept that, in order to achieve a transformation towards a healthy and sustainable food system, the agri-food sector needs to undergo fundamental changes. However, across Europe, much debate exists on the desired future of agriculture and the production of food. Different and diverging ideas on the direction this change should take sometimes even lead to outright conflicts. In 2018, 2019 and 2020, farmers in several European countries (e.g., Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain) took to the streets with their tractors to protest against the agricultural policies of the EU and their own governments. We will focus on the case of Dutch farmers here.

In the Netherlands, farmers' protests in the past couple of years have taken place online (e.g., on social media, where various hashtags have been trending topics: *#boeren* (farmers), *#boerenprotest* (farmers' protest) and *#trotsopdeboer* (proud of the farmers)), but have also taken various physical forms. Banners with various messages were put up in meadows alongside highways, and a number of go-slow protests took place: growing lines of tractors drove through the streets of villages and cities and headed via motorways to the city of The Hague, where the Dutch government resides. The ritual form of their protest resembled a procession heading to the 'sanctuary of power'. During one of the tractor protests in the north, some farmers even used their tractors to exercise violence, causing material damage to local council offices in order to push their demands for a different way of dealing with nitrogen regulations.

The tractor protests, which caused heavy traffic jams during morning traffic throughout the country, had the effect of obstructing the normal life of many Dutch workers. Farmers intended to symbolize the feeling of the obstruction to their businesses that they are experiencing. The protests showed that farmers feel undervalued: the gap that has grown between the (food products of) farmers and the (food on the plates of) consumers, in their opinion, leads to a decreased appreciation of farmers. In their own ways they point to the estrangement between producers and consumers, both to its cognitive dimension, which they frame in a particular way ("no farmers no food") and to its normative dimension ("farmers are not just producers, but human beings who deserve appreciation"). Thus, their protests are not only concerned with their business



Figure 25.1: Dutch farmers in an ever-growing line of tractors through the streets of Amsterdam on 1 October 2019 (photograph: Mirella Klomp).

affairs – their ritualized practices symbolize their very being as their daily work stands for a way of life; the protests are concerned with their entire existence. Several slogans express the fact that farmers seem to be experiencing an existential crisis: to them, the food crisis is the disaster of increasing regulations and demands for changes that complexify their work and their life. This also relates to their experience of a disturbed completeness of the social order: farmers seem to have the feeling that they are being picked on.

Part of these ritualized practices of protest are very emotional (“We’ve had enough!”). They are fueled not only by legal and economic considerations, but also by cultural understandings of farming practices, such as a (constructed) dichotomy between city and countryside, in which the latter is sometimes cast as ‘the guardian of an authentic, Dutch lifestyle’. Here, a connection is made between the farmers and the Dutch soil. This connection is also reflected in the slogan on the placards in a meadow: “Have you eaten today? Say thanks to a farmer!”.³¹ This call

³¹ The slogan perhaps also alludes to an imminent shortage of agricultural products that would be the alleged result of agricultural regulations. As a matter of fact, Dutch farmers export most of their products (live animals and meat, dairy and eggs, vegetables

for thankfulness points to the fact that their work is more than just producing foodstuffs for which consumers pay. It is also a vital process that includes care, cultivation of the soil, working with the elements of wind, sun and rain and living creatures. The slogan points to the fact that all this exceeds mere manipulability – it points to foodstuffs also being seen as a gift.

The explicit connection made between practices of farming (with images of cows, dairy and green meadows) and the Netherlands shows the protests are being politicized. This has become most clear in the actions of *Farmers Defense Force*³² – a community of and for farmers, established in 2019, that has been compromised because of a threat of violence against politicians. In texts on their website they employ combative language, railing against the ‘left-wing’ government and using terms like ‘power’, ‘might’, ‘force’, ‘defense’, ‘war’, and ‘pride’. They even use Christian religious heritage to support their case: in their weblog on Good Friday, a link was made between the betrayal of Jesus by Judas and the agricultural sector that (although “wronged by the government”) runs the risk of “being betrayed by contemporary Judases in our own ranks”.³³ Clearly, some manners of framing the contemporary practices of food production in public discourse are used to immobilize the debate on steering food production through farming in a more sustainable direction. Such ritualized practices thus do not have a ‘discharge function’ in the sense that they channel feelings, calm emotions and contribute to coping; rather, they have a ‘charging function’ as they stir up emotions, fuel the protests and contribute to their escalation. Interestingly, the huge and costly tractors used in this protest are employed to impress and obstruct, while at the same time they symbolize the over-mechanization of our system of food production.

and fruit) to other EU-countries (mainly Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom and France). In 2019, about 77% of Dutch agricultural products was for the exports, and this percentage has remained fairly stable in recent years. Cf. H.A.B. VAN DER MEULEN & P. BERKHOUT: *Food economic report 2019 of the Netherlands. Summary* (Wageningen 2020) 10. <https://edepot.wur.nl/512109> [last accessed 15 June 2020].

³² Farmers Defense Force (strikingly the original name is indeed in English) aims to “advance and promote all (communal) interests of all owners, private individual, legal person and other persons and authoritative sources in the agricultural sector, including the promotion of the agricultural sector”. <https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/farmers-defence-force-visie-en-doelstelling/> [last accessed 15 June 2020].

³³ <https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/pasen-2020-de-zwakste-schakel/> [last accessed 11 November 2020]. Left-wing in this case means progressive rather than conservative.

The ritualized practices of the farmers' protests make clear again that what is described as a 'disaster' is diverse, multi-layered and surrounded by ambiguities. Some construct the food crisis as an agricultural crisis that is part of a non-sustainable food system. Others construct the disaster as the perceived obstruction of their farming practices by a web of regulations issued by local and European governments. The ritualized protest by the farmers can be seen as an expression of protest in reaction to a countermovement of protest that intends to enhance the transition towards a more sustainable food system. But just like the two other cases that we have presented, this case is also connected to broader issues: the protest is also linked to autonomy, having difficulties with regulations and having concerns regarding income that are ritually expressed in these farmers' protests. And, as if this were not enough, there are issues such as animal welfare, the nitrogen crisis and nature policy intersecting it.

Together, these three cases show that the food crisis – irrespective of how and by whom this disaster is being constructed – is characterized by an interplay of many clashing values that find their way in the expression of ritualized practices of food. Besides the disastrous gap between food producers and consumers and the estrangement that comes with it, it is perhaps a disastrous fact that we seem to be unable to agree about those clashing values.

4. EVALUATING RITUALIZED PRACTICES RELATING TO THE FOOD-CRISIS: A THEOLOGICAL APPRECIATION OF FOOD

The food crisis and the different ritualized practices that refer to it can be interpreted from many perspectives. As theologians, we pick up an evaluative framework from two scholars who both discuss 'classical' food practices mentioned in the Old and New Testament respectively: Mary Douglas's study of Jewish food laws in Deuteronomy and Leviticus and Louis-Marie Chauvet's analysis of a Eucharistic meal in the Gospel of John (chapter 6).³⁴ Their work offers a valuable lens on ritualizations relating to the food crisis, a lens that is characterized by holiness and a desire for completeness, for the wholeness of creation. This too informs how we construct the disaster: our evaluative perspective is in stark

³⁴ M. DOUGLAS: *Purity and danger. An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo* (London/New York 2002); L.-M. CHAUVET: *Symbol and sacrament. A sacramental reinterpretation of Christian existence* (Collegeville, MN 1995).

contrast to the gap between food producers and food consumers, as identified by Michiel Korthals.

4.1. Jewish food laws: holiness

Rejecting medical approaches, arbitrariness and “hygiene, aesthetics, morals and instinctive revulsion” and favoring symbolism, Douglas proposes that prosperity is reached by people “conforming to holiness”.³⁵ On the other hand, ruination comes “when they deviate from it”.³⁶ And holiness is exemplified by wholeness and completeness in a social context. For example:

The farmer’s duty was to preserve the blessing. For one thing, he had to preserve the order of creation. So no hybrids, (...) either in the fields or in the herds or in the clothes made from wool and flax. To some extent men covenanted with their land and cattle in the same way as God covenanted with them. Men respected the first born of their cattle, obliged them to keep the Sabbath. Cattle were literally domesticated as slaves. They had to be brought into the social order in order to enjoy the blessing.³⁷

Thus, Douglas goes on to argue,

dietary laws would have been like signs which at every turn inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God. By rules of avoidance holiness was given a physical expression in every encounter with the animal kingdom and at every meal. Observance of the dietary rules would thus have been a meaningful part of the great liturgical act of recognition and worship which culminated in the sacrifice in the Temple.³⁸

The order of creation and social order have to be maintained by rules of avoidance as well as dietary rules and are seen as confirmation of God’s holiness.

Interestingly, Louise Fresco took up the theme of dietary laws with reference to Mary Douglas, when writing that

We therefore need a new, coherent system of rules of conduct for individuals, governments, business and civil society to put food at the centre of a sustainable, just society. To this end, the principles of the old dietary

³⁵ DOUGLAS: *Purity and danger* 62.

³⁶ DOUGLAS: *Purity and danger* 63.

³⁷ DOUGLAS: *Purity and danger* 68.

³⁸ DOUGLAS: *Purity and danger* 71.

laws can be restored. I propose to develop scientifically sound food/dietary laws, based on a form of taboo and sanctions that warn us of the danger of intemperance in production and consumption. In doing so, we restore the essential of food as a cultural asset, the 'holiness' of food, if you like. These new dietary laws have no legal dimensions, but have the meaning of a non-religious commitment. In the relations between states, in the relationship between government and society and in individual behavior, the new dietary laws stimulate respect for food, and for the way in which it is produced and consumed.³⁹

4.2. A Eucharistic meal: the intrinsic connection between the material and the symbolic

In the Christian traditions, the food ritual par excellence is the Eucharist. Indeed, from the earliest times of Christianity, and as frequently reported on in the Bible, the Eucharist also has a 'horizontal' cultural-anthropological and social dimension, and we can safely assume that it is asserted vigorously in sacramental theology in the contemporary world with its unequal distribution of resources and means.

In his reading of the Eucharistic narrative of John 6, the French theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet considers the meal practice that is described as a symbolic event (of bringing, taking, thanking and sharing). In this event, anthropological and theological layers of the meaning of 'bread' exist together; they cannot be separated.⁴⁰ Jesus is followed by a large crowd. He goes up on a mountainside and sits down with his disciples. When he looks up, the crowd is coming toward him, and Jesus asks, "Where are we to buy bread to feed these people?" The first question in the gospel narrative (John 6:5) evokes the first layer of meaning; it points to the nutritional value of bread: people need to eat. The beginning of the story is as simple as that. By mentioning bread, John also introduces a symbol – and here the second layer of meaning appears: he evokes images of the man or the woman on the Earth and under the sun who sows, harvests, grinds, bakes, sells and buys, as well as of the dark earth in which the seed germinates and grows and receives solar heat and mild rains from heaven. In this symbolic sense, bread firmly grounds

³⁹ FRESCO: *Nieuwe spijswetten* 75-122. Here at 109f. Note that 'holiness', although in quotation marks, is associated here with science. This is not necessarily the same as what Douglas means by a symbolic approach, while rejecting other approaches.

⁴⁰ CHAUVET: *Symbol and sacrament* 392-408.

humans in the earth and positions them in the cosmos. Then, the story continues, Jesus “took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to the people” (John 6:11). This taps into the third layer of meaning: within the Christian discursive context, bread is only bread when it is broken and shared and thus establishes community. The next, fourth and highest layer of meaning is emphatically Christian, but it is based on broad anthropological and general religious connotations: here, the broken bread is identified with Christ giving himself to the world (John 6:35.48.51.54). The idea of food as a supernatural gift, that is sometimes even identified with the deity, is not exclusively Christian, but has parallels in other religions (e.g., historically, in the veneration of gods such as Baal/Osiris and Ceres). It is worth noting that the fourth meaning does not cancel out the first three. The gift of Christ, who claims to be the bread of life, must be understood concretely and physically and not be spiritualized; it is the sacramental ‘scandal’ of God’s self-emptying in the Christ who gives himself in concrete bread and wine.⁴¹ Even in its highest sense, the sacrament is scandalously human.

This Eucharistic narrative emphasizes that, more generally, in practices of food, religious and anthropological meanings, as well as the material and the symbolic/spiritual, are intrinsically connected: what is at stake is always more than just the food. It is nutritional values, human labor, agriculture and climate, shared economy, social relationships and (supernatural) gift. The choices that people make in the production and consumption of food will always imply negotiations between different values – life comes at a cost – but to care for the whole of creation, over against maintaining the gap and the subsequent estrangement, means to care for the intrinsic connection between the material and the symbolic aspects of food.

5. TOWARDS SOME PROVISIONAL NEW FOOD LAWS

Building on the insights of Douglas and Chauvet, we advocate that a theological appreciation of food can contribute to mending the gap and the estrangement that we have identified as the food crisis. In addition, on the basis of the Eucharistic narrative in John 6 and Mary Douglas’s consideration that prosperity and ruin are associated with a (non)conformation to holiness, we see a regular meal at the dining room table at home as possibly referring to the sacred and, from a Christian perspective,

⁴¹ CHAUVET: *Symbol and sacrament* 538.

as conceivably exemplifying the Eucharistic meal.⁴² Its starting point is that food is simultaneously considered as a consumable substance with nutritional value, as a creaturely and cosmic quantity, as a social and economic factor and as a (sacred) gift.

It is precisely the combination of all these elements that makes food and food practices ambiguous: the liaison between food and social relationships, for example, cannot be reduced to one fixed relationship, as we have shown in this chapter. The cases of ritualization that we have elaborated have one thing in common: to a greater or lesser degree, they comment on or protest against the ways in which ‘we’ and/or ‘others’ deal with food. This is expressed in symbolic practices that refer to a reality beyond the foodstuffs to which they relate. This intersectional view on the food crisis makes it a tough and demanding challenge to issue new universal food laws that contribute to reducing food-related problems. The ambiguities cannot be resolved.

That said, in line with *Fresco*, we see an opportunity for broad alliances for a responsible attitude towards food that is grounded in its cultural and sacred or even sacramental meanings.⁴³ This responsible attitude aims at handling food the way a sustainable and just society does: it pursues wholeness and completeness of the (global) social order and combats the intemperance that ruins it, that disrupts the relations between living creatures, between people and Planet Earth. By aiming to mend the gap between production and consumption in food chains, and by promoting an attitude of care that is geared towards the wholeness and completeness of creation, it enhances the resilience of humankind and the Earth’s ecosystem. In order for individuals, governments, business and civil society to develop such a responsible attitude, we suggest a coherent new system of rules of conduct based on seven commitments:⁴⁴

1. The commitment to respect life. This requires care and carefulness in handling foodstuffs: these are more than ‘products’. It respects the

⁴² Elsewhere we have developed the notion of ‘casual sacramentality’ to refer to the possibility of qualifying the holiness of regular meals as sacramental. M. BARNARD & M. KLOMP: ‘The notion of “casual sacramentality”’, paper presented at the Congress of Societas Liturgica, Louvain, August 2017.

⁴³ In doing so, we fully recognize that the sacramental meaning is not widely shared. But, as we have seen, the Christian perspective on the Eucharist includes broad anthropological and general religious connotations that make alliances possible.

⁴⁴ Although *Fresco* asks for rules of conduct, in our opinion, the complexities and ambiguities of the food crisis make it impossible to formulate general rules that apply to

- dignity and is geared to the wellbeing of all creatures and parties in (and at the end of) the food chain. It combines the values of quality and quantity, and keep tabs on balance.
2. The commitment to give. This commitment inverts the inclination to take and to gain. It is aimed at contributing to wholeness. It accepts what comes from others as something precious. It implies taking a responsibility that goes beyond self-interest or expediency.
 3. The commitment to solidarity. This pursues choices, decisions, regulations and prices that are fair and just. It acknowledges wealth and takes responsibility for vulnerable or weak parties. It encourages people to act and think inclusively: what is good for you, but bad for others, cannot really be good.
 4. The commitment to be an example. Focusing on one's own contribution instead of getting lost in debates or shaming or blaming others (be they individuals/other businesses/other governments). Exploring the possibilities of improving your own attitude and choices to the benefit of the whole.
 5. The commitment to share. This concerns the sharing of burdens and of limitations, spreading responsibilities and consequences between various parties, rather than singling out one.
 6. The commitment to educate oneself and others. Investing interest in getting a broader picture of the food crisis, learning about food systems and choices made in food chains and healthy and unhealthy diets, reading about problems of food waste, talking with farmers, listening to those who are affected negatively, raising awareness of the impact of particular choices, and discovering conflicting values.
 7. The commitment to act. Knowing better means doing better. Combining the commitment to what is just and good with the practice of what is just and good.

These types of commitment respect the ambiguities surrounding food, food practices, and ritualizations relating to the global food problems. They invite us to look these ambiguities in the eye and make them explicit, in order to be able to make better choices about our communal handling of food, and improving our food practices. Whether or not it is right to speak of the slow disaster of food, observing these commitments

everyone. Nevertheless, holding on to various commitments enables every individual and every governing body and every business to take on an attitude of responsibility and, on the basis thereof, make specific choices.

will, to a greater or lesser degree, serve the wholeness of humankind and the Earth. It will improve our appreciation of food and of those involved in the process between farm and fork, as well as our ability to receive our foodstuffs and each other as a gift.

Thus, in this chapter, looking further into the gap between food producers and food consumers and the consequences of the cognitive, normative and expressive dimensions of the subsequent estrangement that we have chosen to call 'the food crisis', we as researchers have engaged in ritual theological criticism of the ritualized practices of barbecuing, of the activism of a documentary film on agricultural investors in Ethiopia, and of European farmers protesting against governmental laws and regulations. This theological perspective anchors Douglas's 'conformation to holiness' in an overall commitment to the wholeness of creation. This overall commitment plays out in very concrete commitments that can contribute to handling food in more just and sustainable ways, while acknowledging the ambiguities that follow from clashing values related to food issues. At the same time, these concrete commitments challenge us not to acquiesce. We can do better.

HOW COULD BAPTISM CLEANSE US WITH POLLUTED WATER?

ERNST M. CONRADIE

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will reflect on baptism as cleansing in the context of Cape Town's recent experience of drought and the so-called Day Zero scenario it faced by February 2018. This prompted many secular rituals or at least ritualistic behaviour. For me it prompted some critical theological reflection: How can baptism retain its cleansing function if there is not enough water to cleanse us? Moreover, can recycled grey water clean us? How can baptism clean us if the water itself is dirty? What if the water is heavily polluted, indeed toxic? What form of ritual is then needed to clean the water? Can water purification technology do the trick? What implications may that have for baptism as a symbol of inclusion and exclusion?

I will start with two personal reflections that prompted this focus, then discuss ritualistic behaviour in the context of such a Day Zero scenario and, in the process, unpack various layers of what constituted this disaster. While drought and subsequent water shortages may be regarded as symptoms of the underlying problem, there are deeper issues at stake that may be intuitively recognized in ritualistic behaviour but still require critical reflection. I will then return to the cleansing role of baptism.

2. TWO PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

I should start with a confession that is perhaps necessary for a book on rituals. I am not a ritually 'musical' person. True, one does not need to be a performer in order to appreciate music. But ritual is an aspect of religion (or of other secular institutions and customs) that does not appeal much to me. In fact, I grew up detesting rituals. Such resistance is typical of religious observance where rituals are performed devoid of

an obvious experiential dimension.¹ However, in apartheid South Africa rituals also had the function of maintaining one's adherence to the community and the Afrikaner people and therefore of culturally legitimising the system of apartheid. That required a hermeneutics of suspicion. I therefore still find it hard to perform any prescribed rituals, including graduation ceremonies, set prayers or even to say 'Merry Christmas'.

I have often used Ninian Smart's analysis of six dimensions of religion – institutions, ethos, ritual, experience, doctrine and sacred stories.² I warm to all the others (I teach in the field of doctrine and ethos) except rituals. This is not a form of self-legitimation. In my children's education I realise how a lack of ritual participation has undermined their sense of religious identity. My sense is that this partly results from the apartheid separation of churches on the basis of race. I cannot feel at home in a predominantly 'white' church. But I am not ritually at home in a predominantly 'black' church (the Uniting Church of Southern Africa) either. Neither is the rest of my nuclear family.

A second personal note is quite contrary at first sight. In my final year as a student at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University we had group discussions in one class in Practical Theology taught by Bethel Müller. In one session I was having a vehement debate with a classmate (we were not really friends) on baptism (we were way off the prescribed topic). He was far-right wing in his politics and later became a pastor in the *Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk* – a church that believes that there will be apartheid in heaven too.³ In feedback time Prof Müller told a story about a friend of his who once questioned the prayer of a pastor after baptising a child: "Lord, we ask that you write down the name of this child in the Book of Life." Clearly, this pastor wanted to emphasise that baptism is no automatic guarantee for eternal salvation. However, the friend insisted that the prayer should have been: "Thank you, Lord for having written down the name of this child in the Book of Life." The friend clearly realised that baptism would otherwise offer no consolation. That friend, Prof Müller told me afterwards, was my own father – who died twenty year earlier and whom I hardly knew. In a serendipitous

¹ See my argument in chapter 5 of *Christian identity. An introduction* (Stellenbosch 2015).

² See N. SMART: *Dimensions of the sacred. An anatomy of the world's beliefs* (Berkeley 1996).

³ See A. KÖNIG: *Super-apartheid in die kerk. Die oortuigings van die beswaardes volgens 'Geloof en Protes'* (Pretoria 1987).

moment, and to my utter amazement, I realised that I was arguing the same point in response to the views of my classmate. The seal of baptism weighs more than fluctuating religious experiences.

3. CAPE TOWN'S DAY ZERO

Quite a bit has been written on the drought experience in Cape Town from 2015 to 2018. Many different angles have been explored – climate change, population growth, unequal access to and use of water sources, service delivery around water and sanitation, the tension between national and local politics, water infrastructure, water aquifers, the prospects of desalination, municipal income from water usage, the successes and failures of the Day Zero strategy employed and then suspended by the City of Cape Town and so forth.⁴ Instead of a survey of the underlying issues (which would be repetitive and could fill volumes) I will offer four observations that are pertinent to some form of ritualised behaviour:

First, dam levels of the main sources of Cape Town's water dropped to around 21% by February 2018. Since the last 10% of water in the dams is said to be unusable, that left around 11% for further usage. If average water usage per day is factored in, it was indeed possible to calculate the day when Cape Town would 'run out' of readily accessible water, i.e., 'Day Zero'. Rain would increase the dam levels but very little rain is expected in the normally dry months of January, February and March in the catchment areas (which have much less rainfall than Cape Town itself). This meant that many Cape Town citizens consulted the reports on dam levels on a weekly basis, with some sense of anxiety, to see where things stood.⁵ The term 'Day Zero' was used for public relations with considerable influence amongst ordinary citizens, but it also scared off tourists and conference planners, with a devastating impact on Cape Town's economy. Strictly speaking, the term was a misnomer since it was not as if no water would be available. Instead, water pressures would first be lowered and then at some point people would have to queue for water. This would become an incredibly difficult logistic

⁴ For one adequate, yet popular introduction, see L. JOUBERT & G. ZIERVOGEL: *Day Zero. One city's response to a record-breaking drought*, <http://dayzero.org.za/> [last accessed 7 October 2019].

⁵ The best website in this regard, one which I consult regularly, is <https://www.capetown.gov.za/Family%20and%20home/residential-utility-services/residential-water-and-sanitation-services/this-weeks-dam-levels> [last accessed 6 December 2019].

exercise and hard on the citizens, especially the elderly and single-parent mothers.

Second, the reason why dam levels dropped significantly was not merely because of increased water usage (or population growth) but because of three consecutive drier than normal years in 2015, 2016 and 2017 in the catchment areas of the main dams. To check the rainfall statistics became another little ritual, at least for me. In a neighbourhood in Stellenbosch where I live there is a private weather observatory that provides such statistics for one location – which I check very regularly (often on my tablet while still in bed).⁶ It has an annual average of 695.9 mm since 2004 and 385.1 mm for 2015, 510.8 mm for 2016 and 468.8 mm for 2017. This means that this particular location received around 66% of its average rainfall over that three-year period. The total for 2018 was 651.8 mm – which represents an average year – and that was enough to restore Cape Town's dam levels to around 70% at the highest point (usually by early October). Average rains in 2019 and 2020 allowed the dams to reach 100% of their capacity by September 2020.

Third, I gave some two hundred third-year environmental ethics students an assignment in early 2018 on 'Becoming Water-wise: Ethical perspectives on Cape Town's water use'. They had to explore deontological, utilitarian and virtue ethics approaches to moral formation, basically asking what the best strategy may be to educate citizens to use water responsibly, i.e., a deontological emphasis on prescriptions and penalties, a utilitarian emphasis on the well-being of all or cultivating the virtue of frugality. In the process we collected various bits and pieces of information. Let me mention only this: the City of Cape Town imposed what was called level 6B water restrictions as from 1 February 2018. The scale actually made provision only up to level 5 (the most severe restrictions). Here is what this implied:

- Recommended water use is restricted to 50 litres per person per day.
- No irrigation may be done with drinking water.
- Using greywater for toilets encouraged.
- No washing of vehicles with hose pipes is allowed.
- No landscaping or watering sports fields is allowed with potable water.
- Irrigation with borehole water is limited to an hour on Tuesdays and Saturdays before 09:00 or after 18:00.

⁶ See http://weather.lcao.co.za/index.php/Special_WeatherStatsRainfall [last accessed 6 December 2019].

- The City of Cape Town informed the public that water pressures will be lowered where need be.⁷

To lower water pressures was regarded as a last resort to avoid a ‘Day Zero’ scenario where water could no longer be provided. This nevertheless had ominous implications. Consider the following:

- Sections of the city will not have potable water during peak demand.
- There is a need to store water in tanks during off-peak.
- Water will not reach buildings on higher lying areas.
- Upper floors of high buildings won’t have water.
- Sewage systems will stop functioning.
- Fire hydrants will not have sufficiently high pressure.⁸

In the interim, citizens had to plan to live on 50 litres of water per person per day. Such restrictions allowed for individual creativity and innovation. It by necessity changed habits and often this leads to a new form of ritualised behaviour, if only in terms of carrying around buckets of water on a daily basis. The Western Cape Government helped people to visualise what that may mean in the following way:

- 18 litres for the family’s laundry (a weekly average)
- 15 litres for a shower
- 9 litres for flushing a toilet (once a day)
- 3 litres for daily hygiene
- 2 litres for cooking
- 2 litres for drinking water
- 1 litre for domestic animals⁹

From these prescriptions three further implications follow. First, for most (lower) middle-class households in suburban areas it will be necessary to find additional sources of water, e.g., for toilets. Admittedly, this does not include the majority of citizens in and around Cape Town – who are living in flats, in shacks in backyards, in informal settlements, squatter camps or simply on the streets. They may tend to use less water

⁷ See <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/text/2018/January/level-6b-water-restrictions-01.pdf> [last accessed 6 December 2019].

⁸ With indebtedness to Liziwe McDaid for this analysis. She gave a (disrupted) lecture to the Ethics 311 class in March 2018.

⁹ See https://www.westerncape.gov.za/text/2018/January/using_50_litres_of_water.pdf [last accessed 12 November 2019].

but this only raises issues of justice. The most obvious strategy in suburban areas would be to store rain water in winter (albeit that it was not winter at that time!). Access to containers that are large enough pose a problem in terms of space and costs. To keep such water clean is another matter. The alternative would be to drill boreholes or dig wells but these are much more expensive and could also deplete groundwater or aquifers.

Second, there is an obvious need for re-using water, especially water from showering and washing dishes. This became part of household chores.

Third, it is very striking that 45 of the 50 litres are allocated for cleaning/sanitation/hygiene and not for drinking or cooking. Surprisingly, the biggest portion is for laundry, then for toilets, showers, dishes and personal hygiene. Indiscriminately flushing a toilet five times a day would literally send a person's whole water allocation down the sewer drain.

4. URBAN WATER SECURITY

Since July 2018 I became involved in organising a conference on 'Cities facing escalating water shortages: Lessons learned and strategies moving forward'. This conference was hosted by UWC in association with the City of Cape Town, the Institute for Ecological Civilization, the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University from 27 to 28 January 2020. The aim of this conference was to develop a 'Water framework' to offer a guide for collaboration among cities facing escalating water shortages. It articulates a vision for the long-term future (towards 2050) and provides a set of resources to support city leaders and decision makers to address the enormous and incredibly complex challenges associated with water security. This document was finalised in May 2020 in association with the W12 Congress that had similar aims but had to be postponed.¹⁰

It is indeed remarkable to see how many cities from all over the world face serious problems around fresh water. In each case there is a set of complex factors, but the mix is often very different. Climate change plays a decisive role, but so do population growth, urbanisation, rising per capita demands, depletion of water aquifers, sanitation, pipes, taps and other infrastructure, storage capacity, melting glaciers, river flow,

¹⁰ See J. KNAPP [et al.]: 'The W12 framework supporting collaboration among cities for water security', www.w12-congress.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/W12-Framework-Final.pdf [last accessed 15 January 2021].

salinisation, rising salt waters, industrial pollution and rising sea levels. The ‘disaster’ is therefore a multi-layered one where a short-term crisis (severe water restrictions) may help to discern a complex set of long-term challenges with multiple feedback loops.

In order to address such challenges, the organisers of the January 2020 conference adopted a multi-disciplinary approach to problem solving. For that purpose, six task teams were established, namely on the natural sciences, the social sciences, the technical sciences, politics, economics and civil society. Each task team had to focus on what insights it can contribute that others cannot but also to look for transversals that cut across these fields. Each task team brought to the table aspects from within their own set of disciplines that other disciplines would need to take into account in order to avoid a disastrous misunderstanding of the underlying problem.

In the civil society task for which I was a co-convenor we emphasised the symbolic role of water. For ordinary citizens, including the poor, as well as for faith-based organisations, water is not a commodity that can be sold or bought (recognised as a business opportunity). It is not even merely a ‘resource’ that can be ‘used’ or managed (as municipalities may assume). In order to articulate the symbolic meaning of water four connotations were highlighted, namely water as gift, water as threat, water as source of cleansing and water as source of joy. I will return to the cleansing role of water below. The last of these was added at a later stage but it is obviously crucial: water is associated with exuberance, with pleasure, with fun, play and sport. This attitude towards water is expressed by rain making rituals in many indigenous cultures in non-urban contexts,¹¹ but also by graphic images of dancing in the rain after protracted periods of drought. There are of course many water-based sports – swimming, diving, canoeing, sailing, name it. But these pale in comparison to children’s exuberance when water is available. Grown-ups may be concerned about ‘wasting water’ while children are rightly having fun.

The convenors of the six task teams continued with work on this complex set of challenges, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to produce a forthcoming volume on water resilience.¹²

¹¹ See the following collection of essays: E. CHITANDO & E.M. CONRADIE (eds.): ‘Praying for rain? African perspectives on religion and climate change’, in *The Ecumenical Review* 69/3 (2017) 311-435.

¹² To be published as L.A. SWATUK [et al.] (eds.): *Towards the blue-green city. Building urban water resilience* (Cape Town forthcoming).

5. THE SYMBOL OF CLEANSING

In reflecting as a theologian on the water crisis and the response to that from civil society, the cleansing symbolism around water became particularly intriguing for me. The cleansing ability of water is obvious to all concerned – in terms of bathing/showering, sanitation, washing clothes, brushing teeth and washing dishes. Not surprisingly, such cleansing is metaphorically extended towards medical and psychological healing, towards a religious sense of cleanliness (as in Muslim cleansing rituals) but also to cleansing from various forms of guilt (as in Christian rituals around baptism).

This is well expressed in secular terms in a poem by Eduard Burle included in an anthology derived from the McGregor Poetry Festival Anthology 2018, the year when Cape Town's water crisis was at its worst:

Man in a rainstorm

The rain brings relief;
leaves and dirt
are swept away
into drain, unseen holes
in the earth;
roads are left, shining and wet.

But, not even
a downpour will loosen
the oil stains
and grime that remain –
and, in the man still sitting
behind the windscreen,
there are old fears,
old ways of being –
stubborn traces of the past – that have not yet relinquished
their hold
and washed away.¹³

The problem with cleansing is clearly not merely related to water scarcity. That remains a long-term concern given the adverse impact of climate change on the western parts of South Africa. Nevertheless, the

¹³ E. BURLE: 'Man in a Rainstorm', in *McGregor Poetry Festival 2018 anthology* (Stellenbosch 2019) 201.

Cape Town experience suggests that one can make do with relatively little water. Drinking water is required during the hot summer months, but a few litres per day would suffice to survive. Personal hygiene requires more water but, where need be, this can be restricted too. People living in poorer neighbourhoods fare better than the affluent in this regard, although this arguably comes at the cost of personal health and hygiene, making oneself presentable in public in terms of showering (or washing from a bowl), brushing one's teeth, washing clothes and access to adequate sanitation. In this context there is a need for the just distribution of available water. It is commendable that government policies allow for one kilolitre of potable water per month per household at low or no cost. For a household of six persons this provides at least 5-6 litres per person per day. Where, then, does the problem actually lie? This requires some unpacking.

First, while such provision of potable water caters readily for those living in houses or flats, it does not provide direct access to water for three categories of Cape Town citizens, namely the homeless (a smaller group), those living in informal settlements (a sizable proportion of Cape Town's citizens) where access to water is through public taps and backyard dwellers (also a sizable group), namely those living on a serviced plot in wooden or zinc structures outside the more permanent structure, paying rent to the owner, making use of outdoor facilities. In each of these cases the underlying problem is available infrastructure in terms of housing and sanitation. Backlogs are huge and are exacerbated by the continuous influx of people to Cape Town.

Second, the most significant problem is arguably sanitation. At worst people have to use the open veld (with severe safety risks for women and children). In densely populated areas 'flying toilets' are sometimes used, namely excrement put in a plastic bag, merely flung outside. Alternatively, open pit toilets are used (with several scandalous cases of children drowning in such toilets). Where the municipality makes available portable plastic toilets, these are used communally, are often in short supply, are not cleaned regularly and also pose a safety risk for women and girls, especially at night. Proposals for compost toilets or chemical toilets are available, but are met with cultural resistance and are not implemented on any significant scale. Cleaning such toilets remains a problem. Not surprisingly, the demand of activist citizen groups is for widely available flush toilets. Around 2014 this led to a series of 'poo protests' where excrement was dumped at the municipal offices and the Cape Town

international airport as a sign of protest against inadequate service delivery, especially around sanitation.¹⁴ One problem with flush toilets is the extensive use of potable water, another is the low water table on the Cape Flats. Again, not surprisingly, the problem remains unresolved, posing severe health risks.

Third, there is the inadequate maintenance of infrastructure for collecting and distributing water supplies. I do not have the necessary expertise to address such concerns around technical services but merely recognise the impact of fractured open canals, leaking pipes, leaking taps and vandalism of public and private structures. The deeper problem is related to the contamination of water as a result of inadequate waste management and sanitation, especially around informal settlements and industrial pollution where legislation is not adhered to. The most serious long-term problem is probably that of acid-mine drainage (water sources polluted by chemicals from now defunct gold and coal mines), albeit that this does not affect Cape Town directly given its geographical distance from gold, platinum and coal mines.

Fourth, as in most other contexts facing water shortages, a sizable proportion of water resources are allocated to agriculture. In the Western Cape, irrigation is used especially for vineyards, fruit trees and vegetables. Grain production and land for grazing typically relies on rainfall and underground water (using wind pumps). This poses a complex set of issues for economic policy making. If more water is allocated to citizens, agriculture and hence food security will decline. The agricultural sector provides employment to many in rural areas so that changes in the mode of production will lead to further unemployment. Rural unemployment is already disastrously high, leading to social instability, crime, drug abuse and gangsterism. This also prompts further urbanisation, thus leading to a vicious circle. Stricter policies on prescribed food types in particular areas may be enforced, but this may well lead to some resistance in the farming community. That this is extremely complex is evident from the profitable fruit export industry, the main focus of agriculture in the Western Cape. As many observers have commented, this implies that fruit produced with the Western Cape's scarce water supplies are exported to cater for European markets. However, if this is not

¹⁴ For one discussion, see E.M. CONRADIE: 'From land reform to poo protesting. Some theological reflections on the ecological repercussions of economic inequality', in *Scriptura* 113 (2014) 1-16.

sustained, sectors of the rural economy may well collapse, especially in drought-stricken areas reliant on irrigation. This will only reinforce urbanisation from rural towns and farms.

Fifth, the deepest uncertainties are posed by anthropogenic climate change. It seems clear from numerous reports that Cape Town's catchment areas will be negatively affected by reduced rainfall patterns over the long term. The impact of that may already be felt, although it is hard to distinguish current and past weather patterns in an area where three to seven year droughts have occurred regularly. One may argue that Cape Town is a victim of anthropogenic climate change and that this is therefore a matter of global justice and climate debt. Nevertheless, in most data sets South Africa hovers around the fourteenth position for carbon emissions by country, while its per capita emissions are higher than most European countries.¹⁵ This is aggravated by unequal carbon emissions within South Africa between the so-called consumer class, the middle class and the poor. Statistics in this regard are almost impossible to gather given the need to factor in and distinguish between direct use of fossil fuels (petrol, diesel, coal, gas), the embodied energy in any product and carbon emissions related to public infrastructure (roads, public buildings, communication etc.).

From the admittedly rather general discussion above, it is at least clear that the cleansing role of water is not merely a matter of personal hygiene. On a personal level it does require the formation of the virtue of cleanliness. Actually, each of the so-called 'cardinal virtues' – wisdom, justice, courage, temperance – comes into play. However, the kind of cleansing that is required affects issues around justice, peace and sustainability alike (the three pillars of the World Council of Churches' social agenda since 1975). Such cleansing is required in the public and the private sector, housing, health, agriculture, mining, industry, education and therefore pretty much everything else, although the dangers of 'ethnic cleansing' makes the term awkward. The problem is not merely a shortage of water but that the water that is there is ill-distributed¹⁶ and has become deeply

¹⁵ See, for example, the report by the Union of Concerned Scientists, <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/each-country-s-share-co2-emissions> [updated 10 October 2019, last accessed 10 December 2019]. A figure of 414.4 metric tonnes are given for South Africa, compared, e.g., with the UK's figure of 371.1 tonnes. According to this source, South Africa ranks tenth in the world in terms of per capita emissions, with Saudi Arabia, Australia and the United States of America as the top three culprits.

¹⁶ See L.A. SWATUK: *Water in southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg 2017).

contaminated. How, then, can a more just (equitable), participatory and sustainable society emerge? Can ritual play a role in the kind of behavioural change and social transformation that is required? More specifically, can the waters of baptism cleanse us in this regard? Are rituals such as baptism merely a survival strategy in an otherwise disastrous world? Or does baptism offer an escape strategy to secure eternal salvation where well-being in this world for all seems impossible?

6. BAPTISM AS CLEANSING?

For me the water crisis in Cape Town prompted some critical theological reflection on the societal significance of baptism. Clearly, a form of deep cleaning is necessary that goes far beyond the short-term availability of water. Given the presumed cosmic significance of baptism, this is the kind of ritual that should come into play, but not if it is merely a private ecclesial affair.

How, then, can baptism retain its cleansing function if there is not enough water to cleanse us? What if the water is heavily polluted, indeed toxic? What form of ritual is then needed to clean the water?

In teaching on baptism, I typically comment on its five-fold symbolism.¹⁷ First, baptism is an initiation ceremony that points towards inclusion in the Christian community. Under persecution this harbours danger but also a sense of identity and protection. It therefore fosters resilience. Through baptism a person is united with Christ and thus becomes a member of a new family, a citizen of a new society in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slaves nor free men or women, neither male nor female (Gal 3:28).

Second, the symbol of water in baptism refers to the washing and cleansing that is necessary for ritual purity. One needs to be pure to come in the presence of God. Moreover, it symbolises the washing of a sin-stained life. Just as water washes away the dirt from the body, so God's forgiveness washes away the sins of those who are baptised. Baptism thus symbolises publicly that God has forgiven a person's sins.

Third, baptism also symbolises a dying and rising with Christ. The descent into water signifies an identification with the passion and death of Christ. The power that sin had in the old way of life is broken. The

¹⁷ See E.M. CONRADIE: *Christian identity. An introduction* (Stellenbosch 2005), drawing from the discussion in D. MIGLIORE: *Faith seeking understanding* (Grand Rapids 2014).

ascent from the water signifies a participation in the new life based on the power of the resurrection of Christ. In this sense baptism can also be understood as regeneration, as rebirth.

Fourth, baptism signals empowerment by the Spirit: The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Life, at work throughout creation, giving and renewing life. Baptism is a sign of the Spirit of God at work, refreshing and revitalising a person's life. The water signifies the life-giving energy that comes from a life lived in the Spirit. Baptism is therefore closely linked with the gifts that God's Spirit imparts.

Fifth, baptism is a sign of God's coming reign: through baptism Christians receive the Spirit as the first fruits of the harvest to come. They are set in solidarity with the whole groaning creation that eagerly awaits the fulfilment of God's promises and the coming of justice and peace throughout creation.

It would be all too easy to offer such an exposition of the theology of baptism here, as if it is baptism that can save the world. A few further comments may suffice in this regard:

The vast majority of references to baptism in the biblical texts occur in the four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. While the symbol of ordinary water is used, the figurative meaning is typically stressed, either as baptism with the Holy Spirit or a 'baptism of fire', i.e., participation in Christ's death. The first letter of Peter explicitly states that baptism does not concern the washing of one's body but of one's conscience (1 Pet. 3:21). In none of the biblical texts where baptism is mentioned does it have some cosmic significance, e.g., a suggestion that it cleanses the whole world from sin – which is quite surprising given the utmost ease with which biblical texts interweave the personal and the cosmic. Not surprisingly, then, the problem of scarce water or contaminated water does not feature at all. In early Christian teaching on baptism water scarcity was already recognised – so that baptism can take place in rivers or in the sea, or (if not available) by washing in a pool or (if not available) with three hands full of water (only).

Baptism seems to take place individually and personally, not collectively or cosmically. There is some wisdom here. Even where washing is done communally, it is each individual body, each piece of clothing, each eating utensil that has to be cleaned. Likewise, the rite of inclusion in the collective is not itself collective but only provides reassurance insofar it is individually enacted, confirmed and sealed. Moreover, in the biblical texts baptism is repeatedly tied with conversion (*metanoia*) and

the forgiveness of sins (e.g., Mark 1:4). The confession of guilt and the forgiveness of sins is best practised in the particular, not in general as that would amount to blanket amnesty.

In a context of the contamination of water sources and anthropogenic climate change, this emphasis on the individual is not inappropriate.¹⁸ A change of hearts and minds can only happen insofar as each individual is concerned. It is possible and often necessary to bring about institutional and policy changes that could affect millions of lives. Nevertheless, structural change can only happen when individuals change their hearts, minds and habits – and when there is a critical mass of decision makers convinced of the need for change. In the context of anthropogenic climate change such a critical mass is required in order to transform the energy basis of the global economy from fossil fuels to sustainable alternatives. Only in this way can related problems around biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, plastics in the oceans and the toxification of fresh water be overcome.

With roughly a third of the world's population baptised as Christians, plus a quarter who are Muslims with a shared understanding of cleansing, one would tend to think that there is more than enough to bring about the required change. This is evidently not the case though, with carbon emissions still rising every year.¹⁹ The symbol of baptism is therefore clearly not making the difference. This poses the classic theological problem as to whether it is baptism that saves us – as the anecdote at the start of this essay illustrates. This problem now has to be radicalised: Can baptism cleanse us from our (carbon) sins if the water to be used is itself contaminated? Has a cosmic understanding of the meaning of baptism not then become necessary? Does this imply a universalist understanding of salvation (or damnation) in the sense that no one person can be saved if the whole earth is not saved? If the whole earth becomes uninhabitable (surely a symbol of damnation), then any individual cannot survive either. Can such a universal scope of salvation only be reached through qualitative change at the level of the particular? Or does one need to evoke the story of Noah here – when only eight 'souls' were

¹⁸ See my essay 'Confessing guilt in the context of climate change. Some South African perspectives', in S. BERGMANN & H. EATON (eds.): *Ecological awareness. Exploring religion, ethics and aesthetics* (Berlin 2011) 77-96.

¹⁹ See the annual reports of the Global Carbon Project at <http://www.globalcarbonproject.org/> [last accessed 21 July 2021].

saved from rising waters while the whole world was condemned (see 1 Pet. 2:20)? Does baptism as mirror image (1 Pet. 2:21) function in the same way, namely as a prayer for the resurrection of the righteous *only*, while the godless are condemned (2 Pet. 2:5)? Or is the image mirrored precisely to indicate the exclusivity of the ark compared to confirmation of inclusion in baptism? Is ‘salvation’ likened to the work of a lifesaver, saving someone from drowning in too much water (the ark) or is it likened to cleansing amidst too little (clean) water, or in the case of climate change both too little and too much water? What, then, does ‘salvation’ mean? Having enough potable water for today and tomorrow? Adapting a sustainable water policy for a city such as Cape Town? Survival for a few beyond some or other disaster? Or merely a Gnostic idea of cleansing while living amidst filth and inadequate sanitation?

If not baptism, can other rituals help – before it is too late?²⁰ That is debatable as many contemporary rituals are infected by consumerist behaviour.²¹ Can disaster rituals fare any better? Perhaps, but the danger is that the form of ‘salvation’ that it offers would remain escapist and do not encourage resilience. Such escapism is a pertinent problem for baptism as well. If the world is heading for doom and destruction, the individual’s inclination may be to ensure eternal salvation for him- or herself – and leave the world to its fate. At the same time baptism originally served as a symbol of conversion from allegiance to Empire (forms of domination) and as a comforting symbol of inclusion in a community that offered resistance to Empire. Can it play such a role again? In closing, here is a possibility, albeit one coming from a person who confesses not to be ritually musical:

The Plankenburg River in Stellenbosch, often said to be the most beautiful town in South Africa, is also one of the most polluted rivers in the country. It collects water with residues of pesticides and fertilisers from wine farms, passes through the town, then through informal settlements on the outskirts of Kayamandi township, then through an industrial area, a train station and then a railway bridge where the homeless frequent. By the time it reaches that bridge, 1 km from my house, no one would swim or wash in its stagnant pools let alone drink from

²⁰ This is to invoke the title of an early contribution to ecotheology by J.B. COBB, JR.: *Is it too late? A theology of Ecology* (Beverly Hills 1971).

²¹ For a discussion on the commercialization of religious practices, see my *Christianity and a critique of consumerism. A survey of six points of entry* (Wellington 2009).

its water. Numerous academic studies have commented on bacterial and metal contamination. In short, it is as toxic as can be. The Stellenbosch River Collaborative was set up to address this as a case study.²² To enable future children to drink from its water would require a quite radical transformation of the town's economy and residential planning. How is such transformation possible? Could (disaster) ritual help? Imagine a baptism ceremony in the Dutch Reformed Stellenbosch-West congregation (where I have been a member) deciding to baptise infants in the river that flows through that part of town, invoking the belief that the Holy Spirit will wash away all our sins with this water. This would require cleaning the water itself and that would require a clean-up of the local and indeed the global economy. The parents would surely complain but their faith would be put to the test. Can the Holy Spirit accomplish such a clean-up? Indeed, rituals need not become semi-automatic or ritualistic. It can, at times, not only during disasters, take immense courage to perform an appropriate ritual.

²² See especially C. BÜCHNER-MARAIS: *Transformative collaborative governance relations towards sustainability. The case of the Stellenbosch River Collaborative* (PhD Dissertation: Stellenbosch University 2016).

RITUALIZING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:
GLOBAL IMPRESSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has suddenly and unintentionally made this disaster ritual book project very topical, relevant and urgent. At the moment of writing this introductory text (January 2021), we are still in the middle of a slow disaster with tremendous impact on the lives of individuals, social structures and economics. It is obvious that we cannot ignore this pandemic in the book project. Several authors have mentioned the pandemic in their contributions. But shouldn't it also be discussed explicitly and separately and if so, how? A thorough treatment of rituals in times of COVID-19 requires a certain distance. That distance is certainly not here yet. We are in the 'middle of the storm'.

These questions and considerations remind us of the previous book project on disaster ritual when we were confronted with the 9/11 attacks in the USA while finishing the work on the publication (POST, NUGTEREN, ZONDAG: *Rituelen na rampen* 2002; POST [et al.]: *Disaster Ritual* 2003). At that occasion, we were able to include a contribution by Ronald Grimes in the English edition. In a now widely quoted contribution, Grimes did not present a balanced analysis of the 9/11 rituals, but described a memorial ritual at his university as a personal account ('Ritualizing September 11. A personal account').

Following Grimes's example, we asked some of the contributors to this book project to describe rituals or ritual-like practices related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we present these personal and contextual accounts as a kind of collage and final 'case study' in this part of the book.

JAPANESE FUNERALS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

SÉBASTIEN P. BORET & YU FUKUDA

This essay discusses how Japanese people tailor funeral ceremonies during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also comments on the possible impact of these adaptations on the future of mortuary rites in Japan.

The impact of coronavirus-related measures on Japanese funerals

On 3 April 2020, the head office of Ehime Prefecture reported that a COVID-19 cluster had been linked to a funeral.¹ According to their report, at least nine of the twenty-one people present at the memorial parlor of Matsuyama city had tested positive. The infected people took part in the traditional rites, which consist of a wake and a ceremony the following day. The wake often consists of a ritual when participants gather closely in a small room and listen to the sutras recited by a monk. The gathering closes with the offering of incense at the altar and the sharing a meal and sake. The following day consists of a funeral, the cremation and a farewell to the deceased – a perfect sequence for people to gather and chats, touch each other and spread the virus.

At the time of this publication, the death toll of Japan's coronavirus crisis has reached over 1,600, and over 86,000 infected people have been reported. Like most social gatherings, funerals present a high risk of spreading the virus. The risk increases since the ceremonies are especially attended by older people particularly vulnerable to the virus. Unlike in European countries, however, the Japanese Ministry of Health has not prohibited funerals.² Instead, the central authorities published guidelines for funeral companies and bereaved families to take adequate measures

¹ 'Funeral clusters? 9 infected people in...Matsuyama', in *Yomiuri Newspaper*, 3 April 2020, <https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/national/20200403-OYT1T50166/> [last accessed 9 October 2020]. Press Release from Ehime Prefecture, <https://www.pref.ehime.jp/h25500/documents/020331press.pdf> [last accessed 9 October 2020].

² *Euronews*, 28 March 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/30/coronavirus-grieving-and-goodbyes-difficult-as-lockdown-compounds-the-pain-of-those-left-b> [last accessed 7 October 2020]. Reuters, 19 March 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-rites-insight-idUSKBN2161ZM> [last accessed 7 October 2020].

against the virus while respecting the memory and dignity of the dead.³ Local governments, municipalities and private funeral companies have come together to apply these guidelines and develop adapted strategies.

One of the measures consisted of monitoring the origin and the number of participants. Funeral parlors encouraged the bereaved to refrain from inviting relatives or friends living outside their prefecture.⁴ They also requested families to reduce the scale or even postpone the ceremony for better times. It is important to note that depending on the region, the cremation of the body takes place before or after the funerals.⁵ In the northern region of Miyagi Prefecture, the cremation usually takes place before the memorial. It would be possible to imagine families postponing the funerals. In the southern Prefecture of Fukuoka, where the funeral ceremony precedes the cremation, however, people may not delay the rituals. One of the related trends is the preservation of the corpse in dedicated private morgues (*goitai azukari sabisu*) by the Oominami Sousai Company to provide more time for bereaved to organize the funerals.⁶ If the dead died after contracting COVID-19, some funeral companies in Tokyo went as far as asking that no one came to view the body or attend the cremation, if the dead had been contaminated.⁷

Another measure demanded the use of technology to ensure social distancing. Some funeral companies began conducting online funerals using Zoom or YouTube. Participants located outside the funeral hall present their farewell as they watched the live video of the deceased resting in a coffin. Seigetsuki, a funeral company in Sendai, started a similar service before the pandemic. It consists of making a slideshow using the deceased's photos with his/her favourite music in the background. Seigetsuki then distributes a QR code to those willing to participate in the funeral. The QR code enables participants to access to the movie

³ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and Ministry of Trade, Economy and Industry, 29 July 2020, <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/000653447.pdf> [last accessed 21 July 2021].

⁴ *Kaboku Shinpou*, 6 April 2020.

⁵ R.K. BEARDSLEY, K. HALL, J.W. & R.E. WARD: *Village Japan* (Chicago 1959). R. SMITH: *Ancestor worship in contemporary Japan*. (Stanford 1974).

⁶ <https://www.oominami.net/azukari-service/> [last accessed 21 July 2021].

⁷ 'Funeral businesses offer online forms of farewell as Japan adapts to virus distancing', in *The Mainichi*, 8 June 2020, <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20200606/p2a/00m/0bu/016000c> [last accessed 9 October 2020].

remotely. Since COVID-19, the company also places an incense stand outside a funeral hall so that participants do not have to enter the facility.⁸ In addition to funerals, companies offered to attend and film the cremation on behalf of the bereaved before depositing the urn containing the cremated remains of the dead on their doorstep.⁹

Another new feature of funerals during the coronavirus crisis is an online service related to the traditional *kōden*. *Kōden* is the Japanese funeral tradition of giving a monetary offering to the bereaved family at funerals. Uniquet, a funeral company based in Osaka, created a smart-phone application that enables relatives and acquaintances to offer *kōden* by electric payment together with a letter of condolence.¹⁰ Like funeral ceremonies, the practice of gift-giving had already become more restricted in pre-COVID-19 Japan as more and more of bereaved families do not accept *kōden* to avoid social obligations.¹¹

Transformation or trend?

Should we conclude that these trends represent some form of departure from the ‘customary’ funeral practices? In pre-COVID-19, Japan, funeral ceremonies were already undergoing a lot of change.¹² The demographic and family changes, as well as the religious and economic considerations, encouraged people to simplify mortuary rites. ‘Family funerals’ (*kazokusō*), which consist of limiting the participants to the immediate relatives, have become pretty much an accepted and common practice. More radical, ‘direct funerals’ (*chokusō*) have done away with the wake, the funeral ceremony and the picking of the cremated bones of the dead. The dead body is brought directly to the crematorium for a farewell ceremony attended by family and friends. Finally, the last option is known as ‘zero funerals’ (*zerosō*). This form leaves only one rite of passage: the disposal of the cremated remains into the

⁸ *Kahoku Shinpou*, 18 May 2020.

⁹ *The Mainichi*, 8 June 2020.

¹⁰ https://www.life-ending.biz/_ct/17346735 [last accessed 21 July 2021].

¹¹ Y. TSUJI: ‘Mortuary rituals in Japan. The hegemony of tradition and the motivations of individuals’, in *Ethos* 34/3 (2006) 391-431. Y. TSUJI: ‘Evolving mortuary rituals in contemporary Japan’, in A.C.G.M. ROBBEN: *A companion to the Anthropology of death* (Hoboken, NJ 2018) 17-30.

¹² H. SUZUKI: *The price of death. The funeral industry in contemporary Japan* (Stanford 2000). H. SUZUKI (ed.): *Death and dying in contemporary Japan* (New York 2014).

grave.¹³ If they do not form the majority culture, these trends suggest that both funeral companies and their customers were already adopting simpler and less attended funerals before the COVID-19 outbreak.

With regards to their impact on the future of Japanese funerals, one may venture to argue that the restrictions brought by the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to accelerate the liberalization of death in Japan.¹⁴ The pandemic might justify the choice of a *kazokusō*, *chokusō* or *zerosō* that might have been seen as rather inappropriate among certain families in normal circumstances. COVID-19 might therefore contribute to the continued reduction of the number of ‘physical attendees’. At the same time, the development of ‘Zoom funerals’ might allow gathering more considerable numbers of ‘virtual participants’ without increasing the cost of the ceremonies or, equally important in Japan, increasing the sense of obligation on the part of the participants.

The intriguing impact of ‘Zoom funerals’ is the potential de-location of death in Japan. Until now, death ceremonies (as well as cemeteries) were more or less limited to specific spaces and places. Funerals, even if filmed, were only accessible on specific websites and in certain conditions. We saw the introduction of technology with the digitalization of the memorialization of the dead with ancestral altars.¹⁵ However, the platform used by funeral companies (i.e., Zoom) is by nature no longer attached to a place. The company can send the link, meeting ID and the password to any potential participant. The silent and remote observer could choose to watch a relative or friend funeral in one’s car while having food or even during work. The experience of death may just be another app on the screens of our smartphone.

In conclusion, one may argue that, if it did not produce revolutionary changes, the COVID-19 pandemic might have created an environment where smaller and remote funerals may become a reasonable choice for the many, no longer an alternative for the few. If only temporarily, COVID-19 may have further increased the physical distance between the living and the dead.

¹³ H. SHIMADA: *Zerosō. Assari shinu* [Zero funerals. Dying in a simple manner] (Shūeisha 2015).

¹⁴ S.P. BORET: *Japanese tree burial. Ecology, kinship and the culture of death* (London 2014).

¹⁵ H. GOULD, T. KOHN & M. GIBBS: ‘Uploading the ancestors. Experiments with digital Buddhist altars in contemporary Japan’, in *Death Studies* 43/7 (2019) 456-465.

VIRAL RITUALS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM:
PUBLIC RESPONSES TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

DAVID CLARKE

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and the ‘lockdown’ of the United Kingdom in the spring and summer of that year, which is still partially in effect at the time of writing (early June 2020), produced a number of forms of ritual activity that were featured prominently in the national media. The most well publicised of these was the ‘clap for carers’ proposed by a Dutch national living in London, Annemarie Plas, who was inspired by a similar one-off event in the Netherlands. This weekly outpouring of support began on 26 March to honour “NHS [National Health Service] workers and care workers”,¹⁶ but soon extended its remit to “[d]octors, nurses, healthcare workers, emergency services, armed services, public transport staff, delivery drivers, porters, shop workers, teachers, waste collectors, manufacturers, postal workers, cleaners, vets, engineers and all those who are out there making an unbelievable difference to our lives in these challenging times”.¹⁷

To understand the significance of this phenomenon, which was widely supported by ordinary British people every week on Thursday at 8 p.m., I would argue that we need to see it in the context of a range of other ritual behaviours in this period that I understand as both viral and memetic. They are viral in the sense that they have spread throughout the population by means of a process of mediatized sharing, often but not always transported by the ‘new media’ of Web 2.0. They are memetic, by analogy with internet-based memes, because participants have responded by modifying their own performance of the ritual so as to express individuality.¹⁸ Much of this ritual activity has in fact been mediated by the internet, in that participants have used social media to record and share their own performance of rituals. In addition, online

¹⁶ P. GRAFTON-GREENE, R. SPEARE-COLE & S. MORRISON: ‘Clap for our carers. People across UK come together in mass applause for NHS coronavirus heroes’, in *Evening Standard*, 26 March 2020, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/clap-for-our-carers-coronavirus-applause-a4399096.html> [last accessed 21 July 2021].

¹⁷ <https://clapforourcarers.co.uk/> [last accessed 21 July 2021].

¹⁸ L. SHIFMAN: *Memes in digital culture* (Cambridge, MA 2014) 19-20. R.M. MILNER: *The world made meme* (Cambridge, MA 2016) 38.

practices of cutting, pasting and remixing familiar from the world of digital memes have led to crossovers and dialogues between different forms of ritual behaviour. In this brief analysis, I will consider three strands of such activity: the display of ‘Thank You NHS’ signs and rainbow designs; the ‘clap for carers’ ritual itself; and the commemoration of the Second World War, which became relevant when the coronavirus crisis coincided with the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the end of the War in Europe.

The creation of rainbow artwork, often incorporating ‘Thank You NHS’ messages, to be displayed in windows began as an activity for primary school children after the closure of schools and was intended to spread a hopeful message. The exact origin of this practice is unclear, but many shared their efforts via social media, and the display of the rainbow symbol became more widespread, not just among children. In my own neighbourhood, rainbow murals incorporating a range of visual elements were chalked on the walls of houses and on pavements. While people were unable to congregate, the display of such images both online and offline became a form of ritual communication, “directed not (...) toward the (...) act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs”.¹⁹ However, the modification of the image through individual creativity (for example, fashioning a rainbow of balloons on the front of one’s house or baking a rainbow cake) recalled the internet meme’s propensity to speak to an experience of ‘networked individualism’,²⁰ in which both connection with others and the expression of a distinct individual identity are valued. Although organizations such as newspapers offered pre-printed rainbow signs for display, and despite the swift increase in commercially produced ‘thank you’ signs primarily displayed by businesses, it was handmade and individual artwork that proliferated in ordinary residential streets and online.

The ‘clap for carers’ ritual demonstrated similar viral and memetic characteristics: it was spread initially by social media users and was then subject to widespread personalizing modification by participants, with this tendency increasing as the weeks went by. Some participants played musical instruments, some donned fancy dress, others let off fireworks or banged pots and pans. Social media users posted photographs of themselves and their neighbours during the ‘clap’ and, where participants

¹⁹ J.W. CARY: *Culture as communication* (London 2008²) 15.

²⁰ SHIFMAN: *Memes* 106.

found particularly unusual ways of taking part, they were often filmed doing so (or filmed themselves), so that this could be shared via social media. The rainbow symbol and the ‘Thank You NHS’ message were mobilised in signs, banners and clothing during the weekly event, and Twitter posts frequently combined the hashtags such as #ThankyouNHS, #clapforcarers and #clapforNHS. This tended to emphasise a focus on the NHS in the ‘clap for carers’ event, although its instigators eventually incorporated other groups of key workers, as noted above.

The coincidence of these rituals with the celebrations of 8 May, known in the UK as VE (Victory in Europe) Day, had a significant impact on the discourse surrounding the two ritual practices outlined above. The 75th anniversary of the end of hostilities in the European theatre of World War Two was to have been a major national celebration, with the traditional May Bank Holiday moved to accommodate participation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a danger that this would become an example of failed ritual, with many elements of the official celebration cancelled. The UK government proposed alternative commemorative activities that could be performed by people at home (such as standing on their doorsteps to raise a toast to those who fought in World War Two or picnicking in their front gardens), but these suggestions did not appear to be widely taken up.

Nevertheless, the link between the War and the coronavirus crisis was further established during a fundraising campaign by veteran Captain Tom Moore, who was attempting 100 laps of his garden at home before his 100th birthday on 30 April to raise money for the NHS. The campaign went on to raise over £30 million and the coincidence of the VE Day celebrations with Captain Tom’s popularity arguably help to create associations in the minds of many between the heroism of those fighting in World War Two and NHS staff and other essential workers. In my own neighbourhood, for instance, one window display at a local nursing home put the matter plainly: ‘VE Day heroes then, key workers our heroes now.’

The incorporation of this aspect of the UK’s memory culture into the ritual practices that emerged around the pandemic had a notable effect in terms of the transformation of these apparently consensual performances into arenas of contestation. Some health care professionals began to reject their characterization as ‘heroes’, claiming that the analogy between wartime heroism and their professionalism was inappropriate. In particular, some medical personnel pointed out that the dis-

course of heroism potentially de-politicised the situation in the NHS during the crisis, by portraying staff as selfless and self-sacrificing, rather than drawing attention to deficiencies in funding, equipment and personal protection.²¹

What can all of this potentially tell us about the role of ritual in the UK during the coronavirus crisis? Firstly, it demonstrates that offline ritual practices were increasingly spread by social media in a viral fashion, but that these rituals also took on characteristics associated with memetic forms of internet communication. Specifically, the modification of ritual to simultaneously express personal identity and collective solidarity was significant. Secondly, we see intense feedback loops between ritual in the online and offline worlds, with ritual performances enacted in the street, but also digitally recorded and photographed for sharing in social media, encouraging imitation and further modification. Thirdly, we can see how different strands of ritual behaviour (clapping for carers, creating rainbow artwork, acts of commemoration for World War Two combatants) were combined by participants, both in their online and offline performances. Fourthly and finally, it appeared that, at least in the case of ‘clap for carers’, the opening up of the ritual as a space of political contestation led to its demise, with the originator of the event questioning its appropriateness once the ritual became ‘politicized’.²²

As a form of ‘networked individualism’, then, the ‘clap for carers’ was initially sustained by its apparently simple and apolitical message of celebration and thanks, which refrained from offering an interpretation of the context of the actions deserving of that gratitude. Once the notion of (military) heroism became more and more associated with the ritual, the question of how that context should be understood became a matter of public contestation, undermining its consensual intent. From the point of view of ritual studies, this case raises questions about how and

²¹ E.g., S. AKRAM: ‘Don’t clap for carers tonight – it means nothing when government is failing them so badly’, in *Independent*, 21 May 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/coronavirus-clap-for-carers-ppe-shortage-boris-johnson-nhs-a9525596.html> [last accessed 21 July 2021]. ANONYMOUS: ‘I’m an NHS doctor – and I’ve had enough of people clapping for me’, in *The Guardian*, 21 May 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/21/nhs-doctor-enough-people-clapping> [last accessed 21 July 2021].

²² PA MEDIA: ‘Let’s stop clapping for the NHS, says woman who started the ritual’, in *The Guardian*, 22 May 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/22/lets-stop-clapping-for-the-nhs-says-woman-who-started-the-ritual> [last accessed 21 July 2021].

to what effect societies facing significant challenges to their resilience in the coming years (for example because of the consequences of the current epidemic, or indeed in light of the growing climate crisis) will develop viral and memetic rituals that straddle the online and offline worlds.

‘NO-TOUCH GREETING GESTURES’

ALBERTINA NUGTEREN

While many Dutch citizens will probably remember 9 March 2020 as the day when the habitual handshake was banned, I personally remember the date because of a word that was cropping up for a few days in most Dutch news media: the Sundanese (way of) greeting. Our royal couple Willem-Alexander and Máxima, on an official visit to Indonesia, were among the first whose pandemic-etiquette was measured up: official protocol prescribed that they were not to shake hands. Instead – how fitting and culturally specific! – they would use the so-called Sundanese greeting. And they did, gracefully, comfortably, and even light-heartedly, at that early moment of what was to become a crisis later.

I was delighted in more ways than one. First, there was the name, especially the spelling. Obviously, the Dutch-colonial spelling (Soenda) had made way for the more international spelling (Sunda). But much more delight was in the graceful greeting itself, which exists in countless variations all over South- and Southeast Asia. The choice of this alternative to the handshake was self-evident. First, it is local, home-grown, age-old. Second, it is the best no-touch greeting gesture that could replace the entire array of the usual international salutation repertoire: it is respectful, graceful, reverential, and light as air. Third, it is fine-grained in social nuance: the height of the clasped hands corresponds to the social stature of the person saluted. Fourth, it is perspiration-proof in sticky heat. Fifth, it is ideal when persons differ greatly in height and bulk and body odor. And sixth, the most elegant and truly enlightening characteristic is that one keeps one’s gaze eye to eye, soul to soul.

Although for some this obviously counted as ‘a new ritual’, it is in fact ancient. Clasping the palms together solemnly in a respectful fashion and holding them in front of the chest testifies to Indonesia’s Hindu-Buddhist past. Appearing in intricate variations such as the *sembah* (Sunda), the *sampeah* (Cambodia) and the *wai* (Thailand), it has its origin in India’s Sanskrit culture, in which it is known as *namaste*, *namaskār*, *praṇāma*, or *añjali mōdrā*, respectively.

Greeting is a fine art. Greeting is also a minefield of embarrassment, eternal shame, and diplomatic scandals. Whereas Prime Minister Mark Rutte had jestingly suggested alternatives such as ‘*voetzoenen*’ (kissing

someone's feet) or *'elleboogstoten'* (the elbow bump), let us drop the habitual but clumsy Dutch *'drieklapper'* (three kisses on the cheek) for good, even in post-COVID-19 times. Let us adopt the Sundanese greeting as a homage to the rich traditions of our erstwhile colony and to mark the year when the king for the first time ever expressed Dutch apologies to the Indonesian people.

(P.S. Yesterday was the first day when Dutch pupils went back to primary school after many weeks of 'forced holidays'. In Nijmegen the children were offered a variety of fifteen salutations from a distance of 1.5 meter. Among the more predictable 'cool' gestures, there it was: the *namasté!*)

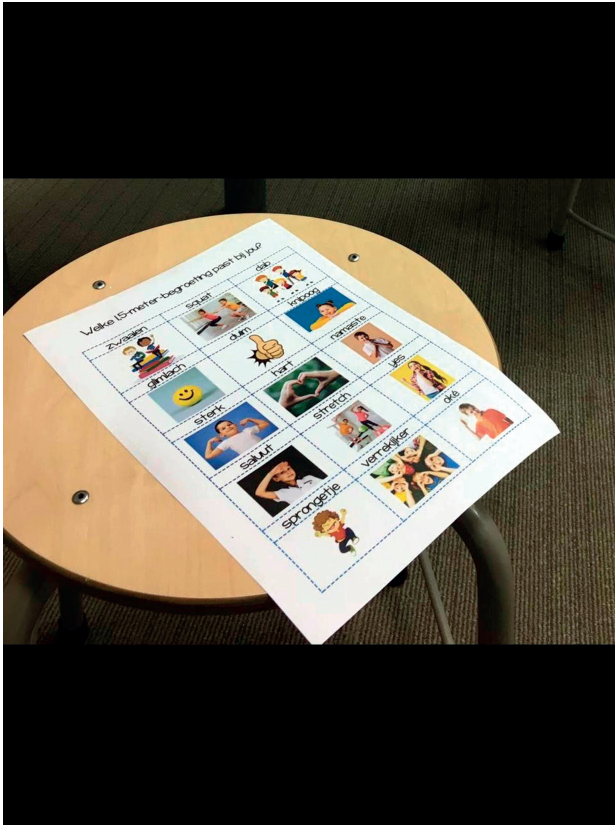


Figure 27.1: Variety of salutations, TaalSter, Nijmegen, May 2020.

HAZARD AVOIDANCE DEVICES AND COVID-19

PAMELA J. STEWART & ANDREW STRATHERN

The advent of the coronavirus and the dangers it entails have given rise to the orchestration of a complete new set of taboos, ritual rules, spatial behavior, and efforts to avoid ‘pollution’ from the virus. These taboos have impinged very directly on the lives of everyone, not least by way of regulations of ‘lock-downs’ (e.g., closures of businesses, schools, movements of people and goods) or ‘shelter in place’ (orders to stay at ‘home’ and leave only for obtaining food or medicine) that governments stipulate about what people can or cannot do. These new taboos also shift over time and are difficult to enforce. New rules of physical/social spacing have placed untoward constraint on patterns of social interaction, for example in terms of access to shops, spacing in queues, and face to face interactions. Even the meaning of ‘face to face’ changes as a result of the requirement to wear masks that hide most of the face and thus block vital aspects of communication between people. Authorities specify variations in how such taboos are to be applied, for example saying whether or not masks are to be worn whenever a person leaves their dwelling place or only when they enter a store. Ritual guardians are stationed at the liminal approaches to facilities, often administering temperature test to shoppers. The operation of rules about the use of all spaces may carry over into institutional contexts beyond stores, for example with the closing of university buildings, such that people are not permitted to enter their own customary work spaces and draw on their carefully constructed resources for teaching and research. In general, ‘face to face’ has become ‘zoom to zoom’ (video conference platform) as a category. Students, in turn, may not feel that their embodied experiences of university life can be maintained under such a regimen.

Taboo systems, as we know them from ethnographic contexts around the world, depend on the power of authority to institute and maintain them. Often that authority is related to religious ideas. In the case of COVID-19, authority stems from government and the general ideology of public health. We see, however, many daily examples of how taboos and stipulations may be resisted or ignored. Each one of us, as an individual, is faced with the choice of resistance or compliance. The main locus of resistance lies in the sphere of collective behavior humans are used to

herding together, and it is precisely this that authorities prohibit. So, we have pockets of resistance, children playing together in the street, raising the danger that they may be spreading the virus to others, even if they themselves are asymptomatic. The potential sanction here is the power of the virus itself, so here 'authority' rests with the virus itself, and risks flow to the adults in the community.

Our point here is that all of us are affected by this new structure of ritualization, so we experience it intensely as individuals and as members of society, entrapped within a new world of taboos that often runs counter to pre-existing social patterns. Stress and dissonance can emerge and require further ritual therapies to counter them. All in all, this is a world where taboos rule and will continue to do so as long as the danger of infection by the virus remains in play. On a broader analytical front, we need to understand how eco-cosmologies are emerging around the virus and its ramifying implications in our lives. Each country is dealing with this pandemic differently and social, political, and cultural dynamics are impacting how people respond.

A FUNERAL DURING LOCKDOWN IN SOUTH AFRICA

CAS WEPENER

Tuesday, 19 May 2020 – the country has been in lockdown for fifty-three days because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been almost nine weeks since South Africans, of which 84% belong to the Christian religion and another 9% to other religions, have not been allowed to gather for worship purposes. As in many countries elsewhere in the world, worship services have since gone online and have been conducted via electronic media in many formats. In the late afternoon, our faculty receives the sad news that one of our colleagues died after an operation. I see the terrible news on Facebook. I phone a colleague who tells me that it happened just ten minutes ago. Under normal circumstances colleagues would leave their offices, meet each other, and make plans to visit the deceased's relatives. This is not happening and not allowed, as we are in lockdown level 4.

My colleague was a well-known leader in church circles globally and under other circumstances would have received an enormous funeral. A big funeral is however not possible as it is not legal. According to some of the regulations of the 'Disaster Management Act: Alert level 4 during coronavirus COVID-19 lockdown' that function in this time, movement between provinces for a funeral is strictly regulated and only permitted for very close relatives, such as a spouse or child; attendance is limited to fifty people; all hygienic conditions and distancing measures must be adhered to for the limitation of exposure of persons at the funeral to COVID-19; in addition to many regulations related to the transportation of a corpse, as well as other lockdown regulations that needs to be adhered to, such as physical distancing during the funeral.

On the WhatsApp-group of the Master of Divinity class the students organize among themselves a Zoom meeting for 21 May at 7 p.m. The invitation states that "during this brief moment of reflection, we hope to recognize her as faith ancestor who embodied unity, reconciliation and justice" and the invitation also indicates that this is deliberately organized to overlap with the Thursdays in Black movement, in which many students and staff members participate on a weekly basis.²³

²³ Cf. <http://www.thursdaysinblack.co.za/> [last accessed 21 July 2021].

Simultaneously the condolences and announcements on Facebook and Instagram (two of the more popular social media platforms in South Africa) continues. Many photographs of the deceased are shared, especially photographs in which the deceased appears along with the person making the post. There were furthermore pictures of burning candles with messages such as “Of A Life So Beautifully Lived And A Heart So Deeply Loved” and very often the line “’n Seder het geval” (A cedar has fallen) is shared. Apart from social media, in the electronic version of several South African newspapers articles about her death appeared within three hours that are widely shared on social media and commented on.

The funeral was conducted the following week adhering to the strict regulations of the Disaster Management Act and live streamed to make more participation possible. It is however doubtful that, even though there was a funeral liturgy and burial, this rite of passage will in our context be appropriated as sufficient closure.

Small gatherings of just a few people as a thanksgiving, without an elaborate liturgy and full burial ceremony, are confined to suburbs in cities such as Johannesburg and a peripheral phenomenon in South Africa. For the largest segment of the South African society funerals are usually large and very important occasions with many people gathering. Even though a big funeral was not possible, electronic and social media assisted in initiating both a grieving and ritual process. Cyber space created the opportunity to mark the death as well as creating space for people to express grief, appreciation, present eulogies and more. However, in many cases in South Africa when people die and are indeed buried during lockdown, as will probably be the case with the death of my colleague, this is probably just a case of postponed rituals or rituals left in liminality. Even though the funerals and burials occur whilst adhering to the regulations, physical social gatherings will most probably still occur, just at a later stage when they are permissible.

What did happen with regard to this rite of passage of my colleague was probably that social media made it possible to announce and ritually mark the arrival of the threshold within the ritual process, however, as long as we are in lockdown the ritual and the participants will, with regard to her death, remain in liminality and the need and longing to complete the ritual will also remain. In (South) Africa some rituals and liturgies that are enacted during lockdown may seem complete, even when a body is lowered into the ground and the funeral

liturgy celebrated, however, I doubt that that is the case. Usually liminality is to an extent managed by a rite of passage such as a funeral in order to serve the passage; however, during lockdown it seems as if the process is inversed and the rituals are governed by the liminal context and the passage, the completion, is either postponed or prevented. Time will tell.

REFLECTION ON RITUALS FOR DYING AND DEATH
IN HEALTHCARE SETTINGS DURING THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC: INSIGHTS FROM CHAPLAINCY

JOANNA WOJTKOWIAK

In the beginning of 2020, the world went into lockdown. In most countries different restrictions and social distancing were encouraged or enforced. Social exchange and physical contact were put on a minimum. In the Netherlands, as in other countries, chaplains or spiritual counselors who work in healthcare were challenged to offer spiritual care to patients who were dying alone due to visiting restrictions. Family members were often unable to say goodbye to their dying loved ones and funerals were not possible. The Dutch Professional Association for Chaplains (VGvZ) initiated a crisis team to gather information on rituals in death and dying in the context of the current pandemic. Chaplain Esli Jongen, master student Kyra Haerkens and I started to collect and report on examples from chaplains who initiated or created ‘universal’ rituals for farewell in the process of dying.²⁴ The suggested rituals can be used when there is time pressure or when there is not the possibility to ask for a chaplain from one’s own religious or spiritual background.

Within a short amount of time, we wrote this crisis document with the valuable information from chaplains working in healthcare settings. How to offer condolences when you cannot shake a person’s hand? How to organize an online funeral? How to give the family a chance to say goodbye when they are unable to visit? How to be there for the patient who is dying alone? These were some of the questions that were addressed.

The suggested rituals included giving families an (indirect) role in the ritual when they cannot be there. When a telephone or videoconference is not possible one can make symbolic links between the dying and their loved ones. Name the people who cannot be there and make them symbolically present. Light a (digital) candle to think about someone. Send an object to make a link between the deathbed and loved ones. The

²⁴ <https://vgvz.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/050720-Afscheidsrituelen-definitieve-versie.pdf> [last accessed 21 July 2021].

caregiver can stand next to the deathbed and tell the patient that now it is time to let go. The suggested texts to read during such a farewell ritual came from poems or were written by the chaplains themselves.

The term ‘universal ritual’ has been used more than once in this context, also in the final document. Can we create these universal rituals that can be offered to various religious groups? The term is difficult and perhaps not correct: can there even be a ritual for us all? Rituals are embodied within worldviews and beliefs. However, in a crisis situation, such as COVID-19, it seems that the term is embraced when there is not the possibility for organizing a ‘requested’ ritual. The pandemic has (temporally) shifted social structures. Chaplains and other healthcare professionals have to improvise and do the best they can. Showing compassion and ‘being there’ for the other is meaningful across cultural borders.

Ritualizing death and dying in such a crisis situation is about small gestures, such as taking a moment to sit with the patient, letting the family know about the patient’s final moments or sending a card of condolence or another symbol to family. These ‘little’ rituals can be immensely meaningful. In case of time pressure, no preparation and lack of attributes, small gestures do count. Just being there with a patient and saying that the patient is not alone can make a difference. Telling someone that it is okay to let go and have a poem in your pocket in case you have to do an improvised farewell ritual. The pandemic has shown that during such a crisis ritual and worldview borders are even more dynamic and fluid, as long as one conducts acts that feel authentic and that one is familiar with. The strength of symbolic representations and communication through ritual has shown to be of great significance.

CAN A RITUAL BE DIGITAL?
A REFLECTION ON DIGITAL PUBLIC EVENTS IN NORWAY
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FROM
THE VIEWPOINT OF RITUAL STUDIES

HANS STIFOSS-HANSEN & LARS JOHAN DANBOLT

We have previously studied the massive ritualizing that took place in Norway in the wake of the 22 July 2011 terror attack, a true disaster, unprecedented to Norwegians (cf. the article by the authors in this volume). The onslaught of COVID-19 could also be seen as a disaster, creating the same reactions in people: fear, anxiety, uncertainty. And in both situations the population was coming together in front of their TVs, expecting national leaders to demonstrate control, give advice, and distribute comfort.

And so it was done in the initial phase of the coronavirus pandemic (from 12 March to the end of April 2020), but there was a drastic difference from 22 July 2011 situation: during the lockdown people were strictly and forcefully advised (even legally required) to stay apart, to isolate, to stay home. In contrast to 2011, when people came together in all imaginable ways, during the COVID-19 lockdown people were to a large extent left to themselves and their immediate cohabitants, in their homes, and – if being careful – on walks in nature. When university campuses, schools, and working places were main arenas for mutual comfort and support in 2011, all these arenas were closed and stayed so for several months. The population was deprived of their main instruments for overcoming the emotional reaction to the shock. No churches or temples were staging disaster rituals.

The result was an explosion of digital activity – communication, relating, digital coming-together. This was in no way a result of a grand strategy, but a spontaneous employment of digital instruments that were already present and in use. Some digital activities were organized, like digital teachings and classrooms in schools and universities. People who were required to stay home established a workplace at home, linked to the workplace. But mainly, in addition to this, like a flourishing field of expressions, digital platforms and events were launched with the obvious aim of providing comfort and feelings of safety and normality. Media companies contributed to this ‘corona-help’, but also nonprofessional

actors and organizations were very active – a very important feature of the process is the fact that producing and transmitting a short film with a message is cheap and quite easy.

THE RITUAL STUDIES PERSPECTIVE

A significant portion of this media phenomenon was produced by churches and faith communities, cooperating with a range of artists and musicians. None of these transmissions were ‘disaster rituals’ in a strict sense or labelled so – but many of them included elements that could be recognized from disaster ritualizing, like candle lighting, emotional or solemn music, poem readings, and meditative image use. Some of the transmissions were of religious services, with all the elements that can be recognized from such.

So ritual – yes, but were these digital ‘rituals’ ritualizing of the actual disaster, the coronavirus pandemic? Our answer to that question is both yes and no. No, because, as we said, they were often not explicitly designed to ritualize the COVID-19 event or situation. But yes, since the coronavirus situation was (and is) omnipresent in our lives and our societies – and thus also in the digitally streamed rituals.

Firstly, the very existence of those digital phenomena was entirely conditioned by COVID, and they would not have occurred without it. Many of them were labelled things like ‘a silent evening in corona-times’. Large media companies selected shows and films that were obviously meant to provide comfort and safety in hard times. But secondly, and important to studies of disaster rituals, the services and meditations that were presented by religious actors generally included explicit verbal and nonverbal references to the ongoing situation. In many religious traditions, references to actual stressful situations are a common and important feature of the ritual.

We will illustrate this feature by an Easter Sunday service in the Lutheran Cathedral of Oslo on 12 April 2020. This was a one-hour transmission on TV (Figure 27.2). The picture shows the service, with pews totally empty apart from technical personnel and the bishop officiating with some other clergy.²⁵ There was a minimal choir of five persons on the lectern, with two musicians, who provided the hymn/musical part of the service.

²⁵ <https://tv.nrk.no/serie/gudstjeneste-tv/2020/DNRR67500320/avspiller> [last accessed 21 July 2021].



Figure 27.2: Easter Sunday service in Oslo Cathedral on 12 April 2020 (photograph: Fredrik Hagen/NTB).

The impression of emptiness is striking – definitely for the TV audience, but certainly for the persons performing the roles in the church as well. We are certain that the service is experienced on a solemn background, as if something fateful is nearby. Consequently, audiences will most likely interpret what they hear and see on this background, and everyone will realize that it is the COVID-19 context that is manifesting itself in that way. After all, it is the first time in modern history that these traditional rites are not carried out according to tradition during Easter.

So COVID-19 was inevitably framing the message – but furthermore, the components of the service were also modified and shaped according to this frame. Elements like hymns, prayers, and sermon were addressing the situation, more or less explicitly. Some prayers were formulated with explicit prayers for strength and comfort ‘in this difficult time’.

This is not the proper context for discussion of the definition of ritual or disaster ritual – though we will suggest that such rituals as the one described above could be understood as a disaster ritual – because of its functions and its similarities with rituals where more participants are present. This taken as a starting point, our observation is that disaster

ritualizing has taken place to a large extent in Norway during the coronavirus pandemic, particularly when the society went into a lockdown on 12 March 2020 until the gradual opening in May/June. (After the end of the school holidays in the end of August, things functioned more normally.) During the lockdown period, when the digital phenomena flourished, faith communities and religious organizations seem to have been very active in presenting digital events targeted at coping with the COVID-19 situation. These included fairly characteristic religious services, but also short digital events with music, theatrical elements, verbal meditations, etc. These events characteristically took place without an audience present (like the service described above); they included implicit and explicit references to the COVID-19 situation; they reflected features from their religious or cultural tradition; and religious services typically combined focus on the pandemic experience with representations of a liturgical tradition or calendar and employment of their symbols and metaphors.

The question of ritual innovation is interesting. One obvious factor is the complex and overwhelming technological innovation – it makes the whole phenomenon happen, but it also becomes integrated in the message. The audiences are aware that they are participants in a digital performance. In addition to technological ritual innovation, the practices point to an implicit mode of disaster ritualizing, different from the explicit ritualizing of the disaster on 22 July 2011. This could also be seen as innovative – the disaster not so much being the object of ritualizing, as it was being the palpable context of it.

As far as the content of the ritualizing is concerned, one might suggest that it is at the same time to some extent counter-innovative, in the sense that the transmitted content is characterized by traditional material, designed to make the audiences feel comforted and linked to tradition.

The critical question seems to be what the digital ritualizing does to the initial pain, the unpleasant isolation of individuals and families, in a time of crisis, when we should have been together, activating our social capital. The outcome is likely to be ambivalent: the digital compensation is certainly experienced as helpful – surveys strongly confirm that a majority of the Norwegian population preferred to join many of these digital ‘get-togethers’. On the other hand, since the digital events in general exposed the emptiness of the halls and the absence of audiences, they may at the same time have reminded people of the potential danger of the situation.

PART III
SELECTED THEMES

STATE APOLOGY: THE SIMULTANEOUSLY HEGEMONIC
AND BRITTLE RITUAL

TOM BENTLEY

Readers will inevitably have first-hand experience of how apology operates in the interpersonal domain: the penitent admits they have done wrong and requests forgiveness from the victim. It is then the victim's turn to reply, either accepting or rejecting the apology. There are good reasons why people can be reluctant to apologise: admitting sin involves acknowledging one's own inadequacies or moral failings and lowering oneself before the wronged. There is a further relinquishing of authority in that the apologise risks their utterance being rejected by the wronged. But there is something to be gained: the ritual, when successful, can restore harmony to once fractured relations and can be pivotal in reviving the offender's tarnished image.

When contemplating political or state apology in the aftermath of manmade disasters (such as genocide, massacres or assassinations), it is tempting to draw on this, admittedly oversimplified, interpersonal model and apply it to the state format. This chapter argues that the scaling of the interpersonal model of apology to the state level is mistaken. Most pressingly, it ignores the complex question of who gets to respond to the apology and how they get to respond. First, especially for crimes committed several generations ago, it is not always clear who may authoritatively reply to the apology on behalf of victims.¹ Second, because state apologies for serious crimes are offered to multiple people, recipients cannot be expected to have a uniform response to the ritual and will inevitably have diverse ideas about the merits of the apology. Third, I demonstrate that victims are not accorded an even platform to respond to apologies.² The result of this confusion about who gets to respond to apologies is that victims' voices become muffled and contradictory.

¹ See N. SMITH: *I was wrong. The meanings of apologies* (Cambridge 2008) 207-220.

² For other works on the contrast between interpersonal and public apologies, see T. BENTLEY: *Empires of remorse. Narrative, postcolonialism and apologies for colonial*

These observations have important and, I argue, contradictory implications for the power relations emanating from the ritual. On the one hand, there is a sense in which the contrast between the suited and staged apologist and the muted victim only emboldens the transgressor state and lends itself to reproducing hierarchical and domineering power relations. But I also suggest that this creates a challenge to the apologising state: the absence of a clear victim to authoritatively accept the apology means that the state cannot be absolved from its wrongdoing. Moreover, the apology entails a politician offering a narrative that is open for subversion. Such fragility leads to further demands for apology and creates a brittleness in the contrite state's legitimacy and desired identity.

The chapter is structured into three sections. The first section examines the format of the state apology and how state apology rituals are likely to closely resemble each other. The second section examines the implications of this and how, at first glance, victims' constrained responses appear to empower the transgressor state's hegemony. The third section turns this on its head and examines how the apology ritual's structure means that the wrongdoing state's crimes cannot be fully absolved. The chapter is interspersed with examples of state apology for extreme wrongdoing. Because the structure of the ritual induces its entailing power relations, I contend that the examples given here have more general applicability to other cases of responses to wrongdoing or manmade disasters.

1. THE FORMAT OF THE RITUAL

In English, at least, there can be ambiguity, sometimes by design, about the term 'I'm sorry'. Take disasters, the topic of this handbook: one could appropriately say 'I'm sorry for your loss' after the devastation of a natural disaster, such as a tsunami or flood. But this would not constitute an apology. Apologies are appropriately offered when one has committed a wrong. In the same way, there has been, over the last thirty years or so, an increasing number of calls for states to apologise for the disasters of severe wrongs, such as genocide, slavery, tor-

atrocities (Abingdon 2016); K. GILL: 'The moral functions of apology', in *The Philosophical Forum* 31/1 (2000) 11-27; A. LAZARE: *On Apology* (Oxford 2004); SMITH: *I was wrong*; N. TAVUCHIS: *Mea culpa. A sociology of apology and reconciliation* (Stanford 1991).

ture and massacres. It is such apologies for extreme wrongs that is the subject of this chapter.

There is, I would suggest, a wider degree of flexibility in the interpersonal format when it comes to expressing remorse. Of course, we often associate apologies with admitting wrongdoing, accepting responsibility, expressing remorse and offering restitution. Yet, this can be offered in a multitude of ways, and, as Nick Smith writes, it is possible to conceive of a circumstance where an apology can be offered, for instance, by such a gesture as the baking of a pie for the wronged.³ Political apologies, on the other hand, tend to be more formulaic. Indeed, Jacques Derrida theorised that state expressions of remorse, no matter the culture from which they emanate, have become globalised and “the universal idiom of law, of politics, of the economy, or of diplomacy”.⁴ To this extent, political apologies for severe wrongdoing are not, in his view, offered in accordance to the particular culture from which they arise. Rather, whether offered by Japan, the United States or Mongolia, state expressions of remorse are offered in what he calls ‘an Abrahamic language’.⁵ More precisely, for Derrida, political apologies resemble a Christian confession.⁶ There is more that could be said about Derrida’s theorisation of public remorse, but it is significant that he observed a rather regimented template by which state apologies are offered. In depicting such a template, he convincingly speaks of a kind of ‘mimicry’ or ‘automatic ritual’ which ties together political apologies and makes them appear discursively and stylistically similar to each other.⁷ In a similar vein, the great anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot observed how public apologies “can be read as rituals in the strictly anthropological sense of a regulated, stylized, routinized and repetitive performance”.⁸ I proceed now to outline some of the characteristics of state apology and how such features speak to power relations between the wrongdoer and the wronged.

³ SMITH: *I was wrong* 20.

⁴ J. DERRIDA: *On cosmopolitanism and forgiveness* (London 2001) 28.

⁵ DERRIDA: *On cosmopolitanism* 28.

⁶ DERRIDA: *On cosmopolitanism* 31. For an in-depth analysis of Derrida’s understanding of state apology as akin to confession, see T. BENTLEY: ‘Settler state apologies and the elusiveness of forgiveness. The purification ritual that does not purify’, in *Contemporary Political Theory* 19/3 (2020) 381–403.

⁷ DERRIDA: *On cosmopolitanism* 29.

⁸ M.R. TROUILLOT: ‘Abortive rituals. Historical apologies in the global era’, in *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 2/2 (2000) 171–186, p. 184.

2. EMPOWERING THE STATE, QUIETENING THE VICTIMS

How do political apologies resemble each other? In the passages below, I outline four ways: (1) they are offered from a stage or at a prestigious setting; (2) they are pre-prepared and highly scripted; (3) they feature and draw attention to a prominent politician; and (4) they speak to an indistinct audience.⁹ These are dealt with in turn.

2.1. They must come from a stage or a prestigious setting

Government apologies typically come from such settings as the national parliament or the president's office. President Clinton, for example, delivered his apology for the Tuskegee syphilis experiment¹⁰ in the White House Rose Garden because, according to a spokesperson, "it was proper and dignified to use the seat of our government and the White House itself as a place to render the apology. (...) [The] White House itself is the people's house."¹¹ At other moments, even where the politician has visited a site of a massacre, such as the German Development Minister's apology for the Herero genocide, it is offered on a stage. There are good reasons for state apologies to be offered in formal settings; for one, it gives the statement gravitas and makes it suitably formal. But note the power relations: the politician is surrounded by the iconography and grandeur of power. If the apology is in the national parliament, then it is on the politician's own turf and any victims or descendants are onlooking guests. There is a potentially particularly vexing irony in the case of colonial settler states offering apologies in national parliaments (such as Australia's 2008 apology to Aboriginal peoples) because, in many respects, the parliament represents the heart of the occupying state's polity. Likewise, if the apology is offered at the site of the wrongdoing, there can be an oddity of the guest taking the stage in other people's domain. In either circumstance, it is the offending state's politician that takes the symbolically elevated position on the stage.

⁹ I analyse some of these characteristics more fully in BENTLEY: *Empires of remorse*, chapter 1.

¹⁰ Continuing until the 1970s, the Tuskegee syphilis experiment entailed the US Public Health Service intentionally leaving syphilis untreated so as to carry out clinical studies. The study was carried out on enrolled African Americans in Tuskegee, Alabama.

¹¹ Quoted in L.M. HARTER, R.J. STEPHENS & P.M. JAPP: 'President Clinton's apology for the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. A narrative of remembrance, redefinition, and reconciliation', in *Howard Journal of Communications* 11 (2000) 19-34, p. 26-27.

2.2. State apologies are pre-prepared and scripted

Second, state apologies are invariably pre-prepared and scripted.¹² Interpersonal apologies may be scripted and written down, but they are not *necessarily* so; they may be off-the-cuff, unexpected and given with a sudden passion. This is not how political apologies operate. Political apologies are set-piece events, meticulously planned and staged. There are several implications of this. First, such scripted narratives allow for carefully conceived caveats that enable the state to limit and sanitise its responsibility. Indeed, given that the text is pre-prepared, it will doubtlessly have been read by lawyers who can help ensure that the text does not unduly expose the state to legal claims from the recipients of the apology. Such caveats mean that the text will likely contain deliberate ambiguities about responsibility, the use of the passive voice and the use of euphemism. Second, the apologiser has scope to offer a particular narrative of their choosing, either emphasising or deemphasising aspects of the wrongdoing. In making this argument, I am not suggesting that apologising politicians have straightforwardly malign intentions. What I am suggesting is that no politician will make a statement that unnecessarily exposes the state to legal liability. Equally, politicians want to cast their state in the best possible light, and, while they may admit particular wrongdoings, it is rare or even unthinkable to see politicians introspectively look at the underlying structures that created such wrongdoings, especially in relation to nationalism, statism, racism and imperialism.

2.3. The apologiser talks into a microphone

The politician of the transgressing state has their words literally amplified and transmitted across the media. The speaker, who, as a prominent politician, is already famous and, as noted, is surrounded by the iconography of power, has their image and words broadcast to a large audience. Here we ascertain another key contrast with the interpersonal apology: in the face-to-face variety, the apologiser is expected to be demure, have their head lowered and even be meek before the victim. There may be flashes of demureness in the political apology, but this is not the overriding sensation. Rather, unlike the private face-to-face apology, the politician is a public performer and the focus of attention; he (in gendered

¹² See LAZARE: *On apology* 40.

terms) exhibits magnanimity, there is a kind of bravado, he rises above petty political squabbling, he is a moral arbiter, he does what is right by the country. In this respect, he revels in speaking for the country, both past and present. This is, I think, why a certain personality of politician is more partial than others to expressing political regret: I'm thinking of David Cameron, Justin Trudeau, Tony Blair – politicians who are comfortable with the stage and camera, at ease with expressing emotionalised sentiments, keen to emphasise their magnanimity and, to some degree, are perceptibly vacuous.¹³ This is in contrast to other politicians who, because of their particular personality traits, may not be so comfortable with the emotionalised performance of expressing regret. It is also in contrast to the current wave of right-wing populist leaders who, despite their propensity for the limelight, cannot countenance admitting their state's wrongdoing and view apology as a form of weakness.

2.4. The indistinct audience

Where the speaking politician is easily identifiable, has the camera trained on him (and is trained for the camera) and speaks from a stage, the recipient, by contrast, can be more difficult to identify. A key reason for this is because political apologies are frequently for historical crimes where the primary victims have long since died (or were killed in the actual crime). Moreover, in political apologies it can be difficult to ascertain who exactly is the intended recipient of the apology. Take, for example, British Prime Minister David Cameron's 2010 apology for the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry, Northern Ireland. Is the apology primarily for the immediate relatives of those killed? How about cousins and uncles and aunts? Is the apology for people who were on the march but not killed or wounded? Is it for the people of Derry? The nationalist community of Northern Ireland? The people of the island of Ireland? A close reading of the apology does not give a clear-cut answer to such questions.¹⁴ Equally, where there are survivors, the fact that there are multiple survivors can create confusion because each will have a different relationship with the wrongdoing and different, and perhaps

¹³ For a discussion of political, personal and apology, see M. CUNNINGHAM: 'Apologies in Irish politics. A commentary and critique', in *Contemporary British History* 18/4 (2004) 80-92.

¹⁴ See BENTLEY: *Empires of remorse*, chapter 5.

conflicting, response to the apology. There is thereby a contrast between the laser-like focus on the lone apologising politician with their singular narrative and the multiple victims, who have less media attention, different narratives of the past and varying interpretations of the apology. As such, even with the best of intentions, the story becomes told about and, to some degree, appropriated by the politician. Again, we observe problematic power relations that are, to say the least, sub-optimal.

Examining the features of the state apology ritual, one garners a taste of the entailing power relations. Doubtlessly, one can certainly point to ‘bad’ political apologies, just as there can be unsatisfactory apologies in the interpersonal context. But I want to go a step further and say that political apologies are *necessarily* problematic. By this I mean that the innate structure of the political apology is pre-disposed to creating a hierarchical power relationship whereby the wrongdoer enacts power over the wronged. Such an unequal power relationship is reproduced in the very formula by which the apology operates; the dominant speaking position, the necessarily legalistic and sanitising discourses and the fact that the story of the wrongdoing is articulated by a politician representing the transgressor state.¹⁵ As I argue in the next section, however, such hegemony is far from complete and is more brittle than may seem at first glance.

3. THE TRANSGRESSING STATE’S ENDURING ANXIETY

The chapter has, thus far, shone a light on the structure of political apology and how this reproduces dominant power relations. I want to say that it is more complex than this. I wish to argue that the very grounds for such hegemonic and hierarchical relations sow the seeds for its own subversion. This is not an uncommon argument when thinking about power relations. For Marx, it is the very qualities of capitalism that make it so fantastically all-encompassing that also provide the basis for its own unravelling. For certain postcolonial theorists – Frantz Fanon in particular – it is the coloniser’s hubris and debasement of the subaltern that ultimately also debases the coloniser.¹⁶ For feminists, patriarchy creates a form of masculinity that is simultaneously oppressive and fragile. I am, I recognise, making a less grandiose point about political apologies,

¹⁵ I develop this argument further in T. BENTLEY: ‘Colonial apologies and the problem of the transgressor speaking’, in *Third World Quarterly* 39/3 (2018) 399–417.

¹⁶ F. FANON: *The wretched of the Earth* (New York 1963).

but I wish to persevere with the argument: many of the factors that make the political apology a hegemonic ritual simultaneously make it a ritual that exposes the state to further subversion.

Allow me to return to Derrida for a moment. To recall, Derrida postulates that political apologies resemble the Christian confession. And, of course, one of the core characteristics of the confession is that the priest, if the ritual is adequately performed, grants the penitent absolution. There may be no priest in the interpersonal apology, but there is a clear interlocutor who can pass judgement on the apology and agree that the matter is resolved. Political apologies do not and cannot have similar resolatory judgements passed on them.¹⁷ This means that the contrite state cannot be conferred clear absolution, cannot have its legitimacy given a clean bill of health and is impelled to offer further (necessarily problematic) apologies. In the remainder of the chapter, I itemise the ways in which the very factors that boost the authority of the apologising state also display its vulnerabilities.

3.1. Contrasting victim positions

Political apologies, as noted in the previous section, tend to be offered by a single person to multiple people. The problem that the state encounters here is that, when the apology is offered to a number of people, there will inevitably be a diverse range of responses. It is possible that some relatives of those killed will accept the apology, but one cannot expect a uniform response; it is inevitable that some will reject or be ambivalent about the apology. Indeed, I elsewhere show that victims can have such opposing positions about a given apology that it can create schisms among the community that campaigned for justice.¹⁸ To this end, unlike as offered by the priest in the confession or the interlocutor in the interpersonal apology, there cannot be a single definitive response from the wronged community. As such, the wrongdoer cannot have their conscience soothed because, even if some accept it, others will turn their backs on the apology.

¹⁷ I explore in more detail the implications of the absence of a priest or higher authority in political apologies in BENTLEY: 'Settler state apologies'.

¹⁸ T. BENTLEY: 'When is a justice campaign over? Transitional Justice, 'overing' and Bloody Sunday', in *Cooperation and conflict* (forthcoming).

3.2. The compromised authority to accept the apology

Not only is there a diverse array of recipients with contrasting positions, there is a problem that there is frequently not one clear person authorised to accept or reject the apology. It has already been noted that the politician is elevated in the apology and has their words and images widely disseminated. By contrast, the multiple recipients have less of a media presence. At first glance, this is empowering for the wrongdoing state. Yet one of the implications of a muted audience is that there is not a clear person to accept the apology and thereby absolve the wrongdoer. Indeed, an apology requires an interlocutor to redeem the transgressor. But without a clear interlocutor, the politician is, to some degree, apologising into a void; there is neither a priest to absolve the penitent nor a clear victim to complete the speech act and vocally accept the apology.

One might think that such an analysis may be straying into the domain of academic overthinking, with little purchase on the concrete realities of political interchange. Yet it is observable that states have gone to some lengths to counter exactly this problem. In doing so, there is an emerging phenomenon of a representative of the wronged group being invited to the stage to respond to the apology. For instance, immediately following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's 2017 apology to Labrador Residential School survivors,¹⁹ the master of ceremonies of the event (for want of a better word) announced: "I would now like to welcome Toby Obed to the stage to accept the apology on behalf of the former students".²⁰ In another example, Japan's 2015 apology to former comfort women entailed the South Korean Foreign Minister sharing the stage with the apologising Japanese Foreign Minister and, in a prepared text, agreeing that "the issue is resolved finally and irreversibly with this announcement".²¹

Of the two cases, clearly the Canadian example is the least problematic. Toby Obed is himself a survivor of the residential school system,

¹⁹ The Canadian residential school system was a colonial enterprise with the objective of assimilating Indigenous children into settler culture through the use of boarding schools. They were sites of grave abuses, with the system operating into the 1990s.

²⁰ Full Apology Ceremony for Labrador Residential School Survivors, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kg4pYIQK6cY> [last accessed October 2020].

²¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2015) 'Announcement by Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea at the joint press occasion', https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000364.html [last accessed October 2020].

and clearly it is his prerogative to accept or reject Trudeau's apology. But how can he "accept the apology on behalf of the former students"? Even in attending the same residential school, different students will undoubtedly have different experiences, and clearly some will have different opinions about the apology from Obed's. Moreover, sadly, many former students are dead, so cannot express an opinion on the apology. As for the comfort women apology: there is a bitter irony in the sexist act of a male politician speaking on behalf of women regarding crimes that themselves emerged through the very structure of patriarchy. How can Foreign Minister Yun Byung Se know that the apology resolved the issue for the surviving former comfort women? In fact, on visiting a home for comfort women survivors shortly after the apology, the South Korean Vice Foreign Minister received a public scolding from a survivor, Lee Yong Soo, who accused him of "trying to kill us twice", asking, "Are you going to live this life for me?".²²

Serious though it unquestionably is, my point goes beyond highlighting that there can be ethical problems of actors accepting apologies on behalf of others. My point is that even where states put someone on the podium to accept the apology, there is inevitably going to be resistance from others who do not accept the apology. This means that declarations that an issue is 'resolved' (such as in the comfort women apology) or implorations to 'draw a line under the event' or 'move on' – sentiments that are near ubiquitous in political apologies – cannot be realised. The state cannot close the chapter and it will face further calls for addressing the past wrongdoing.

3.3. Responding to the sanitised ritual

It was posited in the second section of the chapter that a central implication of the offending state politician holding the microphone is that they have an opportunity to cultivate a narrative that is suitably sanitised, legally prudent and likely to omit certain wrong-doings. Again, at first sight, this is part of the hegemonic edifice of apology. But here the state also encoun-

²² https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=947278581974022&id=193441624024392&refid=52 [last accessed October 2020]. As Soh writes, "'Comfort women' refers to tens of thousands of young women of various nationalities and social circumstances who became sexual laborers for the Japanese troops before and during World War II". C.S. SOH: 'Human rights and the comfort women', in *Peace Review* 12/1 (2000) 123-129, p. 123.

ters problems: first, just because this is the narrative articulated, this does not mean that the audience pliantly internalises and endorses such a message. Indeed, in Emma Dolan's work on political apologies, she draws on Judith Butler's notion of 'excitable speech' to demonstrate that apologies, once articulated, can no longer be controlled by the speaker.²³ In other words, the speaker may choose the words of the apology, but they no longer own them once they have left their mouth; the narrative can be interpreted in different ways, subverted or mocked in ways unanticipated by the speaker. Take, for example, an apology from Japanese Emperor Akihito to South Korea: advisers drafted a statement using the terms '*kokoro*' (heart) and '*owabi*' (apology). As Jane Yamazaki shows, "unfortunately, the phrase 'my heart aches' of the first draft was translated into a Korean phrase commonly used in karaoke (popular singalong genre) to express one's feelings when one has lost one's lover".²⁴ Thus, rather than achieving the speaker's goal of a suitably solemn message, the statement was ridiculed in the Korean media and became an object of mockery.²⁵ Similarly, the comedy television show *South Park* mocked BP CEO Tony Hayward's apologies following a 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico by ridiculing its perceived faux-sincerity in a montage of increasingly preposterous sentimental apologies.²⁶ Of course, it does not need to be mockery; audiences can utilise the speaker's words against him and point to wider disingenuities and hypocrisies within the text.

Finally, apologies are supposed to be last words on events. Leaders are prone to utilising them when there is a clamour to address a wrong and they wish to end public focus on a particular misdeed. To repeat: this is why apologies so frequently contain calls to 'move on' or 'turn the page'. But apologies cannot do this. Apologies create demands for further apologies. When, for example, a British Prime Minister apologises for Bloody Sunday – a massacre in the context of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland – relatives of other people also killed by the state understandably also want apologies. If the Bloody Sunday families deserve an apology, why should the Ballymurphy families not receive one? Why not the relatives of victims

²³ E. DOLAN: *Gender and political apology. When the patriarchal state says 'sorry'* (Oxford forthcoming).

²⁴ J.W. YAMAZAKI: 'Crafting the apology. Japanese apologies to South Korea in 1990', in *Asian Journal of Communication* 14/2 (2004) 146-173, p. 161.

²⁵ YAMAZAKI: 'Crafting the apology'.

²⁶ BP is deeply sorry! (We're sorry) South Park, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15HTd4Um1m4> [last accessed October 2020].

killed through state collusion with loyalist terrorist organisations? Likewise, with the United Kingdom in 2013 offering apologies for its torturous response to the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya, this poses the question as to why other communities that suffered appalling wrongdoing at the hands of the British Empire should not also receive an apology. And it is not only wider wrongdoings; there will be demands for apologies that have already been offered. That is, because existing apologies are inevitably sanitised, it is likely that victims will demand new, better and less compromised apologies. And if there are to be apologies, why should there not be reparations and, where possible, prosecutions? The crux is that apologies beget demands for further apologies – a Pandora's Box, if you will. Moreover, this process can highlight how large-scale violence and massacres, such as in the colonial context, are not the isolated misdemeanours that political leaders frequently frame them as. Instead, victim groups and the wider public are more likely to join the dots to see how such wrongdoings often have their roots in more systematic wrongs, such as racism, imperial expansionism and militarism.

4. CONCLUSION

State apologies for extreme wrongdoing, I have argued, do not and cannot 'end events'. They do not provide a final resolution or close the matter. This is in contrast to apologies in the interpersonal context or even in the religious confession. In the interpersonal domain, there is an interlocutor who can agree that the matter is resolved and accept the request for forgiveness. Likewise, in the confession, a priest can pass judgement and pronounce absolution. There simply is not the capacity for such absolution in the state context. First, there is no single person who can enounce closure because, for others, the wrongdoing certainly will not be resolved. Second, because state apologies are predisposed to being sanitised, there will inevitably be those that contest the apology. Finally, state apology will only elicit further demands for other apologies. In this way, as Dolan demonstrates, the apologising actor, even when offering what might be thought of as a hegemonic apology, begins to lose grip of the narrative and message.²⁷

The argument that apologies do not tidily end events may be disappointing for those who are searching for justice and who may spend

²⁷ E. DOLAN: *Gender and political apology*.

large parts of their lives pursuing state acknowledgement of the crimes committed against them or their loved ones. But I do not mean for this chapter to be entirely pessimistic; the state apology might, at first, seem hegemonic, but it simultaneously reveals a brittleness in the state's narrative and sense of identity. Exactly because the issue cannot be closed, this leaves the door open for victim groups to further subvert state narratives, to make further demands for other forms of recompense, and to strengthen and broaden their networks in the campaign against the entity that did them such harm. The ritual of state apology, in other words, has an ambivalent quality to it: even in putting the state politician in the limelight and inviting her or him to re-craft historical narratives, it leaves these very narratives wide open to contestation and subversion.

RELICS: THE RITUAL ROLE OF TRACES AND REMNANTS

PAUL POST

1. INTRODUCTION: THE BARCA NOSTRA

At the fifty-eighth Biennale for modern art in Venice in 2019, a blue wreck of an old fishing boat adorned the Arsenale quay.¹ The boat was part of the controversial project *Barca Nostra* (Our Ship) by Icelandic/Swiss artist Christoph Büchel.² The wreck displayed in Venice came from one of the largest shipwrecks in the current boat refugee crisis in the Mediterranean that I discussed in the second part of the chapter on refugee rituals.³ The story behind this project and this wreckage offers a good introduction to this chapter about the ritual role of remnants and relics after disasters.

On 18 April 2015, after colliding with a cargo ship near the Libyan coast, an old fishing boat, overloaded with refugees, sank.⁴ Only twenty-seven survivors were rescued from the water. Hundreds of others died in and around the ship; most had been locked up in the ship's hold. The precise number of fatalities is still unclear, with estimates ranging

¹ This contribution uses material from a long-standing research project on refugee rituals; see, for more details and references, P. POST: 'The Lampedusa tragedy. Chronicles of absent and emerging ritual repertoires', in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek/Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* 31 (2015) 19-43; P. POST: 'Refugee rituals. Exploring ritual repertoire of victimhood', in M. HOONDEERT, P. MUTSAERS & W. AREFMAN (eds.): *Cultural practices of victimhood* (London/New York 2018) 55-80; P. POST: 'The Lampedusa Cross en andere relieken en krachtoorwerpen van grensdoden', in P. POST & S. VAN DER BEEK (eds.): *Relieken. De actualiteit van krachtoorwerpen* (= Camino Cahier 4) (Utrecht 2019) 33-45, <https://www.caminoacademie.nl/camino-cahiers/camino-cahier-4-relieken-de-actualiteit-van-krachtoorwerpen/>; P. POST: *Rituele herbestedding als Recasting. Rituele dynamiek voorbij inculturatie en syncretisme* (valedictory lecture, Tilburg University 2019).

² <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2019/partecipants/christoph-b%C3%BCchel> [last accessed October 2019]; cf. POST: *Rituele herbestedding* (Tilburg 2019).

³ Cf. POST: 'Refugee ritual', chapter 16 in this volume.

⁴ POST: 'Refugee ritual'.

between seven and nine hundred. Unlike the follow-up to many other shipwrecks, in this case the Italian government decided to salvage the ship and try to identify the victims, an operation that ended up costing millions of euros. In June 2016, the ship was lifted and landed with the bodies in the hold at the Melilli naval base, near Augusta in Sicily. There the bodies were removed from the vessel and DNA samples were taken. After the time-consuming investigation to identify the bodies, the wreck was turned over to the Augusta municipality.

The wreck attracted special attraction. As the tangible remains of one of the largest shipwrecks with refugees on board in the Mediterranean, it became a symbol of the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. From the moment the wreck was brought ashore, interested parties made plans to save it from being demolished. Various strategies were developed to preserve the ship as a monument. Photographs of the lifted wreckage were put into circulation with the text: “Barca nostra: a monument for the EU / un monumento per l’EU”. This photo caption introduced the name that would later provide the title for the project at the Biennale: *Barca Nostra*. This designation is an allusion to the EU’s Mare Nostrum initiative to rescue ships in distress on the southern border of ‘Fortress Europe’,⁵ a controversial project that had been discontinued in 2015 due to political and financial pressure a short time before the *Barca Nostra* disaster. In Augusta, the local *Comitato 18 Aprile* (18 April Committee) was set up to preserve the memory of the *Barca Nostra* disaster and keep the boat intact and to develop a variety of initiatives aimed at, among other things, recognizing the wreck as a monument. The plan was to set up a *giardino della memoria* (memorial garden) to provide the wreck with a prominent place to be displayed. A year earlier a similar plan had been made for a memorial garden on Lampedusa, and on the coast near a nature reserve such a garden had, indeed, opened in November 2014. However, the intended 366 trees, recalling the shipwreck of October 2013 with 366 victims, was never realized,⁶ and the garden quickly fell into disrepair. The plan for a garden in Augusta remained controversial. The *Barca Nostra* subsequently ended up being the subject of increasing

⁵ Since 1985, the Schengen Convention has guaranteed open borders within the European Union, but keeps the external borders closed, prompting the term ‘Fortress Europe’.

⁶ I described this 2013 disaster in my earlier contribution about the refugee crisis in the second part of this volume.

political debates. Due to the strong rise of populist parties in Italy and, more generally, the unprecedented fierce debate about migration in Europe, proponents and opponents of closing European borders used the wreck to defend their positions. From 2016, the call in Italy not to accept refugees and not to accept survivors from rescue operations at sea grew louder and louder. In that context, Prime Minister Matteo Renzi proposed in 2016 to take the *Barca Nostra* ship to Brussels as a warning of the ‘migration scandal’. However, in July 2017, a new plan for the *Barca Nostra* emerged in Milan. The *Laboratorio di Antropologia e Odontologia Forense* at the University of Milan wanted to give the ship a place in a human rights museum to be established in the *Città Studi*. The municipality made 600,000 euros available for this initiative, but this plan also failed. In 2018, a group that campaigned for migrants in Palermo claimed the ship as “an act of symbolic and political appropriation”. They wanted to give it a central role in what was called a ‘European procession’ in the tradition of boat processions, more specifically, the Santa Rosalia sea procession in Palermo. The procession then symbolized victory over death through the ship that represented the disaster. Reference was also made to the legendary ghost ship *The Flying Dutchman*. Thus, the *Barca Nostra* would become a new ghost ship haunting the shores of Europe as a protest against the large-scale violation of human rights in European migration policy.⁷

Christoph Büchel was also fascinated by the *Barca Nostra*. He and his staff managed to get the Augusta authorities to turn the ship over to him in April 2019 for the Biennale project, thereby designating the wreck as an art project in the Venice Biennale. The plan to incorporate the *Barca Nostra* in the Venice Biennale had been controversial ever since it had been announced, but it also attracted considerable attention. What is now striking when reviewing the many discussions on this initiative in the media, blogs, and the like is how frequently the wreck was referred to as a ‘relic’.⁸ For example, the wreck was referred to as a “relic of

⁷ Cf. <http://www.atoll-uk.com/writing/barca-nostra/> [last accessed May 2019].

⁸ Cf. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/after-mosque-row-christoph-buechel-returns-to-the-venice-biennale-with-migrant-shipwreck>; <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/after-mosque-row-christoph-buechel-returns-to-the-venice-biennale-with-migrant-shipwreck>; <http://www.atoll-uk.com/writing/barca-nostra/>; <https://www.designboom.com/art/christoph-buechel-barca-nostra-boat-venice-art-biennale-05-09-2019/>; <https://www.widewalls.ch/barca-nostra-christoph-buechel-ship-venice-biennale/>; <http://www.artnews.com/2019/05/06/in-venice-christoph-buechel-will-show-ship-that-sank-in->

human tragedy”,⁹ the project as “a relic of a human tragedy but also a monument to contemporary migration, engaging real and symbolic borders and the (im)possibility of freedom of movement of information and people”,¹⁰ a “*relitto simbolo delle tragedie del mare*” (a wreck symbol of the tragedies at sea),¹¹ a “*reliquia tragica*” (a tragic relic),¹² and a “*relitto della morte*” (wreck of death).¹³ It is interesting to note that the plan for a garden still exists: in Augusta people continue to hope for a memorial garden with the returned *Barca Nostra* constituting a prominent part.

In this chapter, I explore this type of ‘new relic’ that emerged in the context of the Mediterranean refugee tragedy. Before discussing various forms of such relics, I briefly discuss the phenomenon of relics. At the end I formulate some reflections regarding central elements, such as materiality, names, and traces. The refugee relics are a current example of the important role of remnants and traces in ritual processes after disasters and tragedies.

2. RELICS AS ‘OBJECTS WITH POWER’

Labeling the *Barca Nostra* a ‘relic’ involves more than just the use of a metaphor. The relic phenomenon is reused and recast in the *Barca Nostra* project. Elsewhere I worked out the process of appropriating objects and spaces in a new way and introduced the terminology of ritual reusing as recasting.¹⁴

mediterranean-killing-hundreds-of-migrants/; <https://www.bonculture.it/news-comunicati/barca-nostra-alla-biennale-il-barcone-della-strage-dei-700/>; <https://www.themakermagazine.com/art/a-relic-of-human-tragedy-at-venezia-biennale>; https://www.open.online/arte-e-spettacolo/2019/05/07/news/il_relitto_del_canale_di_sicilia_su_cui_morirono_1_000_rifugiati_alla_biennale_di_venezia_le_foto-208415/ [all last accessed May 2019].

⁹ <https://www.themakermagazine.com/art/a-relic-of-human-tragedy-at-venezia-biennale> [last accessed May 2019].

¹⁰ *ArchiPanic. Architecture & design magazine*, 8 May 2019.

¹¹ *Repubblica*, 5 May 2019, https://rep.repubblica.it/pwa/generale/2019/05/05/news/migranti-225550578/?refresh_ce [last accessed May 2019].

¹² <https://mediterraneomigrante.it/2019/05/08/58-biennale-di-venezia-reliquia-tragica-la-barca-nostra-di-christoph-buchel-approda-allarsenale/> [last accessed May 2019].

¹³ According to *La Gazzetta Augustana*, 6 May 2019, <https://www.lagazzettaaugustana.it/augusta-il-relitto-della-morte-alla-biennale-di-venezia-barca-nostra-il-titolo-del-progetto-di-buchel/> [last accessed May 2019].

¹⁴ POST: *Rituele herbestemming*.

Before giving more examples of the process of recasting relics and, thus, further exploring the ritual role of relics and remnants in the context of the refugee crisis and disasters in general, I will first briefly address the phenomenon of relics. In a strict sense, relics are remnants (Latin: *reliquiae*), mostly of saints who are worshiped in a religious context (cf. especially Christianity, but also Hinduism and Buddhism).¹⁵ However, we can also view the phenomenon more broadly and connect it with objects with power.¹⁶ Relics, therefore, can be recast in a variety of contexts as meaningful and powerful objects for groups or individuals. The same can be done with remnants of a disaster or tragedy. A major initiative after a disaster, or during a disaster that occurs slowly over time, is the process of gathering the materials left behind to serve as remnants and traces of the tragedy. This is especially the case if primary or ‘first class’ relics, that is, the bodies of victims, are absent. The role of objects is varied. Objects can mark the location of the disaster. Remnants can be developed into monuments or locations for memorials. The ritual memorial function of ruins is well-known. After an attack or bombing, certain buildings, often a church or a tower, are excluded from reconstruction efforts and, instead, are designated the prominent symbolic status as a ruin. Such ruins were established after World War II in Berlin, Dresden, and Hiroshima. Ruins, as relics, express the complexity of feelings that keep the memory of the disaster alive. In his study of ‘shadowed landscapes’ in the United States, Ken Foote showed how dynamic

¹⁵ ‘Relics’, in L. JONES (ed.): *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Detroit 2005²) 7686-7692 (J.S. STRONG 1987/2005); A. ANGENENDT: *Heilige und Reliquien. Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart* (München 1994); J. BENTLEY: *Restless bones. The story of relics* (London 1985); P. BORGEAUD & Y. VOLOKHINE (eds.): *Les objets de la mémoire. Pour une approche comparatiste des reliques et de leur culte* (= Studia Religiosa Helvetica 10-11) (Bern 2005); M. GIBSON: ‘Death and the transformation of objects and their value’, in *Thesis Eleven* 103/1 (2010) 54-64; C. HAHN & H.A. KLEIN (eds.): *Saints and sacred matter. The cult of relics in Byzantine and beyond* (Washington DC 2015); S. HOOPER: ‘A cross-cultural theory of relics. On understanding religion, bodies, artefacts, images and art’, in *WorldArt* 4/2 (2014) 175-207; K.-H. KOHL: *Die Macht der Dinge. Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte* (München 2003); G. SCHOPEN: ‘Relic’, in M.C. TAYLOR (ed.): *Critical terms for religious studies* (Chicago 1998) 256-268; I. SCHRIEMER (ed.): *Relieken, catalogus Museum Catharijneconvent* (Utrecht/Zwolle 2018), particularly the following chapters: J. RAAIJMAKERS: ‘Tastbaar, herkenbaar, controversieel. De rol van relieken in religie en cultuur’, 6-13; M. DE NOOD: ‘Heilige helden en de oorbellen van oma. Over hedendaagse ‘huis-tuin-en-keuken’ en andere relieken’, 74-81.

¹⁶ Cf. H. LEIJTEN: *From idol to art. African ‘objects-with-power’. A challenge for missionaries, anthropologists and museum curators* (Leiden 2015).

the role of relics and remnants of a disaster or tragedy can be.¹⁷ They represent the extremes of sanctification and obliteration (and all varieties in between) by either cherishing and setting apart the place of the tragedy or achieving the opposite: concealing and suppressing it. Various dynamics have been at play with these relics throughout time. Remnants that serve as a reminder of a disaster can, depending on the context of time and place, be appropriated in multiple ways and assigned varying positions in rituals.

Material memories of disasters or tragedies gained value after interest in the material culture as part of cultural studies, ritual studies, and religious studies emerged. Some people observe here a 'material turn'.¹⁸ As mentioned, relics are intermediaries, like objects with power. They share the general relationship of objects with power with what is of great value and importance for individuals and groups, as they mediate and facilitate that relationship. In the case of relics, the mediation is focused on the context of commemoration and death rites. The central role of both, objects with power and relics, is that of an intermediary. The mediation can be focused on a person, but also on an object, a place, or an event. Often it involves an interplay of all these elements of mediation, as we see in relics in the original religious context (cf. the wood of the cross as mediation of the person of Christ, the cross, the crucifixion, and Golgotha, or Calvary).

Mediation through relics takes place through various appropriations in which myths and rites play a central role. The object is given a place in stories and rituals. The mediation process is often accompanied by special design, and often relics become art objects. Here we see the important aesthetic dimension of the material memorial culture.

In the study of traditional religious relics as objects with power, some central functions come to the fore,¹⁹ which can be classified into four clusters: (1) commemorating and remembering; (2) expression of certain emotions, such as respect, devotion, compassion, or sadness; (3) transferring healing and help, protective, saving power; and (4) the mediation

¹⁷ K. FOOTE: *Shadowed ground. America's landscapes of violence and tragedy* (Austin 2003²); K. FOOTE: 'Shadowed ground, sacred place. Reflections on violence, tragedy, memorials and public commemorative rituals,' in P. POST & A.L. MOLENDIJK (eds.): *Holy Ground. Re-inventing ritual space in modern western culture* (= Liturgia condenda 24) (Leuven 2010) 93-118.

¹⁸ B. MEYER: *Material religion* (London 2012).

¹⁹ See literature mentioned in our note 15.

of power. Relics and objects can confirm, maintain, and increase but also contest power.

If we consider the *Barca Nostra* as a recast relic, we recognize these four clusters of elements. The wreck becomes a commemorative object, a way to express feelings and beliefs about the refugee crisis. The remnants of the ship acquire some ‘magical’ allure, critically linked to the power structures of local, regional, national, and EU governments or contested in its ritual role. The aesthetic dimension manifested itself explicitly in Venice through the Biennale setting: it was not only an object with power but also an object of art.

In disasters, I see all kinds of remnants as new forms of relics or recast relics. We see this in many forms and manifestations and, as with religious relics, graduations. For Roman Catholic relics, the graduation refers to primary or first-class, secondary or second-class, and tertiary or third-class relics.²⁰ The remnant may be a primary relic, such as a body or part of the body or ruins from the house where the attack took place. It may also be a more indirect or secondary relic, not the body or the house itself but clothing of the victim or a photo of the disaster site. A tertiary relic is material that was in contact with remnants of a person or an event.

In this context authenticity plays an important role in dealing with relics, both traditional and recast. The value of a relic, related to the functions mentioned, is linked to its authenticity. Parts of the Berlin Wall get a stamp of authenticity. We find ‘real’ ruins after a disaster and reconstructions and replicas. We continually witness debates about the authenticity of remains and ruins. See, for example, the discussion about the rebuilt Dutchbat compound in Srebrenica in Potočari as part of the museum in memory of the 1995 genocide²¹ and the discussions about whether to display the original barracks and railway wagons in Camp Westerbork (the Netherlands).²²

This line of dealing with recast relics in the event of a disaster can be extended to the phenomenon of dark tourism and the (contested) use of remnants as souvenirs.

²⁰ See especially ANGENENDT: *Heilige und Reliquien*. Cf. Th.J. SERAFIN: *The complete relic book* (s.l. 2018) 131s, https://issuu.com/thomasserafin/docs/the_complete_relic_book [last accessed October 2020].

²¹ D. VAN DEN BERG & M. HOONDERT: ‘The Srebrenica Exhibition’, in *Oñati Socio-legal Series* 10, no. 3 (2020) 544-562.

²² Cf. <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/kamp-westerbork-koopt-originele-treinwagons-bd21e7aa/> [last accessed May 2019].

3. RELICS AND THE MEDITERRANEAN REFUGEE TRAGEDY

In the next section I illustrate the role of the (recast) relic in a disaster or tragedy through concrete exponents in the context of the current refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. I briefly discuss two of the clusters pertaining to the function served by the recast relic: material remnants that play a ritual role and a second group of tracing documentation with data, names, and other information.

3.1. Material remnants as relics²³

In the first cluster, first and foremost, the body can be designated as a primary relic. In a general sense, the body plays a central role in disaster rituals. After a disaster, attempts are always made to salvage the bodies of victims. Great efforts are often taken to accomplish this. When a boat traveling through or a plane flying over a body of water goes missing, the authorities spend significant amounts of time searching the sea for victims. If bodies are not salvaged because it is impossible to do so or because those in charge do not want to make the necessary investments to do so, this is experienced as a major loss. Often, it also leads to great anger or indignation. In the introduction of this handbook, I mentioned the trauma of ‘the ambiguous loss’.²⁴ All other forms of recast relics to be discussed can be considered substitutes for this primary relic of the body. Also, new techniques, especially DNA tracing, make it difficult to draw the line between bodily remains as relics or as documentation. Bodies of victims are the direct witnesses to a disaster. They are not only family and community members but also tangible references to the disaster or tragedy. Dead bodies give disasters a face. We also see this in the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. The media know about the thousands of deaths among boat refugees, but the disaster gets a face through recovered bodies. This was true in the case of the shipwreck at Lampedusa in 2013, where 366 boxes stood in front of the cameras. It was also true in 2015 at the *Barca Nostra*, where people realized how many bodies had been in the small boat and had perished. We see this

²³ I presented these new types of recast relics for the first time in the paper ‘The Lampedusa Cross en andere relieken van grensdoden’, on the Utrecht Expert Meeting of the Camino Academie, ‘Relieken. De actualiteit van krachtvoorwerpen’ (Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht 23 November 2018). Cf. POST: ‘The Lampedusa Cross’.

²⁴ Ambiguous loss, see Paul Post in the Introduction to this handbook, p. 43-44.

also when bodies wash ashore everywhere on coasts and beaches. However, most ‘border deaths’ do not leave a body behind, so rituals are mainly absent from these ongoing disasters. There are no bodies to honor, to remember, to bury, or to commemorate. The absence of primary relics, then, encourages replacement relics, the search for and creation or invention of recast secondary and tertiary relics.

Parallel to what we see with saints, clothing is also a secondary relic in the case of border deaths in the absence of the body or in addition to the body. In her art project *Suspended* in 2017 and 2018, Arabella Dorman hung a huge cloud of clothing that refugees left behind in Lesbos in (church) spaces. The Chinese artist Ai Weiwei covered the Berlin concert hall in 2016 with fourteen thousand life jackets. The red or pink life jacket, in particular, became a powerful relic that mediates the victims of the migrant tragedy. The vest, therefore, plays a prominent role in many protests and manifestations related to the migrant tragedies. Clothing as a relic has a long tradition in and outside of religion. Consider the value attributed to pieces of cloth from Padre Pio’s vestments or the *tunica Christi* (the seamless robe of Jesus) that is revered as *Heilige Rock* in Trier.²⁵ Consider, also, the outfits of pop stars like Elvis Presley or the jerseys of football heroes such as Messi and Ronaldo.

As noted in the description of the recast relic of the *Barca Nostra*, wrecked boats and ships that remain after tragedies at sea also become powerful remnants. In the tradition of preserving ruins as described previously, they are material manifestations of the effect of a tragedy. The stacked wrecks at the port of Lampedusa speak strongly to our imagination. Multiple plans have been made to turn the site into a monument. ‘Authentic’ boats are used for commemorative monuments but also for various forms of manifestations and art projects. The *Barca Nostra* is a striking example, but there are many more. In Amsterdam, for example, *Rederij* (shipping company) *Lampedusa* near the Central Station hosts two authentic refugee boats for “alternative tours and cruises in and around the capital”. This is an initiative of Dutch artist Teun Castelein, who brought two ‘real’ Lampedusa boats as relics to Amsterdam.²⁶ The shipping company owns the two boats, a sloop *Hedir* picked up on

²⁵ *Der Heilige Rock zu Trier. Studien zur Geschichte und Verehrung der Tunika Christi* (Trier 1995).

²⁶ rederijlampedusa.nl [last accessed October 2019].

29 August 2014 off the Sicilian coast and the slightly larger Egyptian ship *Alhadj Djumaa* that left for Lampedusa on 25 July 2013. When these boats were originally positioned in the Amsterdam canal zone, Castelein had many questions. What could be done with them? Can they be used as décor for a theater play with figurants playing a role? These questions led to the initiation of a project that focused on authenticity, experience, and solidarity. Central to the project was the recollection of the experiences and stories of refugees. In the related communication, the shipping company emphasized the inclusion of “real boats” and a “real refugee captain” and a “real refugee guide”. I would consider this a ‘living memory’ project with the key element of the boats as relics.

Another relic and object with power also linked to the wrecks is the *Lampedusa Cross*, widely known as a refugee cross.²⁷ This relic even reached the collection of the British Museum and was displayed there together with precious reliquaries. The *Lampedusa Cross* has been described and analyzed multiple times as a relic. It is an initiative of a local carpenter and furniture maker named Francesco Tuccio in Lampedusa who, in solidarity with the boat refugees, produced crosses from the wood of the wreckage. After receiving local, regional, and national attention (Lampedusa crosses became a permanent part of border death protests and memorial events in Italy), the crosses acquired international significance mainly through the United Kingdom. The connection with the Christian cross and the fact that it is made from ‘real’ stranded wreckages from Lampedusa make it a particularly topical and layered relic, as the analysis of Canadian anthropologist Valentina Napolitano revealed.²⁸

Other objects left behind comprise the final form of recast material relics. Not only clothing, footwear, life jackets, and boats are cherished

²⁷ https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3691920&partId=1&searchText=cross+lampedusa&page=1; <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-35120004> [last accessed November 2018].

²⁸ Cf. POST: ‘Refugee ritual’; V. NAPOLITANO: ‘On the political aesthetics of Lampedusa cross(es)’, paper presented at the conference “Inter-Religious Exchanges. Past and Present. Religion and the City. Inter-Religious Exchanges in Urban Environments”, November 2016; abstract accessed via http://mongol.huji.ac.il/sites/default/files/Napolitano_2016_Abstract.pdf [last accessed July 2021]; V. NAPOLITANO: “On the Touch-Event”. *Social Analysis* 64/4 (2020) 81-99. <https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2020.640405>; cf. V. NAPOLITANO, N. LUZ & N. STADLER: ‘Introduction. Materialities, histories, and the spatialization of State sovereignty’, in *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 6 (2015) 90-97.

as relics, but sometimes all possible remains of boat refugees that can be found on the beaches and coasts. A selection of these objects, such as water bottles, dented teapots, a toothbrush, paper money, and other miscellaneous objects, were brought center stage in the 2014 photo project by Marco Pavan. The title of the project speaks for itself: *Dramatic Stories of Immigration Told Through Objects Left Behind*.²⁹

3.2. In search of documentation: data, numbers, and names

Central to a second cluster of relics, namely documentation, is, again, the diligent search for remains, for traces of drowned refugees. Here, too, we see relics taking numerous forms: among them recorded stories of refugees that have been distributed and stories recorded by those directly involved in the tragedies, such as the experiences of the doctor at Lampedusa, Pietro Bartolo.³⁰ These relics are also associated with photo, film, and video projects, sometimes made by migrants during their journey with their mobile phones, but also by professional filmmakers. The refugee documentary is a special genre that is the focus of its own festivals and prizes, organized by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and others. The (documentary) film has for some time proved to be a powerful medium for documenting disasters and genocides, for gathering data, for giving people who did not leave any material trace a face, and especially for drawing attention to the tragedy and the victims in general. Documentaries that captured the stories of Holocaust survivors achieved these outcomes. Think of the projects by Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah* from 1985 (a nine-hour documentary), and *The Survivors of the Shoah* from Steven Spielberg from 1996.

Impressive is the prize-winning documentary that exposes the events in Lampedusa, *Fuocoammare* (Fire at sea) from Gianfranco Rosi from 2016. At the film's premiere in Berlin in February 2016, after winning prizes such as the Golden Bear in Berlin, the filmmaker spoke extensively about the motives for making the documentary. He revealed that he had to make this film: images were needed to make people face the facts, to create awareness, and to show respect to the dead. In the

²⁹ <https://www.wired.com/2014/05/marc-pavan/> [last accessed October 2019].

³⁰ Bartolo was in 2019 elected as a member of the European Union parliament. Two books on his experiences on Lampedusa were translated in many languages: *Lacrime di sale* (*Salt tears*) (Milan 2016); *Le stelle di Lampedusa* (*The stars of Lampedusa*) (Milan 2018).

interviews this exclamation always returned as a kind of incantation: “The Mediterranean is one large cemetery. This is one of the biggest tragedies that Europe faces since the Holocaust. And we do nothing about it.”³¹

In addition to these narrative forms of documentation, basic direct forms of collecting facts and figures about refugee tragedies also exist. As with the Holocaust and other disasters, tragedies, and genocides, initiatives to collect traces and data in databases have been undertaken. As with the films and documentaries, the underlying purpose for these efforts has been the creation of a monument for those unknown and unseen dead, as evidenced by the various mission statements and statements of executors. Once the material relics are no longer available, people search for data that can provide some means for remembering the dead. If a person’s name is unknown and there is no choice but to use ‘N.N.’, *nomen nescio* (I do not know the name), to identify the person, then data on the individual’s place of death, gender, age, nationality, and country of origin can be used to create some form of recognition of the victim. Setting up such databases is a practice with a ritual dimension and is part of the tradition of showing respect for human remains, as outlined previously via the longstanding tradition of establishing relics as an act of solidarity and compassion. This ritual dimension often involves several such database projects that exist side by side and, thus, represent an element of repetition, as this brief overview of the most important database projects focused on the Mediterranean migrant tragedy illustrates.

3.2.1. *Fortress Europe (1988-2009)*³²

Until February 2016, work was done on the database project of Italian journalist and activist Gabriele del Grande. Through various sources, but especially through journalistic media such as newspapers, a blog from his forum *Fortress Europe* established an online database that recorded basic documentation on refugee deaths in the Mediterranean region. The stored data dates back to 1988 and provides (if available)

³¹ Interview in *De Volkskrant*, 18 February 2016, V9; interview with an overview of some parallel documentary projects in *Vrij Nederland*, 8 October 2016, 60-65.

³² <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com/2006/01/press-review.html> [last accessed October 2019].

the date of death, country of origin, and a brief indication of the fatal event (for example, shipwrecked), as well as the source of the information. The database is still online and mentions more than nineteen thousand deaths in total.

3.2.2. *UNITED List of Deaths (1993ss.)*³³

The *List of Deaths*, also referred to simply as the *List*, is a database initiative of a journalist network: UNITED for International Action, a European network against nationalism, racism, and fascism and in support of migrants, refugees, and minorities. Like almost all such endeavors, this database project is strongly political and action oriented. The heading above the list is an explicit position and exclamation: “The fatal policies of Fortress Europe. No more deaths—time for change.” The database includes a list of “deaths of refugees and migrants due to the restrictive policies of ‘Fortress Europe’” from 1993 onwards. From the first year for which data is recorded, 1993, through 2020, 40,555 documented refugee deaths have been added to the list.

3.2.3. *The Migrants’ Files (2013-2016)*³⁴

In mid-2013 a consortium of journalists from more than fifteen countries introduced a database project titled *The Migrants’ Files*. The group started the database on the first of January in the year 2000 with the objective of primarily recording facts about migrants who had died while attempting to reach Europe without incorporating any emotional elements by counting the dead as accurately as possible. Data collection for *The Migrants’ Files* stopped on 24 June 2016. In the words of the project overseers, the goal was “to acquire reliable, comprehensive data on the deaths of migrants seeking to enter Europe”. Project representatives said data collection was stopped because the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UNHCR had been gathering data through separate initiatives since 2014.

³³ <http://unitedagainstreftugeedeaths.eu/about-the-campaign/about-the-united-list-of-deaths/> [last accessed October 2019].

³⁴ <https://www.themigrantsfiles.com/> [last accessed October 2019].

3.2.4. UNHCR³⁵

The international refugee organization of the United Nations has a long tradition of monitoring refugee flows and their victims by region and charting their numbers to the degree possible. The UNHCR has a series of operational portals online to zoom in on crisis regions, one of which is the ‘Mediterranean situation’. The datasets of the UNHCR have been criticized by those involved in other database projects and by experts because the statistics offered only provide an initial summary and provide figures without indicating the methodology employed for data collection and processing and without presenting underlying data.

3.2.5. IOM, *The Missing Migrants Project* (2014ss.)³⁶

One organization in particular that has criticized the figures provided by the UNHCR is the IOM, an intergovernmental organization that has close links with the UNHCR. The IOM pays significant attention to migration statistics, including those pertaining to deaths and disappearances since 2014. The IOM has a special *Migration Data Portal*³⁷ that makes available a series of global datasets about migration and refugees, about deaths and disappearances, and also about abuse. The IOM is responsible for the worldwide *Missing Migrants Project*.

Information on this project, which was started in 2014, can be accessed directly via the project’s website and through the IOM website. This project maintains records of migrants who are missing as well as those who have died. The data for this project is provided by the IOM, national authorities, and a variety of media sources. Data on a specific region, in our case, for example, the Mediterranean, can be obtained through the general portal of the *Missing Migrants Project*.³⁸ The IOM continually assesses the project’s method of documentation and works to improve it. The project database also elaborates on certain themes, such as missing migrant children via the “Fatal Journeys” series.

³⁵ General statistics: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/#>; Europe/Mediterranean sea: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean> [last accessed October 2019].

³⁶ <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/> [last accessed October 2019].

³⁷ https://migrationdataportal.org/?i=stock_abs_&t=2019 [last accessed October 2019].

³⁸ <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean> [last accessed October 2019].

3.2.6. *Human Costs of Border Control (1990-2013)*³⁹

The last database project of note is the *Human Costs of Border Control or Border Deaths* project, an initiative of Amsterdam professor of migration law Thomas Spijkerboer. This database is directly linked to an academic research project examining the relationship between border management and border deaths in Europe. The objective of this “Deaths at the Borders Database” was to develop “a first collection of official, state-produced evidence of people who died while trying to reach southern EU countries from the Balkans, the Middle East, and North and West Africa, and whose bodies were found in or brought to Europe”. Documentation was collected and published in datasets and maps obtained through local authorities in Italy, Malta, Spain, Greece, and Gibraltar for the period 1 January 1990 to 31 December 2013. This database, therefore, has much stricter parameters than those mentioned previously: missing people are not included, and the project generates data strictly based on formal and official sources.⁴⁰ In short, this dataset does not rely on media information. As mentioned, this project is closely intertwined with research into the consequences of migration policy and is associated with publications and symposia in addition to the database. Interviews and publications indicate that in this case, compassion with the refugee tragedy is also an important incentive. Spijkerboer indicated that he wants “to set up a monument” for the dead through his project and research.⁴¹

4. SOME REFLECTIONS

Finally, I take stock of some central elements in the ritual role of relics and remnants: the role of materiality, of names, and of traces, and through those themes the basic function of the ritual as paying attention to specific events and current tendencies in our memorial culture.

4.1. Materiality

The two clusters of relics, material remains and documentation and data, at first glance appear very different. The first pertains to objects,

³⁹ <https://www.borderdeaths.org/> [last accessed October 2019].

⁴⁰ T. LAST [et al.]: ‘Deaths at the Borders database. Evidence of deceased migrants’ bodies found along the southern external borders of the European Union’, in *Journal of Ethics and Migration Studies* 43/5 (2017) 693-712.

⁴¹ POST: ‘The Lampedusa tragedy’ 36.

and the second manifests itself in stories and datasets available mainly online. However, similarities and close relationships exist between the two. In both clusters I see two dimensions or phases in which the ritual dimension manifests itself. The first involves, in a general sense, the search for traces and remains in order to bring attention to the tragedy and the victims. I will return to those key words (traces, paying attention) and elaborate on them separately. A second dimension or phase is how people deal with the relics, as objects or as data and names. Completely in line with the small phenomenology of relics and power objects that we discussed at the start of this chapter, the remains and traces are included in stories and practices: they are cherished, set apart, and surrounded with special attention, for example, by giving them a role in art projects. In that process, we see that also data and documentation are materialized and placed in the tradition of material relics, such as wrecks, clothing, life jackets, and similar items. The project mentioned previously, *The List*, was materialized by the Turkish artist Banu Cennetoğlu in an art project that was exhibited on ad boards in various cities beginning in 2007. In this way in 2018 nearly thirty-six thousand names of perished and lost refugees were presented in Leeuwarden,⁴² and earlier that was the case in Amsterdam, Athens, Basel, Istanbul, Sofia, Bonn, Milan, Los Angeles, Berlin, London, and Barcelona as well.⁴³ This ritual of presenting names is common after disasters and tragedies: the names of the victims become central to monuments, places, and objects. The Holocaust, for example, is commemorated in many ways through recorded names and data. The names can be found in handwritten books and on the walls of memorial sites. Construction recently started in Amsterdam on a large Holocaust name monument designed by Daniel Libeskind, which will contain the name of every documented Dutch Holocaust victim on its 102,000 bricks.⁴⁴ The international *Stolpersteine* project of Gunter Demnig is known for placing handmade stones, stumbling stones, with the name and life dates of Holocaust victims everywhere in cities of Europe.⁴⁵ After the MH17 disaster, the names of the victims were mentioned in the commemorative ritual on 10 November

⁴² <http://www.iepenup.nl/events/the-list-lijst-reading-the-names-2018/> [last accessed March 2019].

⁴³ <http://www.list-e.info/liste-hakkinda.php?l=en> [last accessed May 2019].

⁴⁴ <https://www.holocaustnamenmonument.nl/nl/holocaust-namenmonument/nieuws/> [last accessed March 2019].

⁴⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stolperstein> [last accessed November 2019].

2014 and also projected on screens during the ceremony and later materially represented on the monument. Again and again, we see the names of the dead in stone: the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC and the 9/11 monument in New York City are two additional examples.

4.2. Names

The names, written down, part of online datasets, and presented in objects and monuments, are a central part of the disaster ritual and, more generally, of the commemorative repertoire. This is an age-old tradition. In the Jewish and Christian faiths, many texts and traditions indicate the importance of cherishing the names of the dead. Well known is the narrative that everyone's name is written in the palm of God's hand (Isaiah 49:15-16, cf. 56:5; Exodus 1:1: "These are the names (...)"). The World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem *Yad Vashem* literally means 'hand/memorial and name' and refers to Isaiah 56:5: "to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever" (translation from New International Version).

Stemming from the same tradition, the ritual of the litany involves the ritual naming of names of saints and the deceased, which takes multiple modern forms. For example, following the fight against dictatorships in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, the names of the fallen comrades were mentioned, after which *presente* (present) sounds, or the reading of the names of victims of disasters and tragedies occurred every year during a memorial service.⁴⁶

The practices around names also reflect the tendencies of the current commemoration culture. Due to the strong rise of interdisciplinary research into the memorial culture, many valuable studies are available.⁴⁷ What we see is that the use of names fits in well with the current trend to make memorial rituals more personal by connecting them with personal stories about the victims. This creates an interesting double tendency:

⁴⁶ A. STOCK: 'Litanieën', in P. POST & M. BARNARD (eds.): *Ritueel bestek. Antropologische kernwoorden van de liturgie* (Zoetermeer 2001) 303-315.

⁴⁷ A.-J. BIJSTERVELD: 'Creating commemorative communities. Remembering the Holocaust in the 21st-century Netherlands', in T. SCHILP & C. HORCH (eds.): *Memoria – Erinnerungskultur – Historismus* (Turnhout 2019) 315-330.

collective commemoration goes hand in hand with individual, and private with public. Particularly when it concerns generations that have not experienced a tragedy or disaster themselves, there is a strong urge to connect with the experiences of victims in the form of living memories that provide experienced connections with that past. Reconstructing personal life stories starting from a name appears to be an appropriate way, certainly if that story can be linked to a specific place, such as a house or street. A striking example is the *Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands*. That started as a database set up by Professor Isaac Lipschitz (1930-2008), and it became a dataset that formed an online monument with data from all 104,000 victims of the Holocaust in the Netherlands, the *joodsmonument.nl* that was published in 2005.⁴⁸ Later, in 2010, a digital community was added to the monument. The monument presents the names, and behind each name historical facts are shown about the person and the family. The monument shows the interplay of individual and collective, of private and public. One can trace victims individually and participate collectively in the interactive community. One can also speak of a double individualization: via the database an individual is commemorated by an individual online.

It has already been pointed out that there is also tension and contestation in all of this, especially in the tendency towards the 'living memory'⁴⁹ and in the interaction of individual and collective and private and public. There always seem to be limits to updating or making the repertoire relevant. The wish to include the current refugee crisis in Holocaust or World War I and World War II commemorations is often a bridge too far for many, and presenting individual life stories with family details in the public domain is offensive to some. For example, the aforementioned digital *joodsmonument.nl* met opposition precisely because of individual data being made available in the public domain of the web.

⁴⁸ Cf. POST: 'From site to site. The digital monument to the Jewish community in the Netherlands', in P. POST, P. NEL & W. VAN BEEK (eds.): *Sacred spaces and contested identities. Space and ritual dynamics in Europe and Africa* (Trenton 2014) 345-359; L. FARO: *Postponed monuments in the Netherlands. Manifestation, context, and meaning* (PhD Dissertation: Tilburg University 2015) chapter 4.

⁴⁹ P. POST: 'Living memory tussen Zivielreligiös herdenken, kunst, healing en attractie. Over de meervoudige identiteit van een Holocaustmonument', in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek/Yearbook for Liturgical and Ritual Studies* 27 (2011) 87-111.

4.3. Traces of the dead

The search for documentation of victims, as we saw in the lists of dead and/or missing refugees, as “a queeste” (quest) for traces of the dead was aptly expressed by Amsterdam forensic anthropologist Amade M’charek. In a 2019 public lecture and in interviews, she said she collected traces of the dead refugees.⁵⁰ She explicitly pointed to the Tunisian coast, where bodies of boat refugees wash ashore and provisionally are buried near the town of Zarzis. M’charek mentioned that after some disasters or tragedies, the traces are secured with great precision and care, but after others, minimal if any effort is made to secure the traces. According to her, the search for traces of the dead, for example, via DNA, is not only a forensic activity aimed at providing evidence but also a human “art of paying attention”: “The art of carefully observing and investigating the few material traces. Traces that invite us to engagement, to think something, to do something. If we pay attention to these traces, then we also commit ourselves to follow the traces and to imagine what could be the matter.”⁵¹ If we do not pay attention to the traces, we regard the human remains as waste, M’charek observed. That is why with others she calls for burial of the bodies and, if possible, to document the remains – not only the bodies, but also other traces, like shoes, slippers, and clothing. “Now, waste is not intended to be thrown out and trampled by man, but as an aid to preserve our humanity. By giving attention and following traces. (...) Waste to call into question the reduction of people to waste.”⁵²

Perhaps without being aware of it, M’charek touched on an important notion that determines the ritual dimension of commemoration. Paying attention is a central notion in the ritual theory of the influential religious and ritual studies scholar Jonathan Z. Smith. In his view, a ritual is not determined by a certain characteristic of being, is not substantial,

⁵⁰ ‘Bergrede’ in de Bergkerk Amersfoort (NL), 12 February 2019. Shortened version published as ‘Verzamel de sporen van de doden’, in *NRC* (16/17 February 2019) 4-5.

⁵¹ *Ibidem* 5: “De kunst om aandachtig de weinige materiele sporen waar te nemen en te onderzoeken. Sporen die ons uitnodigen tot engagement, om iets te denken, om iets te doen. Geven we aandacht aan deze sporen, dan gaan we ook een verplichting aan, om de sporen te volgen en ons in te beelden wat er aan de hand kan zijn.”

⁵² *Ibidem* 5: “Nu is afval eens niet bedoeld om door de mens buitengeworpen en vertrapt te worden, maar als hulpmiddel om onze menselijkheid te behouden. Door aandacht te geven en sporen te volgen. (...) Afval om het reduceren van mensen tot afval ter discussie te stellen.”

but is rather situational; it is determined first of all by situating and is more an adjective than a substantive. For him, place and space are key concepts in thinking about ritual acting. A classic quote from his standard work *To Take Place* from 1987 is “Ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention. It is a process for making interest. (...) It is this characteristic, as well, that explains the role or place of a fundamental component or ritual: place directs attention.”⁵³

This, thus, indicates the ritual dimension of the search for traces and the practices with relics and remnants as ways of paying attention, and confirms as well the central role here of space and place.

⁵³ J.Z. SMITH: *To take place. Toward theory in ritual* (Chicago/London 1987) 103.

DISASTER THEATER: PLAY WHEN THINGS GO AWRY

KEES DE GROOT

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the twenty-first century, it seems that there is a trend in theater productions dealing with disrupting events such as wars, ecological catastrophes, public scandals, and political troubles.¹ Ongoing developments in contemporary theater have probably facilitated this trend. One is the emergence of theater collectives who compose their own productions instead of a company with a director having the actors performing plays from a gradually changing repertory. Hence, it becomes possible to relate directly to recent events. Another is the move from performing on the high stage to performing on the same floor as the (first rows of the) audience or on special locations, such as in a farm shed, on a beach, in a church, or in an industrial building. The production *Bevings* (2019-2020), for example, on the earthquakes caused by the gas exploitation in the North-East of the Netherlands, is performed in local theaters, cafés, and community centers.² The play was announced as ‘a requiem for the victims’. Nowadays, it is not uncommon for a show to involve the audience or to address topical issues.

From the perspective of the study of ritual, disaster theater might also reflect a rediscovery of ritual or an enhanced ritual creativity. Victor Turner already expressed the hunch that in postmodern times (or, as I would prefer, liquid modern times) theater functions as a functional equivalent of ritual.³ According to Turner, the postmodern turn includes a return to subjunctivity, the ‘as if’ mode, and a rediscovery of cultural transformative modes, “particularly in some forms of theater”.⁴ Several

¹ A first version of this chapter was presented at the KVAS Meeting of the Department of Sociology of Charles University, Nečtiny, 9 November 2019.

² <http://www.waark.nl/groningstalig-theater> [last accessed 3 January 2020].

³ K. DE GROOT: *The liquidation of the Church* (London/New York 2018) 161-177.

⁴ V. TURNER: *From ritual to theatre. The human seriousness of play* (New York 1982) 86.

theater directors, producers, and actors have indeed explored this ritual dimension and have referred to the ritual – and transcendental – dimension of theater, often in terms reminiscent of religion. The influential director Peter Brook, for example, uses imagery best known from a epistle of Paul (1 Corinthians 12) to explain what theater is ultimately about: “The aim of any show is to unite an audience. This is the very basis of the theatrical experience, its deep meaning: the desire to become one with others, and for a second to hear what it’s like to belong to a single human body.”⁵ Brook points to the human longing for unity as a driving force behind theater, subtly suggesting a parallel with religion. In a similar vein, though less eloquently, others have claimed that the theater has replaced the church as the space where people search for meaning.⁶

The advantage of theater, compared to religion, is that it is less contested. Theater might work exactly because it is less associated with a specific ‘we’ than religious rituals, the anthropologist, theologian, psychologist, and actor Roger Grainger writes.⁷ Plays presuppose an aesthetic distance: the spectator sits in her chair, shields down, and watches to what is not real, but ‘only play’. And then, as it might happen, the spectator is taken in.

While – at least in the Netherlands – church services have become less successful in including all kinds of people, even on special occasions such as the commemoration of the Dutch victims of war on 4 May, theater steps in with shows and performances on war, violence, and discrimination all over the country, performed directly after the national commemoration (*Theater na de Dam*). This Theater of Remembrance “seeks to broaden and deepen the commemoration via simultaneously presented theater-performances of all sorts”.⁸ Here, play becomes serious business.

⁵ Peter Brook, cited in H. VAN MAANEN: *How to study art world. On the societal function of aesthetic values* (Amsterdam 2009) 193.

⁶ E.g., theater director Theu Boermans in H. JANSEN: ‘Een enorme verrijking. Te weten dat kunst de plek van de religie kan innemen’, in *De Volkskrant*, 13 May 2017. <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/een-enorme-verrijking-te-weten-dat-kunst-de-plek-van-de-religie-kan-innemen-bfd41c8e/> [last accessed 21 July 2021].

⁷ R. GRAINGER: *Ritual and theatre* (London 2014).

⁸ <https://www.theaternadedam.nl/theatre-of-remembrance> [last accessed 3 January 2020].

Theater, however, in principle uses the ‘as if’ mode. It is not part of the real world ‘outside’. Although often implicit or explicit references to reality outside the play are made, the world of the play is a product of imagination. What happens when this imagined reality is embedded firmly in the contemporary external reality?

The links between theater’s reality and the reality of disruptive events can be multiple. Sometimes, the performance of a play enhances disruptions. The performance of the opera *La muette de Portici* on 25 August 1830 in Brussels ignited nightly riots. Sixteen years earlier, Belgium and the Netherlands had been united at the congress of Vienna. The riots against William I, the new king, were eventually followed by the declaration of Belgium’s independence. Popular history recalls how the lines on patriotic love in one of the arias evoked Belgian patriotic sentiments among the audience.⁹ Other times, theater even intentionally propagates a particular worldview in order to mobilize people to change the status quo, or to make the soil fertile for a revolution.

In this chapter, I will focus on theater after the disaster, and my question is exploratory: how do plays deal with the disastrous reality outside and how does this response to the outside world affect the ritual dimension of the show? The disaster may be presented through the play itself, the players, or the context. First, the play may refer directly to a more or less recent disaster. The disaster may be the play’s topic, it may use material gathered from interviews, video footage, typical gestures, clothes, objects, and so on. Secondly, the players may have been witnesses, or participants, of the disaster, such as survivors who appear in a play on sexual abuse. Thirdly, outside reality may be present through the context of time, place, and people. This is the case when a play is programmed on a specific date, such as on the 4th of May in the Netherlands (*Theater na de Dam*), on a specific site (*Bevings*), and/or for a specific audience, such as the community theater projects on the expulsion of inhabitants of the boundary area of Germany and Czech Republic, both before and after World War II.¹⁰

⁹ See, e.g., the graphic novel J.-L. VERNAL, FRANZ & J. GÉRARD: *1830. De Belgische revolutie* (Brussels 1980) 16.

¹⁰ B. SPALOVÁ: ‘La question des allemands sudètes au théâtre. Représentations artistiques et transformation de la relation au passé allemand’, in *Revue d’études comparatives Est-Ouest* 47/1-2 (2016) 1-28; B. SPALOVÁ: ‘Remembering the German past in the Czech lands. A key moment between communicative and cultural memory’, in *History and Anthropology* 28/1 (2017) 84-109.

I will describe and reflect upon three cases that exemplify three varieties. The first case is in the genre of educational theater and has it all: topic, actors, and (often) the audience as well are related to the disaster. In the second case, an example of documentary theater, the topic and one of the actors is related to the disaster. In the third case only the topic of the show, which is in the genre of storytelling, is related to a disaster.

The first case (*With Eyes Wide Open*) is about veterans who had been involved in genocide and is based on an interview, supplemented with photos, video, and secondary literature. The other two, on sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church (*And Have Not Charity*) and the extinction of species (*Before Us*), are based on field notes taken directly after the performance of the play, interviews, and additional data. Each case study starts with a short sketch of the historical background of the disaster and of the theater production. Then I will describe the performance: the context, the play itself, and the aftermath. The case studies end with a reflection on the status of the case study as case study, on its ritual qualities, and on the relation with reality outside theater.

2. *WITH EYES WIDE OPEN*: THEATER WITH SREBRENICA VETERANS

On 11 July 1995, a Dutch UN mission in former Yugoslavia came to an end. Their mandate had been to guard a Bosnian enclave in Easter Bosnia – at that time occupied by Serb troops – that was designated as a ‘safe area’ for the Muslim population. When, however, the Serbian general Mladic announced he would attack the enclave, the UN, presented on the ground by the Dutch battalion, decided not to resist and assisted in separating the male from the female people that had sought refuge. Subsequently, 8,372 Muslim men and boys were systematically killed. The first media reports focused on the Dutch military who had survived a narrow escape from the life-threatening situation in Srebrenica, but as information about the fate of the local population began to spread, a long lasting discussion about the failed responsibility of the military (on various levels in the hierarchy) and politicians (national and international) started.

Two decades later, the Dutch communication specialist Lotte Penning came up with the idea to make an amateur theater production about people with hidden suffering. She contacted the cineaste, actress, and psychologist Prisca van der Mullen, who happened to be working on a documentary in Bosnia. They decided to work together and approached

director Boy Jonkergouw, who had experience with theater productions on vulnerable people. Together they developed a project with war veterans, including them both as actors and as part of the intended audience. As part of the research they had conversations with veterans, partly about their experiences during wartime, but even more about what happened with them afterwards: their feelings of misrecognition, being misrepresented by the media, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide attempts. The goal the team envisaged for the veterans was to have them express their experiences and inner world; as far as the wider audience was concerned, the goal was to gain acknowledgement of the veteran's experiences. Three of the veterans they interviewed were prepared to take part as actors: Stephan Mertens, Raymond Braat, and Antoon van de Wiel. Prisca van der Mullen and Lotte Penning (later replaced by Heleen van Doremalen) played additional roles, mainly as the wives of the veterans.

The title of the play (*Met open ogen*) refers to the Dutch equivalent of the saying 'We have been taken in with eyes wide open'. The poster showed an eye with blue helmets in the iris.¹¹ The play was performed from 2017-2019, mostly for networks of veterans, but also in schools, at a university, a center for mental health care, and a conference on mental health. The performance included the reenactment of war scenes the veterans had experienced themselves – supplemented with historical video footage – and their failure to protect the local population, personified by a Muslim woman. More elaborate were the scenes about their lives after the mission, such as a conversation with a medical examiner, a talk between the wives of the veterans, inner dialogues, and a scene in which one of the veterans is about to take an overdose. The latter incident actually took place during the process of making the play.¹²

Usually, the performance was followed by talks with the audience. Viewers took this opportunity to give positive feedback to the veterans, ask them about their lives and about the theater project. The setting also evoked stories being told by members of the audience.

¹¹ https://www.facebook.com/pg/hetmagazijntheaterproducties/photos/?tab=album&album_id=516660131845084&ref=page_internal [last accessed 6 January 2020];

<https://vimeo.com/289840900/817384d229> [last accessed 6 January 2020]. In 2020/2021, a production followed called *25 jaar Srebrenica / Gevaarlijke namen* (*25 years Srebrenica / Dangerous Names*), in which one of the veterans and the daughter of one of the men who were murdered participated. See www.boyjonkergouw.nl [last accessed 21 January 2021].

¹² Interview with Lotte Pennings on 28 October 2019 in Tilburg.



Figure 30.1: *Met open ogen* (photograph: Annelies Verhelst).

The theater production *With Eyes Wide Open* is instrumental in heightening the awareness of the fate of the veterans. It seeks to correct a narrative of offenders and puts forward a narrative in which the soldiers are victims of a situation beyond their control: they were sacrificed. In this sense, the production has a political goal: it proposes an alternative for what is perceived as the dominant discourse, in particular in the years directly after the genocide. It also borders on therapeutic theater, since the subordinate goal was to offer a means of expressing their emotions and to enhance the healing process by turning the negative emotions into something useful: theatrical material.

As such, the production engages in the collective memorialization of – not so much the fate of the victims of the genocide or the acts of those who committed or assisted with it but – the veterans as victims: first of international politics and, secondly, of media, doctors, and people surrounding them.¹³ The production bears characteristics of a memorial: a stylized sequence of action units expressing and shaping a narrative about a publicly significant event in the past that can be, and has been, repeated over time.

¹³ M. HOONDERT: “Playing Srebrenica”. Theatre plays in the Netherlands regarding Srebrenica’, in Y. ESKI (ed.): *Genocide and victimology* (London/New York 2021) 138-150.

The ties with reality outside the theater are strong and multiple: the stories, the actors, the uniforms, the usage of authentic news and media footage, props such as sandbags, and often also the audience are taken from or part of the world of the military. The viewer is confronted with differing perspectives: of the Muslim woman, the partners, the doctor and the three different veterans (a medic, a logistics officer, and a soldier). The room for imagination, however, is limited. The narrative of the play reflects the veteran's perspective; the obvious goal is to assist their coping process and raise compassion and solidarity with them.

3. *AND HAVE NOT CHARITY*: THEATER WITH A SURVIVOR AND A PRIEST

During the twentieth century, substantial numbers of children, mainly boys, have been sexually harassed and assaulted by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church or in settings related to this church. After journalistic investigations – in the Netherlands, since 2010 – the Dutch church province commissioned an independent committee to investigate the reports of abuse, resulting in the Deetman Report, named after Wim Deetman, himself a Protestant, a former minister, President of the House of Representatives, and mayor of The Hague, who presided over the committee.¹⁴

One of the boys who had experienced abuse, namely by the director of his church choir and the chaplain of his scouting club, was Remy Jacobs. He became a priest, left the office, and started to work as a spiritual caregiver for the elderly in Rotterdam. In 2013, he approached writer, producer, and actress Marjolein van Heemstra, known for her theater productions on controversial political issues. Van Heemstra responded positively and together they made and performed the play, starting with Jacobs's ambivalent attitude towards the church as someone who had suffered from its practices and ethical stance on homosexuality and at the same time feels love for this church.

The poster of the tour depicted the two actors: Marjolein van Heemstra in plain cloths and Remy Jacobs in a surplice.¹⁵ The title (*Als ik de*

¹⁴ W. DEETMAN, N. DRAIJER, P. KALBFLEISCH, H. MERCKELBACH, M. MONTEIRO & G. DE VRIES: *Seksueel misbruik van minderjarigen in de Rooms-Katholieke Kerk* (Amsterdam 2011).

¹⁵ <https://www.marjolijnvanheemstra.nl/speelt/als-ik-de-liefde-niet-heb> [last accessed 3 January 2020]; https://issuu.com/rotheater/docs/programma_als_ik_de_liefde_niet_heb [last accessed 3 January 2020].

liefde niet heb) refers to a bible verse: “(...) and have not charity [, I am nothing]” (1 Corinthians 13:2). I watched the show in a small venue in Rotterdam (*RO Theater*) on 26 September 2014.¹⁶

The play opens with a dramatized recollection of the origin of this show. While Remy (Jacobs) watches in silence, his face hidden under a lion mask, Marjolein (van Heemstra) reads aloud the email he had sent to her. His ‘little story’ has to get its place back in the ‘grand story’, she reads, preferably in church. Since this didn’t work out, the present goal is to have a ‘pop up mass’ in theater.



Figure 30.2: Remy Jacobs in *Als ik de liefde niet heb*
(photograph: Leo van Velzen).

The play is driven by the conflict between Remy’s delicate position as someone who believes in love and Marjolein’s indignation and lack of understanding of his biography: becoming a priest himself and maintaining his faith in love’s greatness despite the reality of rapists, white-washing bystanders, and ecclesial representatives who didn’t want to blow the whistle. (During the play, Remy even reveals that one of his

¹⁶ K. DE GROOT: ‘Misbruik in het theater’, in *gOdschrift*, 2 October 2014. Retrieved from <http://godschrift.nl/artikel/misbruik-theater> [last accessed 19 January 2021].

fellow choir boys had been found dead at the churchyard, strangled, most likely by the same priest who had abused him.) While Remy testifies how as a boy he was impressed by the calix and sings and prays, Marjolein takes the role of the skeptical critic, until her own position – she is obviously pregnant – is taken into account. After all, having a child presupposes a belief in love.

At the heart of the play is a line by the Spanish mystic San Juan de la Cruz: “In order to arrive at that which you do not possess, you must go by a way of dispossession”, which is here interpreted as “in order to arrive at love, you have to pass the lack of love”.¹⁷ This incites the two to reenact the history of the disaster. Marjolein offers the imagination of Remy’s story by recalling a fantasy novel she read as a child: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. Together they enact the scene of the lion king Aslan who sacrifices himself for children he doesn’t even know. Through this ‘play in a play’, with Remy taking off, putting on, and taking off his mask again, the identification and detachment with his role as a sacrificial figure is played out.

After the show, the atmosphere and talks in the theater café in home base Rotterdam suggest a high degree of familiarity between actors and audience on this particular evening. In the following months, the production went on tour and was widely praised by the critics. The original plan was to perform it for the Pope as well, but this didn’t work out as planned. Instead, a church service in the Wallonian Church in Rotterdam (5 November 2016) was held.¹⁸

And Have Not Charity is about a personal story that reflects a broader history. The tension in the story (within a person who is both a victim and a representative of the church, between love and hate) is used in the dramaturgy of the production. Through the use of poetic language, tranquility, singing, and solemn gestures, the theme of sacrifice and the memorial of the victims of abuse, especially the dead boy, the play acquires ritual significance. This accords with the play presenting itself as ‘a mass’. At the same time the production is an example of documentary theater, a theatrical research project into an ambivalent attitude

¹⁷ Original: “Para venir a lo que no posees has de ir por donde no posees” (from: *Subida al Monte Carlo*), translated by Lynda Nicholson in: G. BRENAN: *St. John of the Cross. His life and poetry* (Cambridge 1973).

¹⁸ <http://bottejellem.nl/als-ik-de-liefde-niet-heb/> [last accessed 1 January 2020]; <https://soundcloud.com/user-752382789/als-ik-de-liefde-niet-heb> [last accessed 1 January 2020].

towards not just the church, but towards social systems in general, the love that is present in it and that people have for it, and the lack of love. It is possible that for the audience the sensational quality of the story that is told prevails, but the play also invites the attentive reading of the black pages of one's own biography and to perceive reality through other lenses than those colored by the master narratives of good versus bad or the individual versus the system.

The disastrous reality outside is very much present through the character of Remy, playing out his own experience, through dramatizing the process of the making of the play, and through sharing biographical and historical information. This external reality and the imagined reality of the play are present at the same time.

4. *BEFORE US*: THEATER ABOUT EXTINCTION

During the first decades of the third millennium, reports on the effects of global warming, pollution, and the growth of the human population on the climate, the sea level, and biodiversity started to be perceived as alarming. This incited the Australian actor and storyteller Stuart Bowden to make a show on the theme of the apocalypse.¹⁹ In it he portrayed the last man on earth and explored the loneliness this would imply. In his next production, entitled *Before Us*, he took up this theme again, but from a different angle.²⁰ Bowden himself distinguishes three meanings of the title: past, present, and future. First, it refers to the individuals, both the character on stage and the visitors, before they are united into a community, an 'us'. Secondly, it is what is laid out before our eyes. And thirdly, it is about what is ahead of us. In his view, the vulnerable state of our world enhances the need to take care of one another. The intention for the show was "to create an event that was special and memorable". The character of the show tries to find a way to be remembered and appeals to the audience's willingness to play, to not conforming to so-called respectful behavior. In this respect, there is a parallel with the youth theater shows the actor stages.

I witness the show in an alternative theater (*Det andre teatret*) in Oslo on Saturday night, 23 March 2015. The show starts at 7 p.m.; visitors bring in beer, popcorn, bottles of wine, and glasses. There's a sofa on

¹⁹ Interview with Stuart Bowden at *Den andre cafeen*, Oslo, 26 March 2015.

²⁰ See <http://www.stuartbowden.co/before-us> [last accessed 6 January 2002].

the left side of the stage. As we enter, we hear repetitive music from a keyboard with a few high vocal sounds once in a while. Then, suddenly, the actor appears: a man with a full hipster beard and big glasses, dressed in a long green bodywarmer with a zipper from top to bottom on front. His upper arms are stuck under his dress, his underarms stick out, a mug in his right hand. The hairy legs are wearing short fluorescent green socks. He looks at the audience with a rigid look and struts center stage.

He (or rather she, because the character, named 'I', appears to be female) tells how impressive this show will be. We will get into all kinds of moods and "at the end we will all be holding hands and lying on the floor and our hearts will stop beating so we'll be dead. The staff would find us and they wouldn't have to clean up 'cause there won't be bloodshed". The coming shows would have to be canceled since here in this theater "it all ended". The serious presentation conflicts with the appearance of the character; the extravagant outfit and body language incite sympathy and a willingness to get involved.

The character tells her story and defines the setting of the play. This is where she lives: under a rock in the middle of a forest. She names and comments on the décor as if entertaining a visitor to one's house and asks herself the questions a visitor might ask. At night, she gets out, she tells us, because she's nocturnal. She's the last of her species. She did meet guys twice, but she didn't want to get involved.

She tells about her last few days, including going to bed. Two nightly visions play a central role. One is of her mother, whom she sees when she's looking in the mirror. Her own face changes into that of her deceased mother who sings: "I'm not dead. I'll live forever. I'll live every single day in you, in you, in you." This line is repeated in different keys, accompanied by loops on the keyboards. The second vision is of her father. In the forest, when she's out there contemplating about ending her life, he appears to her and sings: "Don't throw your live away, 'cause you meant the world to us."

The endgame starts when she discovers a place where a party is going on. (The audience is defined as the visitors of the party.) Here, she gains confidence: if the species is going to be extinct anyway, why not take the risk of ending it now, but in a dramatic way. She always wanted to fly; let's try it and if it does not work, "then I'll fall dead on the rocks".

She mimes climbing up on a big tree to the very top, looking down, and then discovers people whom she identifies as the visitors of the party. "You, the people of the party, are all there!" Enthusiastically, she



Figure 30.3: Stuart Bowden in *Before Us* (photograph: Ilona Sawicka).

concludes: “You all followed me to watch me die!” She repeats what is at the same time a stage direction for us: “You *are* all standing around me.” A large part of the audience gets on the stage; we lie down and join hands. She describes the attitudes of the audience: some are giggling, some are confused. We hear her mother’s tune and sing along repetitiously: “I’ll live forever. I’ll live everyday single day in you, in you, in you” – the melody of the prologue. Looking up, we close our eyes and hear the character say that she lets go, and discovers she’s not flying but falling. Then we are asked to open our eyes again “to see how beautifully I die”. She zips open her green dress, which appears to have a white lining. Beneath is a shiny white outfit with three white ropes dangling from it. She walks slowly up the stand and exits, while we are singing again. The lights go out and the actor returns for applause. Visitors collect their belongings and talk in excitement as they gather in the café were the actor joins the public after a short while.

The show is about the end of the last representative of a species. More than focusing on a global perspective, however, it zooms in on the tragic situation of the individual failing to build a relationship, letting go of his life, and in this letting go receiving new life. The themes are existential: loneliness, death, hope, insecurity. The genre is storytelling: the

character tells the story of her life directly to the audience, instructs them, and plays out a series of scenes. The style is surreal; the reality of the extinction of species is not spelled out. The show focuses on the consequences on an individual level.

The audience is involved in singing, moving to the stage, holding hands, and thus joining in what one might consider the prayer accompanying the final self-sacrifice of the character. Earlier in the show, the play contains ritual moments in play, such as the blessings the character receives in visions from her father and mother. The whole show is a commemoration of the last one of an undefined species on earth: that is, of a creature that is ultimately alone. Even more, the show succeeds in establishing a sense of community in the present and some sort of awe for someone who transcends the boundary between life and death.

The external reality of the extinction of species is only present in the imagined setting of the story. The reality of the play, including audience participation, prevails. The theme of death is dealt with in a playful way. I witnessed a character coming to life by preparing herself to die, uniting visitors of a theater into a momentary community, through a dramatic ritual act.

5. EVALUATION

Broadly speaking, theater and rite differ in their positions on the dimension of involvement. In theater, the apparent code is that this is not real, and at the same time those involved act as if this were real for a while. In rites, the apparent code is that this reflects a deep, eternal reality, although the acts, persons, and objects involved are taken from everyday reality. The aesthetic distance characteristic for theater is missing in the rite. The rite works if we are taken in, without reservation, completely and not just for the time being, but with repercussions in daily life.²¹

In fact, this is a gradual difference: rites may allow for bystander positions and theater fans may fail to distinguish between the actors and the characters they play. A typical trend in contemporary theater, reality theater, further blurs the distinction with rites.²² Reality theater draws direct links between theater and outside reality. Theater presupposes a

²¹ GRAINGER: *Ritual and theatre* 64.

²² J. SALDAÑA: *Ethnodrama. An anthology of reality theatre* (Walnut Creek 2005).

magic circle,²³ or empty space,²⁴ that distinguished the reality of the play from the reality of the outside world, be it on stage or on location. A line is drawn, or we pretend that a line is drawn. Behind the line, the actors present the world of the imagination. Before the line, the spectators watch them from their position in the everyday world. Reality theater – and this is what happens in disaster theater – opens up channels through which the outside reality permeates the world that is acted out before the audience. But is it true that the two worlds otherwise remain separate? I will first have a closer look on the phenomenon of disaster theater as reality theater and then describe how the study of this particular variety brings us back to the stuff theater is made of in the first place.

The popularity of reality theater can be viewed through different lenses. It has its own peculiarities, both when viewed as a theatrical variety, a ritual act, and a societal phenomenon. Through the lens of theater, this variety aligns with a focus on experience, rather than reproduction; involving the audience, rather than suggesting a transparent ‘fourth wall’ through which the audience observes another reality; and exploiting the here and now of the performance, for this is what distinguishes watching a play from watching a movie. In plays such as *With Eyes Wide Open* and *And Have Not Charity* the outside world not only enters the play through the topic, but is also present in ‘the immediate’, the local circumstances that help to represent the play world. Actors, audience, material culture, and the place where the play is performed refer directly to a particular disaster in the real world.

Through the lens of ritual and religion, disaster theater demonstrates how theater can take up ritual functions of commemoration, healing, and building *communitas*. *And Have Not Charity* is clearly a theatrical show, while it also presents itself as a pop-up church. In a theatrical setting, a representative and victim of the Roman Catholic Church is coming to terms with his ambivalent attitude towards this particular institution that is also a community he loves and belongs to. *With Eyes Wide Open* is performed by, and often before, members of a specific ‘we’, thus closely resembling the traditional ritual reenactment of war scenes, known from anthropological studies. Interestingly, both cases present themselves primarily as shows, not as rites. At the same time, the latter

²³ J. HUIZINGA: *Homo ludens. A study of the play-element in culture* (Boston 1955).

²⁴ P. BROOK: *The empty space* (New York 1996).

case is a memorialization of a historical event guided by political and therapeutic motives. In this way, I would suggest, a functional equivalent of mourning rituals appears, namely one that allows for some (aesthetic) distance. After all, the shows start with spectators watching actors – and then they might end up as participants in some kind of ritual. The both theatrical and ritual quality of these shows might explain the success of initiatives such as the Theater of Remembrance referred to at the outset. Plays are, at least potentially, less marked by a particular political or religious stance and may appeal to those who feel attracted to a mode of remembrance that is more innovative, or more attuned to their specific preferences or situation.

Through the lens of the broader society, it is striking that disaster theater confronts the audience with the harsh reality of life outside the theater building. If the conventional view on the theatrical experience – namely, that it requires the suspension of belief in everyday life – were true, one would expect disappointed spectators. Considering the success of several touring disaster plays this is apparently not the case. Brook is right: theater doesn't make us forget the world, but invites us to engage with it in a playful manner. It is the interaction between the mundane and the imagination that makes out the theatrical experience.²⁵ Yet, the mundane doesn't present itself to us unmediated. In an age where the narratives that are circulated by media industries give shape to how we think about the world, reality itself is for a large part dramatized.²⁶ Important parts of our lives are 'lived in' the stories we hear and see through all kinds of tools in communication such as TV and Twitter. In this respect, reality theater might even be a reaction against the theater of contemporary reality. When reality has become theater, we will look for reality in theater. Where mass media present dramatized realities of heroes and villain and histories of success and fall, theater might be a place for the complex, multifaceted, confusing reality, in which standard scripts are broken down.

Taking this one step further, I would propose that theater does not necessarily need direct links with disasters in the outside world in order to succeed. When the theater production is performed on the site of the disaster, on a remembrance day, or for an audience of survivors and their next of kin, a tension may arise with the subjunctive reality that is created in the magic circle of the play. Is there then still room for an 'empty

²⁵ Cf. P. COHEN: 'Peter Brook and the "two worlds" of theatre', in *New Theatre Quarterly* 7/26 (1991) 147-159.

²⁶ Cf. Lynn Schofield Clark's definition of mediatization cited in K. LUNDBY: 'Introduction', in K. LUNDBY (ed.): *Mediatization of communication* (Berlin/Boston 2014) 18.

space' in which new worlds can be imagined, or is the context already filled with existing interpretations? Here, the art of playing with the circumstances is required. When the theatrical reality conforms to an existing political or cultural construction of reality, the 'as if' character of theater is minimized.

In my view, the three cases described in this chapter reflect an increasing degree of innovation in telling new stories. The last case, *Before us*, suggests that the ritual quality of a performance can do without explicit links with external reality. Theater, certainly playful performances in the tradition of youth theater such as this one, can create *communitas* and a sense of awe. In fact, what happens in these shows is probably not far off from what the King's Men brought to The Globe, while performing Shakespeare's tragedies amidst a crowd of people.²⁷ They presented an imaginary world of failure and despair, indirectly related to the circumstances of those days and appealing to the experiences of failure and despair of the surrounding audience. Theater does not need to incorporate explicitly the reality outside in order to address the impact disrupting events have on the human soul.

²⁷ Trial lecture Perry McPartland at University of Agder, Kristiansand, 15 January 2021. Cf. P. MCPARTLAND: *Shakespeare and Metatheatrical Representation* (PhD Dissertation: University of Agder 2020), available at <https://hdl.handle.net/11250/2711194> [last accessed 20 January 2021].

SHOCKED IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE:
 MEDIA (RE)PRESENTATION OF IMPROVISED FUNERARY
 ACTIVITIES AFTER THE 2015 EARTHQUAKE IN NEPAL

ALBERTINA NUGTEREN

1. INTRODUCTION

When Nepal was shaken by a severe earthquake on 25 April 2015,¹ global media tended to report on it in the usual way: a quick visit to one of the demolished sites, a few quotes, a single miraculous rescue operation, and a horrified photograph of ‘mass cremations’. Considering that open cremation fires are traditional in Nepal, one could wonder what such news reports really disclose: deeply felt transcultural sympathy or a cross-cultural faux-pas?

The core of this chapter is constituted by a juxtaposition of headlines and captions about ‘mass cremations’ and the actual mortuary rituals that took place on a massive scale in the first few days after the quake. Through a multilayered study of presentation and representation of post-disaster funerary practices in the media, this chapter nuances the binary of proximity and distance in the public gaze. By critically weighing the journalistic frame of decontextualized ‘mass cremation’ against ‘cremation on a massive scale’, this chapter pleads for a culture-specific sensitivity in idiom and (re)presentation.

On that Saturday in April 2015, in the safety of my home in the Netherlands and from a considerable distance, I allowed the first media reports on the massive earthquake to shatter my disparate memories of Nepal: cherished acquaintances, medieval alleys with their alluring chiaroscuro, cityscapes dotted with the white bell-shaped domes of Buddhist *stūpas* and multi-layered Hindu temple towers, brilliantly green terraced fields, and even that rare glimpse of white peaks against crystal-blue mountain air. Those previous impressions were forcibly replaced by glimpses of horrifying

¹ For more background information on Nepal and the earthquake in 2015, see the related article by NUGTEREN, HADDERS & POUDEL in chapter 11 of this volume.

scenes, rubble, chaos, destruction, deprivation, and bottomless grief. Words and images were mediated by long-distance television news flashes, international media reports in newspapers and/or webpages, and an occasional documentary, hashtag, or YouTube posting. When I was invited for this new book project on rituals after disasters early in November 2018, I decided to probe more thoroughly and critically what I had somehow found so jarring in those reports. Triggered by the discrepancy between into-your-face headlines and an array of relatively uniform portrayals of what was, at that time, taking place at grass-roots level, I formulated the research problem and central question as follows:

The majority of media reports unreflectively spoke of ‘mass cremations’ in their headlines and added pictures of individual open cremation fires in mostly improvised places. Was this framing of improvised post-earthquake funerary activities as ‘mass cremations’ justified, or was it a case of cross-cultural ignorance, even a tricky type of orientalism?

The underlying idea is that a nuanced answer, supported by multidisciplinary desk research and a retrospective search through media reports and photographs, could contribute something crucial to the overarching topic of this volume on rituals after disasters.² By distinguishing headlines from content and images I attempt to build up a culturally specific corrective perspective and expose a fundamental awkwardness that calls for more awareness of the locally specific in global media.

2. NEWS COVERAGE: ON THE MEDIA CONSTRUCTION OF INTERNATIONAL DISASTERS

International media coverage of disasters may be considered as evoking ‘distant suffering’ or suffering by proxy. This is a type of co-suffering and sympathizing with traumatic events in which the majority of media consumers are not directly emotionally involved. Simultaneously, news reports on natural disasters may play a pivotal role in giving publicity to numerous

² One of the few directly ritual-related remarks in existing academic trauma literature on the 2015 earthquake in Nepal is the following passage: “Some conversations with people on the street indicated a sense of frustration, anger, and sadness over the bodies remaining in the rubble. This may have prevented individuals and communities from engaging in *proper mourning rituals*” (emphasis mine). S. PENTA, S. DE YOUNG, D. YODER-BONTRAGER & M. SUJI: ‘Trauma, victims, time, changing organizations and the Nepal 2015 earthquake’, in *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 34/3 (November 2016) 345-375, p. 354.

instances of distant misfortune and grief. Although in our common perception natural disasters (including the alarming reports about melting polar ice and thawing permafrost) appear to have increased in frequency and intensity, in the past two decades by far most of what are conventionally taken as natural disasters took place in Asia and Africa. This implies that most Western spectators and readers might receive such information and undergo even the famous ‘disaster marathons’ *a priori* as distant suffering, not first-handed or by direct personal involvement, but through the media. The role of the news media as the central and often only source of information in disaster situations may lead to the key notion of disasters as ‘media constructions’.³ The huge amount of available footage has even been amplified by digital media and user-generated content such as eyewitness videos. It is a truism that global news media may tend to engender a degree of apathy by the obvious overload of items that can hold our attention only briefly. Yet most quality media in the course of post-disaster reports – preferably live and on-the-spot – also disseminate a multiplicity of voices and perspectives to keep us interested. Through headlines, open texts, ‘latest developments’, and especially through photographs and audiovisuals, media may create, for a moment, even by simply ‘being there’,⁴ communities of compassion, and so do news flashes on television and in social media postings. Especially journalistic on-the-ground encounters may give the distant ‘participant’ a more immersive experience and a surrogate sense of co-presence.

Today, social media (especially Facebook) form a parallel platform for those who are more affectively involved. In the case of the April 2015 earthquake in Nepal, people from all over the globe searched their networks for confirmation that their Nepalese friends, colleagues, and acquaintances were all right.⁵ A kind of ‘virtual participant

³ S. JOYCE: ‘Media and disasters. Demarcating an emerging and interdisciplinary area of research’, in *Sociology Compass* 8/8 (2014) 993-1003.

⁴ K. RIEGERT & E.-K. OLSSON: ‘The importance of ritual in crisis journalism’, in *Crisis, Communication and Media Studies* 1/2 (2007) 143-158.

⁵ ‘Facebook safety check feature activated for Nepal earthquake’, April 2015, www.businessinsider.com/facebook-safety-check-feature-activated-for-Nepal-earthquake-2015-4 [last accessed 17 September 2020; no longer valid]. Comparable was Google’s ‘Person Finder’, www.google.org/personfinder/2015-nepal-earthquake [last accessed 17 September 2020; no longer valid]. It was relaunched in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. The tool was a searchable, online database to help people track down persons who may have been involved in the disaster. It collated information from emergency responders and individuals who posted details about relatives and ‘significant others’ missing or found.

observation⁶ emerged: an event from afar was closely observed and participated in through likes, shares, and comments.⁷ People were particularly drawn to do so by photographs and audiovisuals of positive news, not only when someone confirmed survival but particularly when all kinds of informal relief initiatives arose and pictures were posted of volunteers helping the injured and homeless.⁸ Photographs and short videos of successful rescue efforts were a favorite of mainstream media as well.⁹

Later on, critical reflections on what the media had missed, overlooked, or underreported began to appear as well.¹⁰ There may have been compelling reasons why the international press mostly and exclusively focused on the city of Kathmandu and its direct environs: if they ventured outside the Kathmandu Valley they were confronted with blocked roads as well as continuing risks of aftershocks, landslides and avalanches. Particularly in the first week there was a general lack of communication with more remote regions. Because of that limited action radius, other afflicted areas were almost neglected or at the very least underreported. There could have been more structural reasons, however. At that time, Nepal was often conceived, particularly by outsiders, through the lens of its recent political history of instability. Rural – particularly mountain – communities, with their socio-economic precariousness and limited political representation, were still

⁶ S. CRAIG: 'Reckonings. Participant-observation from a distance', 16 June 2015. See savageminds.org/2015/06/16/reckonings-participant-observation-from-a-distance/ [last accessed 21 September 2020].

⁷ This made me wonder, at the time, if any adequate hand gesture (subtler than either 'thumbs-up' or 'thumbs-down') or any emoticon/emoji-like expression of commiseration existed. In Spring 2020 Facebook introduced the so-called COVID-19 Emoji, hugging a pink heart as an expression of care, support, and sympathy. This was received as a special no-touch hug. Whether this would have been an adequate icon for computer keyboard commiseration sent to Nepal, where public hugging is relatively rare and bound to all kinds of culturally specific restrictions, remains the question.

⁸ See P. DHUNGEL: 'How social media helped in rescue and relief efforts after Nepal earthquake', academia.edu/26926095/how_social_media_helped_in_rescue_and_relief_efforts_after_Nepal_Earthquake_A_Report_Prabin_Dhungel/ [last accessed 23 September 2020].

⁹ Such as on cbc.ca/news/world/nepal-earthquake-recovery-includes-remarkable- Tales-of-survival-1.3055329/, a report on several miraculous rescues from the rubble, including a four-month old baby, rescued after five days [last accessed 19 September 2020].

¹⁰ A. NELSON: 'Classquake. What the global media missed in Nepal earthquake coverage', 4 May 2015, www.theconversation.com/classquake-what-the-global-media-missed-in-nepal-earthquake-coverage-41063 [last accessed 21 September 2020].

associated with Maoist insurgents. Critics even used the term ‘class-quake’, not only because Nepal’s entrenched elites appeared to live in safer houses and have better access to post-disaster funding, thus laying bare a structural inequality in society, but also because much media attention and costly rescue efforts had gone to the few dozens of foreign tourists and mountaineers who had been killed by avalanches. International victims at the Mount Everest base camp were spotlighted whereas the extensive devastation in other mountainous areas and rural Nepal remained underrepresented, even in the days that followed.

A particularly striking media critique was instantaneous and virulent: the Twitter campaign #GoHomeIndianMedia, followed by #DontComeBackIndianMedia, protesting against what many Nepalese considered to be the insensitive, paternalistic, and boorish coverage of the first days of the earthquake in Nepal by Indian television networks.¹¹ However lackadaisical the response of the Nepalese government to the disaster may have been, the Twitter campaign against the Indian media resulted in a proud refusal of Indian aid.¹² In a similar vein, several commentators, for instance on Twitter, criticized English-language media for their ‘orientalist’ perspective, a perspective that was experienced as supremely painful when it came from their big neighbor India. Other media reports were likewise accused of an ‘orientalist’ (i.e., paternalizing, condescending) undertone as well. In *The New York Times*, the headline on 26 April ran as follows: “In an already troubled Nepal, a picture of despair emerges”, hinting at the political and economic disarray of the country well before the earthquake shattered lives and buildings.¹³ Other reports characterized Nepal as “a country (...) ruined by political mismanagement” and pointed to its twenty-four years of unstable governments, the Maoist insurgency, and the

¹¹ The campaign was featured as the top global hashtag on World Press Freedom Day in 2015. See S. SHAKYA: ‘GoBackIndianMedia. A letter to the Indian media from a Nepali’, 3 May 2015, thelogicalindian.com/exclusive/gobackindianmedia-a-letter-to-the-indian-media-from-a-nepali/ [last accessed 21 September 2020] and S. BISWAS: ‘Why is Indian media facing a backlash in Nepal?’, 4 May 2015, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-32579561/](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-32579561) [last accessed 21 September 2020].

¹² R. KUMAR: ‘No, thank you. Nepal asks India to not send old clothes as relief’, in *Hindustan Times*, 6 May 2015, preserved by the Pakistani military on defense.pk/pdf/threads/no-thank-you-nepal-asks-india-to-not-send-old-clothes-as-relief.373636/ [last accessed 21 September 2020].

¹³ G. HARRIS, in *The New York Times*, 26 April 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/27/world/asia/nepal-known-for-its-toughness-and-disarray-is-seriously-tested.html> [last accessed 21 September 2020].

royal massacre of 2001.¹⁴ For some Nepalese, outsiders' persistent characterizations such as 'shattered', 'fragile', 'politically unstable', and 'vulnerable' were particularly hard to swallow now that their country had indeed been so dramatically shaken by a natural disaster. Some of the proud and fiercely independent Nepalese used their computer keyboards and smart-phones to write back with a vengeance. Others, of a more pragmatic bent of mind, tried to be of service in whatever way they could, as rescue volunteers or offering assistance in the morgues and hospitals. Some of them helped the wounded of their own neighborhoods and assisted in setting up the first improvised camps. Some started international aid campaigns, using networks to collect funds from Nepalese co-ethnics living in diaspora. For a few weeks, new forms of solidarity and belonging that cut across established categories emerged, and some, tired of the unproductive writing process of the new constitution, even looked at the earthquake as a new beginning. More or less opposed (yet strikingly similar) to what they accused outsiders of – an orientalist perspective that equated the devastated state of the land after the earthquake with the ravaged political state of the country¹⁵ – optimists, in their impromptu writings, used the literal shifting of the earth caused by the quake as momentum to break the years of political deadlock.¹⁶

¹⁴ S. SUBEDI: 'What is missing in Nepal', in *CNN Opinion*, 28 April 2015, edition. cnn.com/2015/04/28/opinions/subedi-nepal-earthquake/index.html/ [last accessed 21 September 2020].

¹⁵ Please note that in this chapter the term 'orientalism' or its derivatives are not applied in the usual East-West dichotomy. It stands for the incomplete, essentialized, and stereotypical portrayal of the cultural or ethnic other. Among the commentators who were accused of an orientalist perspective in social media were even more Asians (Nepalese themselves and "big neighbor India") than occidentals. For a type of reversed orientalism, applying a reverse set of visual, textual, and nationalist identity modes of (re)presentation, see U.K. REGMI: 'Media coverage on the responses to the Nepal Earthquake-2015. National and international perspectives', a Nepalese journalism student's paper comparing three articles in the *New York Times* with three articles in the Nepalese English-medium newspaper *My Republica*, available at academia.edu/37924482/Media_coverage_on_the_responses_to_the_Nepal_Earthquake_2015_National_and_International_perspectives/ [latest accessed 23 September 2020], as well as S. POKHAREL: 'A comparative study of the British press framing of Nepal Earthquake and UK Floods in 2015', posted August 2016 on academia.edu/29909949/A_comparative_study_of_the_British_press_framing_of_Nepal_Earthquake_and_UK_Floods_in_2015/ [latest accessed 23 September 2020].

¹⁶ G. DOMINGUEZ: 'How political instability affected Nepal's disaster preparedness', 27 April 2015, dw.com/en/how-political-instability-affected-Nepals-disaster-preparedness/a-18411259/ [last accessed 23 September 2020].

The feelings about the devastation of the physical, social, economic, psychological, and cultural order – especially the private loss and grief – caused by the earthquake may be unfathomable. Yet most of the survivors, with the weight of the future on their shoulders, tried to make sense of the calamity in all sorts of ways: for instance, by connecting their own situations and experiences with those of their relatives and neighborhoods during a similar earthquake in 1934.¹⁷ In a country so eager to embrace the future, the past was everywhere. Particularly neighborhood associations (*guthi*), which some scholars of contemporary society and culture had considered to be ‘on their way out’ in the urban contexts of increasing individualization, proved to be of great practical value. Tradition was tangible, even when countless buildings had collapsed and statues of the gods had disintegrated beneath the rubble. Heritage is more than a label handed out by UNESCO and continuity embraces both past and future.

In this open perception of Nepal’s culture and tradition, I now proceed to juxtapose a range of media mentions of ‘mass cremations’ with presentations of the improvised cremation of the dead ‘on a massive scale’ during the first days after the earthquake.

3. THE MEDIA ON POST-DISASTER DEATH RITUALS AS ‘MASS CREMATIONS’

Through an extensive search of news media reports (both offline and online) in the period right after the earthquake and extending to a few days after the second major aftershock on 12 May 2015, I collected passages and pictures about cremation practices. Somehow, on 26, 27, and 28 April, there was an absolute peak in news passages highlighting cremation of the casualties.¹⁸ In those first three days most items that highlighted cremation were presented as live reports from the *Paśupatināth*

¹⁷ R.B. BHANDARI: ‘Social capital in disaster risk management. A case study of social capital mobilization following the 1934 Kathmandu Valley earthquake in Nepal’, in *Disaster Prevention and Management* 23/4 (2014) 314-328.

¹⁸ The *Indian Express* on 28 April 2015 mentioned the highest number of cremations taking place daily: “500 bodies a day at the Hindu Pashupatinath every day, rather than the usual fifty.” See the article by H. KHAN on indianexpress.com/article/world/neighbours/Nepal-earthquake-1200-bodies-in-three-days-pashupatinath-pyres-keep-burning/ [last accessed 23 September 2020]. Compare this to our own interviews with PADT staff who mentioned 154 bodies at the peak moment (interview 9, PADT official staff, under the heading 5.4, ‘On lack of staff and ritual specialists’; see NUGTEREN, HADDERS & POUDEL in chapter 11 of this volume).

area. Most of the images used in newspapers and magazines, and more particularly those that are still posted on their websites, are from agencies such as Getty and Reuters. After a closer search of the countless images that were published in the public domain at least one local photographer stands out: Navesh Chitrakar. Some of his images spread all over the world. At least one of those has become iconic: a Buddha statue sitting unperturbed amidst piles of rubble. Of this image he wrote:

This was taken the day after the 7.8 magnitude quake that left more than 8,500 people dead. It was the most emotional and difficult assignment I've covered. I'm lucky that I survived the earthquake but at the same time it was painful to witness the suffering.¹⁹

Another genre of his images that profoundly hit me at the time – and continues to do so while writing this – is his photography of people randomly and haphazardly lighting cremation fires throughout hard-hit Bhaktapur, Kathmandu's neighboring town. Rubble, deprivation, personal suffering and an occasional late rescue of a baby or a toddler from piles of debris may somehow form a common genre in any post-earthquake coverage, yet for someone like me who has studied Hindu mortuary customs for quite a while now, and who, moreover, was familiar with every nook and cranny in the background of these 'mass cremation' images from Bhaktapur, these photos provide a lasting shock.²⁰

There is no denying, however, that far more common were reports and images covering the Paśupati temple complex. The journalistic singling out of this particular site may have various reasons: it is an archaic place known not only for its open-air cremations but also for its sacred river, its *sādhus*, its central temple complex (locally known as Pashupati Mandir), and various other *mandirs* such as those situated in the wooded area called Mrigasthali Ban (*mrgasthali-vana*, the deer park). Cutting through this sprawling collection of temples, shrines, statues, and inscriptions is the sacred Bagmati (Bāgmatī) River. Though it may be clogged with refuse and be severely polluted, bathing in it on special calendric moments and

¹⁹ On widerimage.reuters.com/photographer/navesh-chitrakar/, 26 April 2015 [last accessed 19 September 2020].

²⁰ Published in my own daily *NRC* on 27 April 2015 and conserved on nrc.nl/nieuws/2015/04/27/arm-nepal-is-in-het-hart-geraakt-de-zwaarste-beving-1492112-a1058091?utm_source=NRC&utm_medium=banner&utm_c/ [last accessed 23 September 2020]. Although this same photograph has appeared all over the world as illustrating mass cremation, in *NRC* it merely said "open-air cremation".

being cremated on its banks are still considered extremely auspicious. As most international reporters had landed in Kathmandu, the Pashupati area was a logical choice. That many other stricken areas were severely under-reported by professional journalists in those first days was also due to the unreliable or even non-existing connections, both on the road, by air, and by communication channels such as telephone and internet. Some footage of other devastated areas (such as made from a helicopter or drone) does exist, but these images are not relevant for the topic ‘mass cremations’: the bodies of international trekkers and tourists were flown out of the country and repatriated, and the cremations or burials of rural inhabitants have rarely been recorded in ways we can still retrieve five years after the quake. Another factor accounting for the underrepresentation of news from outside the Kathmandu Valley is the type of ‘hit and run’ journalism, voluntary or not, that was aggravated by the chaos at Tribhuvan International Airport, which made a number of reporters fly home before the airport would be completely closed to outgoing passengers.

Although I had started collecting relevant but rather random material from the very first day of the earthquake, I had to severely limit my focus for this contribution. Thanks to the prolonged life of ‘old news’ in the online archives of news media I was still able to browse those in 2018 and 2019. My wider search soon resulted in a shocking find: the shameless use of the term ‘mass cremations’, endlessly repeated both by quality media and obscure agencies. The raw but telling data are as follows: of the news reports by more than thirty different media outlets between April 25 and 28, 2015, almost all used the term ‘mass cremation(s)’, either in the headlines, the bullet list of main topics acting as a sub-header, or in the main text body, sometimes on all three levels of their text, and even in the captions of photographs and the titles of video footage. ‘Hits’ were provided by prestigious global news sources such as the *Daily Mail* (UK), *The New York Times* (US), the *Guardian* (UK), and *Time Magazine* (US), as well as by Asian news media such as the *Hindustan Times* (India), *NDTV* (India), the *Bangkok Post* (Thailand), and the *South China Morning Post* (China). It may be a coincidence, or it may be the result of the considerable time difference between Nepal and New York, but *The New York Times* already used the term ‘mass cremations’ as early as the 25th of April, as did CTVNews (Canada).²¹ Photos were

²¹ *The New York Times* had various reports written on 25 April, some of which were published on that same day or (after re-editing) on 26 April. I refer to the caption “Mass

often provided by Getty Images (they used the term ‘mass cremations’ from the 27th (although Shutterstock was first, from 25th onwards) but also by AFP, AP, Reuters, EPA, Alamy, and Anadolu. For instance, CNN.com (on 27 April) used the following caption for their photograph (taken on 26 April):

On Sunday, April 26, Pashupatinath temple became a backdrop for a mass cremation for some of the thousands killed in the 7.8-magnitude earthquake.²²

Frequently occurring alternative phrasings in the main texts include “bodies of earthquake victims being cremated on a mass scale” and “continuous cremation”. Some rare reports, in the perceptions of distant copy-editors, might indeed have invited and justified the term ‘mass cremation’ by hinting at bodies being cremated simultaneously on a single pile: “Up to five bodies are burned simultaneously on a single pyre”; “Once every two hours, the time it takes to burn each body, a new set of bodies are placed on a pile of wood.”²³

Although most reporters and photographers obviously went to the same place, some managed to visit Bhaktapur (directly east of Kathmandu).²⁴

cremations in Nepal for earthquake victims” showing a photograph of several cremations taking place in Bhaktapur by local photographer Niranjan Shrestha/Associated Press and one posted on Twitter by local photographer Prakash Mathema (@AFPphotic.twitter.com/19cpuE5Jfu) and retweeted by Alex Ogle/Agence France-Presse (@AFPphotic.twitter.com/19cpuE5Jfu) and retweeted by Alex Ogle/Agence France-Presse with the caption “People burn the bodies of earthquake victims at mass cremation in Kathmandu” in the article by Hanna Ingber, nytimes.com/live/earthquake-katmandu-nepal-updates/mass-cremations-in-nepal-for-earthquake-victims/ [last accessed 24 September 2020]. The Canadian CTVNews, in their ‘before and after’ article by Phil Hahn, shows a photo of a single cremation going on at Pashupati, local date 26 April, with the caption “(...) the area outside the temple has become a place for holding mass cremations, as the death toll from the disaster rises”. In both North American news outlets photos taken in Nepal on 26 April seem to have been posted when the local date was still 25 April.

²² See <https://www.edition.cnn.com/2015/04/26/world/nepal-earthquake-buddhists-hindus/index.html> [last accessed 18 September 2020].

²³ 29 April 2015 (English edition, photo taken on 27 April, <https://www.efc.com/efe/English/life/mass-cremations-bid-farewell-to-earthquake-victims-in-kathmandu> [last accessed 21 September 2020]). On this sensitive issue, see also note 39.

²⁴ Although the distinctions may be easily overlooked today because of urban sprawl, the Valley consisted traditionally of three major ‘royal’ cities: Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur. Whereas the first two have undergone rapid modernization, Bhaktapur has managed to preserve and retain more of its distinct traditional culture within its clearly defined city gates. This was one of the reasons for including Bhaktapur in my news collection. A second reason is the widespread photographs of many random cremation fires on its wastelands. A third reason is that some excellent work

When coverage of Bhaktapur is combined with social media postings of local inhabitants one gets a fair image of that ancient town as well. Bhaktapur, being much smaller than Kathmandu, has far fewer and much smaller cremation *ghāṭs* (stepped riverbanks), mainly Hanuman, Chupin, Ram, and Mangal *ghāṭs*. Various photographs and audiovisuals show how all areas around the Hanumante River, often consisting of some form of wasteland and rubbish dump, were used for impromptu cremations performed by relations (instead of the usual priests and death specialists). A closer study of the pictures also shows that even women performed cremations. Hardly anyone (not even the bearers) wore the traditional white clothes as the color of mourning or went barefoot.²⁵

Two things are striking: (1) the frame ‘mass cremation(s)’ most often appeared in headlines and subtitles, and (2), once the frame was set (as early as 25 April 25), even local newspapers and television broadcasts used the same term for a few days. We often find that the term so prominent in the headlines is toned down to the more factual phrase “cremations on a massive scale” in the reports themselves. Photographs illustrating cremation activities indeed tended to show the massive scale of cremations by zooming in on many fires burning simultaneously while covered bodies lay waiting nearby, by the edge of the water or even dumped on the grass. Alternatively, some photographs, by zooming out to incongruous spaces momentarily used for improvised cremation activities, such as sandbanks and other higher patches of muddy ground in the middle of the rivers, illustrated the enormous pressure and lack of proper space. Even places normally reserved for royalty or other high-class families were now used as overflow capacity for any who provisionally broke the rules of class, caste, and privilege. Any other accessible spaces bordering the Bagmati, Hanumante, Manohara, and Bishnumati Rivers, and even places like urban wastelands, rubbish dumps, construction sites, and field tracks outside villages were used as improvised cremation sites. In spite of the frequent use of the term ‘mass cremations’ I haven’t found a single photograph confirming mass cremation in the accepted use of the term, and even those images of which the captions

exists on the city’s death rituals. See note 7 in NUGTEREN, HADDERS & POUDEL in chapter 11 of this volume.

²⁵ Whereas in a city like Kathmandu one sees a general waning of the prescribed white clothes worn by barefoot bearers, this attire is still more common in Bhaktapur, especially among the higher classes. During the chaos of the first days after the earthquake, however, this tradition was dropped there as well.

read ‘mass cremations’ merely show cremations going on round the clock, in incongruous places, and on a massive scale.

My search for news reports from those first days at the end of April 2015 may include some references to our own interviews with descendants, cremation staff and priests, but focuses primarily on those in the public domain, such as news and images by the global press, English-language coverage from Asian news agencies, and national Nepalese TV channels and newspapers. It also includes social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.²⁶ In some of the live reports international reporters (assisted by an invisible interpreter) as well as local journalists conversed in Nepali or Newari with people standing in ‘assembly lines’ waiting for their turn at one of the *ghāts* or questioned cremation workers (*adhikāri*) and office staff at the Pashupati temple complex. It is immediately evident that people directly involved with the cremations – either professionally or privately (those who had the sad duty of bringing a dead relative to be cremated) – stood firm and insisted on a minimum of attention to each and every cremation and never used the term ‘mass cremation’.²⁷ Yet, what to think of the following account as related by an Indian news medium:

“There was no space to accommodate so many bodies as we only have 11 pyres, and so makeshift pyres were made by families on the steps leading to the river,” said Purshottam Pochrel, a priest at the temple. Another 50 to 60 unclaimed and unidentified bodies were burnt together soon after the earthquake, with no one to decorate them with garlands, or pray for their souls. “We just needed to get rid of them so we could accommodate more,” Pochrel said.²⁸

Although there is no other evidence for multiple persons being cremated simultaneously on the same pyre, and our own interviews held with cremation staff four years later do not corroborate the persisting

²⁶ See also NUGTEREN, HADDERS & POUDEL in chapter 11 of this volume.

²⁷ Both in Sanskrit and in local languages there are terms that would approach the technical meaning of ‘mass cremation’, yet in the perception of those who were asked explicitly (see chapter 11) these were hardly ever applicable to procedures after the quake. Yet there is no denying that the alleged numbers of cremations that were reported as having taken place in those first days at Pashupati vary considerably, and a great number of unregistered cremations in incongruous places may have gone unnoticed by PADT officials.

²⁸ *Quartz India*, 4 May 2015, qz.com/india/397162/ [last accessed 24 September 2020]. See also footnote 39.

rumor of mass burnings at Pashupati or elsewhere, there might be a grain of truth in it. In the first three days after the earthquake, both forensic experts and rescue workers came to a point that they had no idea what to do with all the putrefying bodies.²⁹ Before the forensic service issued clear orders and rescue workers received clear instructions, there might have been a single moment when unidentified and unclaimed bodies were unceremoniously disposed of. If this had been so, cremation staff interviewed by us four years later had no knowledge of it.



Figure 31.1: NDTV interview with cremation worker Ashok Dhital at the Pashupatinath temple complex, Kathmandu (still from New Delhi Television broadcasting by Nina Masih, April 30, 2015).

4. JUXTAPOSITION AND DISCUSSION

In this concluding section, I confront the dictates of ‘Breaking News’, headlines as a journalistic frame, and the somehow uniform nature of journalistic gazes, on the one hand, with, on the other hand, a cultural confirmation that the usual mode of ‘disposal’ is not merely a practicality but, instead, a point of crucial cultural concern. Or, as Stefana Fratila

²⁹ J. ACHARYA [et al.]: ‘When protocols become fairy tales and gods remain buried under. Excerpts from the diary of forensic experts at Ground Zero during the mega quake that hit Nepal’, in *American Journal of Forensic and Medical Pathology* 38/1 (March 2017) 5-8.

rightly pointed, “the ritual is what matters, how the body disappears matters”.³⁰

Before I proceed to a more reflective consideration of the precarious distinction between ‘mass cremation’ and ‘cremation on a massive scale’, I need to elucidate briefly on the ‘why’ of the persistent tradition of open-air cremation. Even most Hindus would not be able to answer the question adequately, other than stating “it is our tradition”. One of the main arguments is indeed constituted by the poetics of ancient Vedic tradition itself, going back as far as the creation of the world from a cosmogonic sacrifice.³¹ In a deeper sense, every cremation in an open fire is a ritual reenactment of that very first creative moment from which everything in this world is believed to have come forth. The prescription of an open fire is paralleled by the prescription of open air: both fire and air are essential for a proper cremation since the world is seen as an intricate system of correspondences, and the final rite of passage returns the body to the five elements: fire, air, water, earth, and ether/space. The passage back to these five constitutive elements should be free and unhindered; if not, the soul is considered to remain enslaved in an endless earthly entrapment.

Additional arguments for open-air cremation are provided by liturgical prescriptions, such as the ritual requirement to circumambulate the corpse on the pyre; the main mourner lighting the fire manually; breaking or piercing the skull with a stave to release the spirit; and the immersion of the ashes into flowing water. The original considerations behind these aspects may be as poetic as the idea of continuous creation and re-creation mentioned above, but in daily funerary practice they are often no more than a jumble of incomprehensible rules – varying from community to community – about which only death specialists are considered to be knowledgeable. Nevertheless, most Hindus still regard an open-air cremation on a wood pyre as the most auspicious way to definitively release the soul from the physical body. Even though the ancient

³⁰ S. FRATILA: ‘The body is disappeared. Cremations and mass graves in the aftermath of Bali’s 1965-66 massacres’. Available at studylib.net/doc/7499242/stefana-fratila-the-body-is-disappeared-cremations-and-mass-graves-in-the-aftermath-of-Balis-1965-66-massacres/ [last accessed 24 September 2020]. The quote is found on p. 8 of this document.

³¹ A. NUGTEREN: ‘Through fire. Creative aspects of sacrificial rituals in the Vedic-Hindu continuum’, in J. DUYNDAAM, A-M. KORTE & M. POORTHUIS (eds.): *Sacrifice in modernity. Community, ritual, identity* (Leiden/Boston 2016) 109-131.

custom is challenged in many ways – as in diaspora minority situations,³² among modernists, anti-ritualists and anti-traditionalists, and where ever ‘greener’ alternatives have come on the market³³ – the burning of dead bodies in the open air on a pyre of wooden logs was still fully customary and the only option available to Hindus in Nepal at the time of the 2015 earthquake.³⁴ In addition to the above requirements – open fire and open air – the symbolic universe of Hindu death requires an impressive material universe as well. Long lists of ingredients are usually handed to grieving families by their family priest, on which dry firewood is one of the main and certainly the most expensive item. In the Kathmandu Valley, it is often the neighborhood association (*guthī*; more specifically called *siguthī* when it acts as a cremation association) that provides the materials.

For many Hindus in South Asia, cremation, particularly cremation in open air, on a wood pyre, exposed to the elements, marks not merely biological cessation but a purified offering.³⁵ Did the ‘foreign’ journalists, when they used the term ‘mass cremations’, have no knowledge of Hindu death practices and no culturally specific sensitivity? Would they have reported on the normal daily cremations being performed at the *ghāṭs* in the same tone of horror? Would they have been shocked in any event by Hindu necro-aesthetics? Or was the implicit association with ‘real’ mass cremation (as the term is used in dictionaries) merely an awkward expression of sympathy, an acknowledgement of the massive

³² It is a curious footnote to the history of cremation in the UK and Nepal that in 1934 the British Government had made a momentous exception to the UK Cremation Act of 1902 when Nepal’s ambassador to the UK in London was given permission to cremate his wife outdoors. See S. WHITE: ‘Hindu cremations in Britain’, in P.C. JUPP & G. HOWARTH (eds.): *The changing face of death. Historical accounts of death and disposal* (Basingstoke 1997) 135-148.

³³ A. NUGTEREN: ‘Wood, water, and waste. Material aspects of mortuary practices in South Asia’, in F. FERRARI & T. DAEHNHARDT (eds.): *Roots of wisdom, branches of devotion. Plant life in South Asian traditions* (London 2016) 118-141.

³⁴ Strictly speaking, it is not true that open-air cremation on a pyre was the only option, since in Nepal there are a variety of death practices among minorities, including inhumation, ‘water burial’ and ‘sky burial’. ‘The only option’ here simply distinguishes it from the much faster indoor option at the Electric Crematorium that only became available in 2016, see H. HADDERS: ‘Establishment of electric crematorium in Nepal. Continuity, changes and challenges’, in *Mortality* 23/1 (2017) and R. POUDEL: *A gyst on traditional and modern cremation ceremony in Nepal* (Einbeck 2018).

³⁵ One of the common terms for Hindu cremation is *antyeṣṭi* – literally, the final sacrifice (cf. NUGTEREN: ‘Through fire’ and NUGTEREN: ‘Wood, water, waste’).

scale of death and disposal going on before their shocked eyes? And why then was the term adopted by Nepalese and Indian journalists as well?

A sensational story should be easily recognizable by its title. A headline creates the syntax in which the title message suggests the dominant frame. But a headline is also intended to draw attention and might promise more than it can deliver. The tenacious and attentive reader might soon perceive a disparity in the form of a nagging disquiet, without being able to nail the exact discrepancy. In the case of English-medium reports on Nepal's earthquake, the uniformity of the headlines and captions on the first three days is striking: almost all of them use the term 'mass cremations' in their headlines.³⁶ It is only by combining headlines with the main text body that one becomes aware this is mostly nuanced to 'cremations on a massive scale'. A study of the accompanying photographs and multimedia audiovisual material corroborates this discrepancy: what the images show, whatever the caption might say, is indeed open-air cremation on a large scale.³⁷ For those media-consumers who were not previously familiar with the traditional Hindu custom of burning bodies placed on wood pyres, erected on stone steps or platforms by a river, the shock must have been tremendous. Indeed, cremation in those first chaotic days after the earthquake did take place on a massive scale, with improvised ritual services and in unusual places. The normal cremation *ghāts* were overcrowded, with long queues waiting for their turn; priests and cremation staff were overburdened and working round the clock; and the required funerary ingredients were becoming scarce and expensive. There is no denying, however, that bodies were burned individually and that only in very exceptional cases (such as unidentified bodies released by the morgues or left at the *ghāts* by

³⁶ One might speculate that the phrase had a single origin and that it was subsequently copied thoughtlessly. Another explanation might be found in what has confusingly been phrased as 'disaster ritual', 'media ritual', or 'the function of ritual in crisis journalism' in media studies: a sequence of phases in which a disaster is usually reported, namely discourses of horror, grief, empathy, and anger, respectively. Accordingly, the term 'mass cremation' would belong to the 'discourse of horror'. See RIEGERT & OLSEN: 'Ritual in crisis journalism'.

³⁷ One more remark needs to be made here: what any first-time visitor at any day might incorrectly interpret as a 'mass cremation' at the Paśupatināth *ghāṭ* is in fact more or less normal there, since there are twelve platforms on which twelve cremations could take place simultaneously. That Mr. Pochrel (quoted above) spoke of eleven platforms instead of twelve is logical from his professional perspective: one platform is usually reserved for the royal family. When pressure became too high, even this reserved platform was taken over and used clandestinely.

rescue workers) several unclaimed bodies might have been gathered together and cremated collectively.³⁸

According to various handbooks and dictionaries on cremation practices worldwide, the term ‘mass cremation’ is mostly reserved for the collective disposal of the bodies of victims of war (both conventional warfare and chemical attacks), genocide, and epidemics.³⁹ For most English-language readers of newspapers as well as for television audiences, mass burial pits and ‘instantaneous cremation’ may invoke a grisly specter. Although cremation has become a more common practice in everyday occidental life, the term ‘mass cremation’ is still associated with situations of instantaneous and often anonymous disposal. Particularly for Europeans, the term mass cremation uneasily recalls some of the specters of the Second World War. Auschwitz-Birkenau is a symbol of the systematic extermination of Jews and the disposal of their bodies in pits, gas chambers, and on pyres. Hannah Arendt wrote: “[T]hey all died together (...) like things that had neither body nor soul (...). It is in this monstrous equality without fraternity of humanity (...) that we see, as though mirrored, the image of hell.”⁴⁰

In relation to the victims of disasters in South Asia, we mention two other occasions when ‘mass cremations’ were reported: after the Bhopal gas tragedy on 2 December 1984 and after the mass fatalities following the Asian tsunami disaster at Christmas 2004. One of the conclusions

³⁸ I found three explicit references to this in the news media, whether based on evidence or not (*EFE* (India), *Capital* (Kenya) and *Quartz* (India)). See <https://www.efe.com/efe/english/> on 29 April 2015; qz.com/india/397162/a-kathmandu-crematorium-is-struggling-to-cope-with-the-earthquakes-dead/ on 4 May 2015; www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2015/05/nepal-tragedy-takes-toll-even-on-cremation-overseers/ on 6 May 2015 [all three last accessed 24 September 2020]. All three of them might even go back to the same interview, in which Mr. Pochrel was either indicated by his family name or his function (*adhikāri*). Another reference is not to actual co-cremation but to government authorities issuing the command for ‘mass cremation’ when the morgues could no longer handle the number of still unidentified bodies. This order was retracted later (see J. ACHARYA [et al.]: ‘Fairy tales’). See also GAUTAM’s article referred to in note 43. In our fieldwork four years later (see NUGTEREN, HADDERS & POUDEL in chapter 11 of this volume, interview 16), the only (sad but beautiful and dignified) reference was to a young woman who had clung to her grandmother in their last moments in such a way that their bodies had become indistinguishable; upon retrieval their remains were burned together.

³⁹ Such as D.J. DAVIES & L.H. MATES (eds.): *Encyclopedia of cremation* (London/ New York 2016 [2005]) 421-422 (under the entry ‘War’).

⁴⁰ H. ARENDT: ‘The image of hell’, in J. KOHN (ed.): *Essays in understanding, 1930-1954* (Orlando 1979) 198.

of the World Health Organisation about the handling of bodies after the Asian tsunami was that “Mass cremation of bodies should never take place when this goes against the cultural and religious norms”.⁴¹ It was only on 14 May 2015 – almost three weeks after the alleged ‘mass cremations’ – that an article appeared in the *Kathmandu Post* in which mass cremation was declared as being against traditions in India and Nepal. Its author, Manish Gautam, quoted Dr. Kailash Gupta, director of the Indian Chapter of the International Emergency Management Society, who had done extensive research on the management of ‘mass corpses after disasters’:

We have special beliefs and emotional attachments to those who have died. (...). Families should be allowed to conduct final rites in their own tradition. Mass cremations are against traditions in India and Nepal and such acts can leave surviving families in disarray (...).⁴²

It is generally acknowledged that, following natural disasters, mismanagement of the dead, including mass cremations and mass graves, has consequences for the psychological well-being of survivors and that emergency response should not add to the distress of affected communities by inappropriately disposing of the victims.⁴³

By way of a tentative conclusion, returning to the main research question, let me add a final note. In the above I have indicated that not only do modes of disposal matter, but words also matter. Although genres such as ‘Breaking News’ and journalistic dictates about headlines are well acknowledged for what they are, there are cultural border areas “where even angels [should] fear to tread”. Death, and especially unexpected, untimely violent death, is fraught with culturally specific anxieties. On 26-28 April 2015 the term ‘mass cremations’ suddenly went viral, as if

⁴¹ www.who.int/hac/crises/international/asia_tsunami/en/ [last accessed 20 September 2020].

⁴² M. GAUTAM: ‘Disease outbreak from corpses a mere myth’, in *Kathmandu Post*, 15 May 2015. The underlying tension becomes clear in the course of this article: “Initially, faced with a preponderance of corpses, authorities had suggested mass cremation if the bodies were not collected soon. But dr. Gupta considers this a bad idea. ‘We have special beliefs and emotional attachments to those who have died,’ he said.” See kathmandupost.com/national/2015-05-15/disease-outbreak-from-corpse-a-mere-myth.html [last accessed 23 September 2020]. See also J. ACHARYA: ‘Fairy tales’.

⁴³ For specifically Hindu norms for ‘appropriate-inappropriate disposal’ see NUGTEREN, HADDERS & POUDEL in chapter 11 of this volume.

the term were completely justified and self-evident. In the form of headlines and photo captions a journalistic ‘frame’ – a kind of global ‘cremationscape’ – emerged.⁴⁴ What was not taken into account, apart from the range of associations this term continues to evoke in those involved in recent genocide, civil war, or pandemics, was the ancient local Hindu tradition of Nepal. Local funerary habits such as open-air cremation may be strained to the limits under the stress and chaos of a natural disaster, but the English media⁴⁵ should have done their homework and should have ‘trod’ more cautiously. Even headlines can – and should – be phrased in a culturally sensitive manner.

⁴⁴ ‘Scapes’ are global patterns or scripts of socio-cultural behavior. In applying the term to the research question of this chapter, we might speak of a temporary (linguistically distorted) ‘cremationscape’, illustrating how uniform global reporting can overpower local facts. A. APPADURAI: *Modernity at large. Cultural dimensions of globalization* (Minneapolis 1996).

⁴⁵ The term English media (instead of global press) is used deliberately here, since in several cases English-language local press and Indian news outlets also used the term ‘mass cremation’, although they, especially, should have known better. As far as I know, this chapter offers the only critical note on the distinction between ‘mass cremation’ and ‘cremation on a massive scale’ in the context of the Nepal 2015 earthquake.

E-RITUALS IN THE CORONAVIRUS CONTEXT

PAUL POST

1. INTRODUCTION

In all contributions in this book it becomes clear that disasters and tragedies set rituals in motion. This also applies to the COVID-19 pandemic that we consider a ‘slow disaster’.¹ Due to measures such as lockdowns and social distancing, certain ritual repertoires are absent or have gone missing, but new rituals are also emerging. Above all, this slow disaster seems to be spurring redesigning and resetting rituals, re-situating them, setting new accents, and making new choices from available repertoires. I would like to speak here of ‘ritual recasting’, also referred to as ‘reinventing’ or ‘contextualizing’, by which I mean adjustments to new contexts.² This is not primarily about new rituals, as people often think. As stated, certain choices are made, certain repertoires come to the fore, or certain trends are underlined or are corrected. In this recasting context, the strong rise of online or e-rituals is striking (more about this terminology later). This is not about new repertoires, but about rituals that suddenly manifest themselves strongly due to the pandemic.

Contributions to this disaster ritual handbook indirectly include online culture and e-rituals. In this chapter I make it more explicit – I thematize

¹ In this chapter I adapted parts of previous publications: chapters 11 and 12 in P. POST: *Ritueel. Theorie en praktijk in kort bestek* (Almere 2021); *Ibidem*, ‘@Ritual: Contested and inauthentic’, in P. POST & M. HOONDEERT (eds.): *Absent ritual. Exploring the ambivalence and dynamics of ritual* (= Ritual Studies Monograph Series) (Durham, NC 2019) 205-215.

² For recasting, see P. POST: *Rituele herbestemming als recasting. Rituele dynamiek voorbij inculturatie en syncretisme* (Valedictory Lecture, Tilburg University, 1 November 2019) https://pure.uvt.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/31538457/Rituele_herbestemming_als_recasting.pdf; *Ibidem*, ‘Recasting ritual. Ritual dynamics beyond inculturation and syncretism’, in S. LOIERO & F.X. AMHERDT (eds.): *Christentum und Theologie zwischen Synkretismus und Inkulturation / Le Christianisme et la théologie entre syncretisme et inculturation. Interdisciplinaire Perspektive / Perspectives interdisciplinaires* (= Théologie Pratique en dialogue / Praktische Theologie im Dialog 53) (Basel 2020) 175-213.

it in the context of the current coronavirus pandemic, which as I write this (January 2021) is spreading across the Netherlands in a second wave, resulting in a second lockdown. After a small panorama of rituals in the time of coronavirus, I focus on e-rituals in the broader context of the recasting of rites in this crisis and this specific situation of place and time. From this context I briefly shed light on some important aspects of e-rituals in general.

2. SMALL PANORAMA OF RITUALS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

In the period March-December 2020 I compiled a file with all kinds of ritual manifestations and related discussions in connection with the coronavirus pandemic. Below, I give a small impression from this file that, once again, concerns the Dutch situation.

2.1. Absent and modified rituals

First of all, there are many examples of rituals that have become impossible, are absent, or have been heavily modified. The ecclesiastical, liturgical repertoire immediately catches the eye and has also received a lot of attention in the media. The Sunday church service became impossible, as did mosque visits on Fridays. In late June 2020 churches opened their doors again, by appointment only, and for a limited number of people. Congregations were looking for alternatives to Sunday celebrations. Streaming of services was often done, with empty churches sometimes filled with photos of congregants and parishioners in photo frames. There were suddenly plenty of celebrations online, while 'liturgies at home' were also developed (especially by the Protestant Church in the Netherlands).

The Easter period fell exactly in the coronavirus lockdown period. In Eindhoven, in the south of the Netherlands, there was a salient plan by the local Roman Catholic Dean to bless the city from a helicopter on Palm Sunday; however, the local authorities did not permit this. During Holy Week, the Pope took part in two sober celebrations from Rome: a special Good Friday prayer service from an empty St. Peter's Square and on Easter Sunday the classical blessing for the city and the world (*Urbi et Orbi*), this time from an empty St. Peter's Basilica. Later, at the end of July, Muslims celebrated the Feast of Sacrifice in several cities in the open air.

It is not only the gathering that became impossible; all kinds of material and physical elements became impossible, such as using holy water, baptisms, kisses, giving the sign of peace greeting, and shaking hands in general. People were also very reluctant to sing, especially in choirs, as these were sources of infection.

Furthermore, the pandemic had consequences in terms of the ritual calendars which mark celebrations of national, regional, local, and private moments. Birthdays, anniversaries, and weddings were canceled or postponed. The annual ‘Stille Omgang’ (Silent Procession) in Amsterdam, a traditional Roman Catholic silent procession scheduled for 21 March, was canceled. It is remarkable that there were three online alternatives. As an alternative, there was a podcast from the organizing Society of the Stille Omgang: ‘Listening in Silence’. The Diocese of Haarlem-Amsterdam organized a ‘Spiritual Silent Procession’ via a live stream with Eucharistic adoration, reflections, and a blessing. Finally, the Jesuit online initiative ‘Praying Underway’ made a virtual Silent Procession of approximately forty-five minutes.

Other Catholic devotions suddenly become topical. In Maastricht, the twelfth-century *Noodkist* (Servatius reliquary shrine, ‘emergency shrine’) with the relics of various bishops, including Servatius, was displayed in March (the shrine could also be reached online) and Lourdes water was made available to coronavirus patients in various hospitals.

The annual national World War II commemoration on 4 and 5 May was supposed to be particularly celebrated in 2020, dedicated to seventy-five years of liberation. The National Committee and many local groups had put together an extensive remembrance program. However, none of that could take place. They diligently sought appropriate alternatives, invoking the help of the public. In the end they implemented a series of smaller initiatives, such as blowing ‘Taptoe’ on 4 May, singing the national anthem, the *Wilhelmus*, on 5 May, and putting up a poster that could be obtained from newspapers. The ritual attention also focused on the many small war memorials in the country, and by transferring money, flowers were placed at those monuments. Commemorations of the liberation of the Nazi prison camps in Vught and Amersfoort were also adapted by being made small-scale or held online.

This adaptation, making rituals small or online, was reflected in many other commemorations of disasters and tragedies that were on the calendar: the attack on a high-speed tram in Utrecht (18 March 2019), the Tripoli air disaster (12 May 2010), and the fireworks disaster in Enschede

(13 May 2000). The disaster of passenger flight MH17, which was shot down in 2014, was commemorated on 17 July. The media spoke of an impressive digital commemoration, but in fact it was a mixture of offline and online elements. At the monument in Vijfhuizen, a few relatives (the board of Foundation Air Disaster MH17) and a trumpet player were present. The meeting was streamed, a well-known method by now. There were speeches and a video message from Prime Minister Rutte. The Last Post was played and the names of all the victims were read. Elsewhere in the country there were also local commemorative events.

2.2. 'Coronavirus repertoire'

Something of a 'coronavirus repertoire' also developed over 2020. Think of the basic daily ritual of greeting. Shaking hands is out of the question during the pandemic, but alternative forms such as making contact with the elbow or doing a 'fist bump' are difficult to imbed. In addition, there are many rituals that aim to express solidarity and compassion which initially focused strongly on hospital staff ('heroes') and the critical situation around intensive care units. These rituals also express compassion for the victims. They include applauding together, putting up banners with red hearts, singing from balconies (first noted in Italy), and playing music in front of the windows of nursing homes.

Remarkably, already in the middle of the first wave of the crisis, a national coronavirus commemoration moment and even a monument were considered. The Landelijk Steunpunt Verlies (National Support Point Loss) advocated a national coronavirus commemoration "in line with May 4 and 5", the commemoration of World War II in the Netherlands.

Finally, from a ritual point of view, the most attention in my file is paid to death rites, the rites surrounding death and dying, funerals and mourning. That is where the limitations, impossibilities, and improvisations of the pandemic have been most distressing, and also where I have seen the most creativity. The lack of rituals and also the feeling that there are a lot of 'defective rituals' have been widely experienced and discussed. In particular, the inability to say goodbye to a dying loved one, or to be physically near to them in the final phase of life has been experienced as very painful. The same applies to funerals, where only a limited number of people are allowed. How does a family, in consultation with the funeral directors, select the invitees?

People have found all kinds of new ways to carry out these rituals. Streaming is used so that funerals can be followed on computer screens from a distance. There are ‘drive-through’ and ‘walk-through’ processions to say goodbye. The deceased is laid out at the house, church, or crematorium and one walks or drives (at an appropriate distance) past the coffin with flowers in a kind of parade. The immediate family lines up next to the coffin and receives condolences at an appropriate distance. Another widespread form is the setting up of a hedge of honor on either side of a road that the funeral procession travels. Applause and flowers are a regular feature here, sometimes with banners. These forms of funeral rituals are often included in obituaries.

There has also been a strong emergence of all kinds of online forms of expression, such as online condolence registers, memorial pages, and reminder portals. There are many more examples of how these rituals have been adapted. In several places I have seen all kinds of small, new rituals that have not reached the media and that, to a certain extent, do not take place in line with the severe coronavirus rules. For example, in a large cemetery nearby I have seen meetings at the grave several times. The coffin was next to the grave, and there was a table set with white linen, champagne, and snacks. Family and friends had organized an open-air ritual goodbye.

3. A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

3.1. Ritual dynamics

The first thing I noticed is that a relatively stable set of ritual repertoires, which has grown over a few decades, is coming under pressure, has been set in motion, and is being questioned by the sudden coronavirus situation. I briefly outline two clusters of those dynamics.

As a first cluster, there are absent and defective or affected rituals. Many rituals are not possible and not allowed anymore. People have suddenly realized that rituals are not as obvious as we thought. There now appear to be a lot of absent rituals,³ faulty rituals (rituals that are missing something or are incomplete), and all kinds of improvised rituals. From a historical and global point of view, this is actually a fairly normal situation. There have always been circumstances in which rituals

³ POST & HOONDERT: *Absent ritual*.

could not exist or manifested themselves differently and had to transform. In this regard, we are confronted with the non-self-evident nature of rituals, with their vulnerability, provisionality, contingency, and dependence on the circumstances.

There is also a second cluster that I label provoked rituals. This is where a situation creates ritual dynamics, transformation, and innovation. I briefly consider three important forms of this cluster that were already mentioned in our panorama: postponed, vicarious, and transferred ritual.

First, rituals are postponed.⁴ Weddings and other commemorations have been postponed to later dates in the post-coronavirus period. This is by no means an exceptional form of ritual; there is a long tradition of postponed rituals. Much of our standard remembrance ritual of World War II and the Holocaust in Europe is a postponed ritual that only became established later, sometimes many years later.

Second, there are vicarious rituals that also have many forms in the past and present.⁵ This can be a form of ritual transfer, where a new ritual takes the place of another, as is the case with the new All Souls' Day rituals. Alternatively, persons take the place of ritual actors who normally do the ritual. For instance, during the pandemic, medical staff have been present at patients' deathbeds, instead of the patients' next of kin.

Third, there are many transferred rituals.⁶ In addition to the transfer from an offline to an online situation (see below), rituals in churches, crematoria, and funeral homes have moved to homes, streets, and cemeteries. It is interesting how rituals often move from an indoor to an outdoor, open-air situation, which entails all kinds of changes in perception and experience. Outside, in the open air, rituals are different. There are different sounds (the wind, birds, traffic), and the ritual is more public and often, at the same time, more intimate. All kinds of outdoor rituals have developed around funerals, such as the previously mentioned

⁴ L. FARO: *Postponed monuments in the Netherlands. Manifestation, context, and meaning* (PhD Dissertation: Tilburg University 2015).

⁵ M. HOONDERT: 'Vicarious ritual. Requiem concerts as vicarious All Souls' Day ritual', in P. POST & M. HOONDERT (eds.): *Absent ritual* 167-186.

⁶ P. POST: 'Barbara, Job en de Betuwelij. Actuele notities over liturgie, devotieel ritueel en Schrift', in M. BARNARD, G. HEITINK & H. LEENE (eds.): *Letter en feest. In gesprek met Niek Schuman over bijbel en liturgie*. (Zoetermeer 2004) 129-142; P. POST: 'Ritual transfer als 're-inventing ritual'. Liturgische 'Bewegungen' und rituell-liturgische Referenz', in *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 58/2-3 (2008) 149-164.

walk-throughs and drive-throughs, hedges of honor, and informal gatherings at cemeteries.

3.2. New accents

The coronavirus context has changed the character of rituals. Ritual ambivalences and trends have acquired their own accents and are thus ‘corrected’, as it were.⁷ It has often been mentioned that rituals have become more intimate, that they are experienced more emotionally and intensely by a small community. In funeral circles there is now general talk of the emergence of the ‘intimate funeral’. What is experienced as a major gain is that the focus is no longer entirely on the farewell celebration; there is more attention to the circumstances of the funeral as a process of larger and also all kinds of smaller ritual moments. I have heard from different sides that it now appears that those in the Netherlands are good at farewell celebrations, but not so good at mourning, and that in southern European countries it is exactly the other way around. In the Netherlands, many small moments of saying farewell, of marking and sorrow, are now re-appreciated. These include moments and rites at home, in the street, and in the cemetery, and rituals after the funeral, on All Souls’ Day, and on the anniversary of the deceased.

An observation about the ritual design is also appropriate. I spoke earlier of the emergence of a specific coronavirus repertoire. That repertoire rarely turns out to be completely new, but is usually derived from existing rituals. Applause is an established ritual, while the guard or hedge of honor along the street was also dominant at the Air Disaster MH17 rituals.

We also see the increased role of basic sacrality here. These newly emerging ritual forms fall back on very general and familiar elementary forms, as shown in the silent processions and the marking of scenes of disaster.

The suddenly changed context confronted us with all kinds of ritual forms or types that we were hardly aware of but that were already there. Online rituals in particular suddenly came into the picture, but

⁷ On ritual ambivalences and trends, see P. POST: ‘Ein Panorama der Ritualdynamik. Bereiche und Trends’, in U. WAGNER-RAU & E. HANDKE (eds.): *Provozierte Kasualpraxis. Rituale in Bewegung* (= Praktische Theologie heute 166) (Stuttgart 2019) 21-43.

they were not new. Within the cluster of alternative and provoked rituals, this is without doubt the most striking form. In small groups and specific contexts, rituals have been online for a long time, but quite broadly, e-rituals were not seen as fully fledged. Especially in religious-ecclesiastical circles, people were reticent: can e-rituals be authentic ritual acts? Now, out of necessity, church services, funerals, and commemorations are suddenly massively streamed or recasted for digital settings. Whatever people think of them, e-rituals are suddenly on the agenda.

In the following part of my chapter I dwell on these strongly emerging e-rituals, focusing mainly on religious rituals, liturgy, and funerals. I begin with a brief note on terminology and various forms of e-ritual.⁸

4. A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY AND FORMS OF E-RITUAL

4.1. Terminology

As far as terminology is concerned, I use a range of terms for the general context of information and communication technology networks and digital media, such as i-, digital, online, virtual, e-, net-, and cyber. This indicates the culture of computers, information technology, and virtual reality. More specifically, I usually choose e-ritual, online ritual, and ritual online as umbrella terms for rituals connected with digital communication technologies (plural!). It is important to deploy e-rituals widely. This is not limited to internet deployment, but covers all rituals related to computer-mediated communication (including VR, games, etc.).

4.2. Forms of e-ritual

In addition to these general umbrella terms, it is important to distinguish between different forms of e-ritual. First, we can make a distinction between a ritual online and an online ritual. A ritual online is an

⁸ The following parts on e-ritual and online culture are partly based on two previous publications (in that there is additional literature on the theme): P. POST & S. VAN DER BEEK: *Doing ritual criticism in a Network Society. Online and offline explorations into pilgrimage and sacred place* (= Liturgia condenda 29) (Leuven/Paris/Bristol 2016); POST: '@Ritual'. For some current explorations of digital ritual, see M. HOONDEERT & S. VAN DER BEEK (eds.): *Ritual in a digital society* (= Netherlands Studies in Ritual and Liturgy 21) (Amsterdam/Groningen 2019).

offline ritual that can be followed online, such as the aforementioned streamed church services. An online ritual is a ritual that is only available online, designed separately for digital media (it is ‘e-only’). In practice, there is usually an interaction of online and offline elements.

This gross distinction of forms of e-ritual can now be refined. When we take as an example of an e-ritual repertoire the liturgy, church services, we see in several modifications a scale with two poles: the offline and online situation of the ritual. This scale can be applied to other ritual repertoires, such as funerals. Eric van den Berg discerns physical church services; dominant physical church services with online forms; dominant online church services with physical forms; and fully online church services.⁹ Marian Geurtsen further details this classification: services streamed live with sound and vision; video church services, recorded services that are edited with the church space acting as a kind of studio; video messages in the form of, for example, a meditation put together through editing; interactive online services via, for example, Zoom or other platforms for webinars and web conferences.¹⁰ When distinguishing forms of e-ritual, two parameters are striking: the degree of being online (in other words, the ratio of online to offline) and the degree of interaction.

There has been parallel diversity in funerals during the coronavirus pandemic. Drawing on my own experiences (I attended about five funerals online during the pandemic), I see variety as well as a certain growing similarity in the funeral rites. Much is directly linked to the technical infrastructure. Because of these technical possibilities, there is a distinction between rituals in crematoria, which usually have much more professional means available, and churches. Funeral services in churches are streamed in a straightforward manner, with at most an occasional change of camera setup or focus. In contrast, crematoria offer streaming that is tailored to the online situation. After logging in, you enter a virtual waiting room where an impression is given of the surroundings of the crematorium and the interior through a film and photos with background music. During the service, photos of the deceased are shown full screen.

⁹ E. VAN DEN BERG: *Alles over online kerkdiensten video en audio* (Den Haag 2020²); E. VAN DEN BERG (ed.): *Ervaringen met online kerkdiensten* (Den Haag 2020).

¹⁰ M. GEURTSSEN: ‘Wat doet online vieren met de liturgie?’, in VAN DEN BERG: *Ervaringen* 56-70.

5. KEY ASPECTS OF E-RITUALS

There are a number of key aspects or elements that recur in almost all studies of e-rituals.¹¹ These aspects are important for e-rituals in the coronavirus context and appear in debates and experiences. These aspects include issues that are more descriptive, analytical, and sometimes critical of rituals, such as authenticity, the physical dimension, the community dimension, online/offline relationships and interaction, connection with offline institutions and authorities, and sacredness.

5.1. Authenticity or ‘the real thing’

All the issues and elements mentioned are concerned with the general, diffuse notion of authenticity or ritual identity. To what extent does the innovation of rituals online influence the characteristics of rituals? This has everything to do with the phenomenon of ritual innovation in a general sense, especially when technical innovations are involved. Technical innovations often have a large and broad impact on culture. Many innovations directly touch on the authenticity and characteristics of rituals. For example, the emerging application of concrete (together with glass and steel) in architecture at the beginning of the last century raised the question of whether ritual spaces such as churches, chapels, and monasteries could be built with these new materials. For a long time, this new building material was banned as ‘unworthy’ by ecclesiastical authorities and certain architectural schools. Only fire-formed materials, such as brick, or natural materials, such as natural stone and wood, were chosen.

¹¹ I must note here that many of the studies on e-ritual are about religious ritual, cf. the many studies of Heidi Campbell; I mention here three recent digital publications on religion, ritual and the coronavirus pandemic: H. CAMPBELL (ed.): *The distanced church. Reflections on doing church online* (2020), doi:10.21423/distancedchurch; H. CAMPBELL, *Religion in Quarantine. The future of religion in a post-pandemic world* (2020), doi:10.21423/religioninquarantine; H. CAMPBELL (ed.): *Digital ecclesiology. A global conversation* (2020), doi:10.21423/digitalecclesiology. Some other publications where you can find the here mentioned key issues: Special issue on Rituals on the Internet of the *Journal of Religion on the Internet* 2/1 (2006); T. HUTCHINGS: *Creating church online. Ritual, community and new media* (London 2019 [2017]); T. BERGER: *@Worship. Liturgical practices in digital worlds* (= Liturgy, Worship and Society Series) (London/New York 2017); T. BERGER, ‘@Worship. Exploring liturgical practices in cyberspace’, in *Questions Liturgiques/Studies in Liturgy* 94/3-4 (2013) 266-286; T. BERGER (ed.): *Liturgy in migration. From the upper room to cyberspace* (Collegeville 2012).

There is a similar discussion today about rituals and the rise of new media.¹² With the advent of radio and later TV, there was the question of whether religious rituals could be fully mediated through the then-new media. Many of the debates about e-rituals and e-liturgies are entirely in this line. The ecclesiastical struggle with radio and especially TV has been described several times and revolves around the general question of whether there can be ‘authentic’ rituals through media mediation. Under the label of ‘authentic’ there is a series of aspects. Most of them are discussed below, such as the sensory component, community, and the ‘sacred’ character. Here, I mention separately the element of reproduction. In the discussion about the authenticity of media such as photography, film, and TV, the reproduction dimension played an important role as the opposite of originality and authenticity. A famous 1936 essay by Walter Benjamin on the (mechanical) reproducibility of a work of art set the tone here.¹³ In a study on cyber pilgrimage, I also elaborated on the reproduction aspect of online culture and rituals. Reproduction appears to be able to take many forms: reconstruction, recreation, copy, image, and replica are all reproductions. Some of the forms of e-ritual that I previously distinguished are also forms of reproduction. Leading ‘modern’ progressive theologians such as Romano Guardini, Karl Rahner, and Johann Baptist Metz were also critical of TV rituals until the 1990s. In addition to the question of whether rituals on TV were ‘the real thing’, there was the question of the far-reaching, public nature of the ritual. Do religious rituals not need to be shielded from the public domain? Can we just hand over rituals to the mass media?

5.2. Sense of physicality

The aspect of sensuality and sensoriality constantly features in discussions about e-rituals. Ritual acting is connected with physicality, with the senses, with seeing, feeling, hearing, and smelling, and with embodiment. For many, physical space is also a defining part of the ritual experience. What about embodiment in e-ritual?

¹² On the debate on ritual/liturgy on TV the summary with an overview of literature: P. POST: ‘Disciplina arcani. Modern avatars of Christian ritual secrecy’, in P. VAN GEEST, M. POORTHUIS & E. ROSE (eds.): *Sanctifying texts, transforming rituals. Encounters in liturgical studies* (Leiden/Boston 2017) 385-406, p. 393-396.

¹³ W. BENJAMIN: ‘L’oeuvre d’art à l’époque de sa reproduction mécanisée’, in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5 (1936) 40-68.

First of all, we have to be careful about the contrast between virtual and physical. Of course there is a difference between an offline and an online ritual. E-rituals are different. Although people tend to compare the two, with the 'traditional' ritual as the benchmark (consciously or unconsciously), they do more justice to e-rituals by seeing them as their own new forms of rituals.

In addition, the comparison with 'traditional', offline rituals can also be disputed. Many rightly point to the material and physical aspects of virtual rituals that are indeed present. There is always someone at the device (computer, tablet, smartphone), commands are given, screens are opened or swiped, and there is image and sound. There is also plenty of physical experience. A virtual presentation can move people to tears, infuriate them, make them sweat, or make them laugh. Figures indicate that porn sites are among the most visited sites worldwide. Porn is a striking example of the interaction of online and offline, of virtual and physical, in a twofold way. Most of the time, porn is offline sexual activity brought online (although there is more and more 'e-only' porn with avatars) that elicits offline physical experiences.

On closer inspection, there is almost always an interaction or interference between online and offline. That interplay is also present when it comes to place and space. In the case of the ritual online, there is the virtual space of the virtual ritual act (which, incidentally, is often given shape with reference to a physical space) and there is the space in which one finds oneself with the screen. These spaces are different from a crematorium in the case of a funeral or a church in the case of a worship service, but there are indeed space and place and spatial experiences. It is also important that the setting of the ritual is moved, similar to the moving of the ritual space from indoor to outdoor contexts during the coronavirus pandemic. Often the transfer is from the traditional ritual space to the home situation, whereby the ritual is now partly linked to the context of everyday life. I had that experience of double spaces when I was participating in funerals during the coronavirus lockdowns.

A final comment is that the virtual ritual as a ritual phenomenon is by no means new and only came to the fore because of our digitized network culture. Many forms of 'spiritual' virtual rituals are known.¹⁴ From the beginning of Christianity and Islam, spiritual ritual practices

¹⁴ P. POST & S. VAN DER BEEK: 'Virtual pilgrimage as a mental journey', in POST & VAN DER BEEK: *Doing ritual criticism* 87-94.

can be identified. There are many virtual devotions such as spiritual pilgrimages. Recently, research has been conducted on spiritual or mental devotional practices in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that involved traveling virtually to Rome or Jerusalem.¹⁵ Via Crucis meditations were, in fact, a virtual exercise. Here, too, the aforementioned reproduction aspect played a central role. The mental journey was supported by offline material culture, such as devotional books, devotional pictures, or larger representations of sacred places.

5.3. Community and interaction

Another consistently discussed theme around e-rituals is community and all kinds of related aspects, such as active participation in a ritual. The central question here is what exactly is understood by a ‘community’. Lorne Dawson formulates six criteria for a virtual community: interactivity, stable membership, stable identity, ‘netizenship’ and social control, signals of personal concern, and occurrence in public space.¹⁶ It is very questionable whether these parameters do justice to online ritual communities and whether they are formulated too much from an offline community perspective. I think especially of the criteria of stable membership and stable identity; I see in the ritual online culture a new type of community that is fluid, momentary, and temporary in nature. It is not without reason that ‘community’ has become a key concept in the network culture. In an e-ritual community, we should rather think of community as a place of affinity (Paul Gee: affinity space¹⁷), a group that meets to cherish or ‘celebrate’ one or more shared interests. This could involve gathering around a shared memory of a deceased loved one, or around a movie hero or writer, or commemorating a disaster or tragedy.

¹⁵ K. RUDY: *Virtual pilgrimages in the convent. Imagining Jerusalem in the late Middle Ages* (= *Disciplina Monastica* 8) (Turnhout 2011); I. CORNET: ‘Spiritual communion in mystical texts from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries’, in *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* 36 (2020) 34-53.

¹⁶ L.L. DAWSON: ‘Do virtual religious ‘communities’ exist? Clarifying the issues’, in G. LARSON: *Studies in Inter-Religious Relations* 29 (Uppsala 2006) 30-46; *Ibidem*, ‘Religion and the quest for virtual community’, in H. CAMPBELL (ed.): *Digital religion. Understanding religious practice in new media worlds* (New York 2013) 75-89.

¹⁷ J.P. GEE: *Situated language and learning. A critique of traditional schooling* (New York/Abingdon 2004) 70-81.

This form of community cannot be called entirely new either. In ritual and liturgical studies, the distinction between community as ‘Gemeinschaft’ and as ‘assemblea’ has already been pointed out. *Gemeinschaft* stands for a static and massive community, while *assemblea* represents a flowing, momentary community that exists as a group is called together.

Community is closely linked to participation and interaction. It is important to underline that Web 2.0 is anything but a passive one-way medium. Interactivity is an important characteristic of computer-mediated communication. Numerous interactive elements can also be incorporated in relatively limited forms of e-ritual, such as ritual online via streaming. If I take the example of online church services and online funerals during the coronavirus pandemic, I see all kinds of interaction, such as communicating prayer intentions online, organizing meetings afterwards via online coffee dates or a separate chat function, or using WhatsApp or Zoom during or after the ritual.

More generally, there is also the question of what exactly ‘participation’ in a ritual is. Ritual participation can take many forms. This does not only have to consist of an active role in the ritual, as often seems to be assumed. Marian Geurtsen rightly points out in her first analysis of e-church services during the coronavirus outbreak that one can participate in the online Liturgy of the Hours of an abbey, where that participation consists of “residing in the space of the liturgy.”¹⁸ My experiences at the aforementioned funerals were similar to this.

5.4. Authority and ritual experts

The interference of online and offline, which has already been emphasized several times, is also reflected in the elements of ritual experts and authority. Whether it concerns streaming or carefully orchestrated online rituals, there is always a connection to offline institutions, which in turn are related to so-called ritual experts. These can be the staff of churches, funeral organizations, or crematoria, or families and relatives when it comes to a funeral. Authorities and experts are always linked to power and interests. For e-rituals, there are the questions of who is in charge, who facilitates, and who selects the music and words? Who manages the

¹⁸ GEURTSSEN: ‘Wat doet online vieren met de liturgie?’, in VAN DEN BERG (ed.): *Ervaringen* 56-70, p. 64.

websites, who has access to data, what commercial aspects are there, and are there privacy issues? This complex area of power, privacy, commerce, and manipulation has become urgent in light of data scandals and the growing awareness of the enormous influence of algorithms in the hands of globally operating mega-corporations, such as Microsoft and Google, healthcare institutions, all kinds of government agencies, and so on. Parallel to commercial corporations, religious groups also use online culture as a propaganda tool.

5.5. Sacrality

We already mentioned a final aspect in the context of authenticity. It concerns the special character of rituals that is often captured as ‘sacred’. Rituals are connected with what we can call the ‘sacred domain’. A ritual is a special act; it sets things and persons apart. Rituals express to people that which is ‘sacred’ to them. From that perspective, the question for some is whether the digital world is an appropriate environment for the sacred. That critical voice comes not only from circles of religious rituals, but is much broader. In around 2000, when it became public knowledge that there was a plan to set up a digital monument in memory of all the Dutch Jews who died in the Holocaust (the site went online in 2005, see digitaljoodsmonument.nl), there was a lot of protest, especially against the digital form. The Internet was seen as an unworthy public domain where one can end up on a porn site with one wrong mouse click. That does not fit with commemoration as a special, privileged, ‘sacred’ practice.¹⁹

In religious circles, this aspect of the sacred is extended and is part of a theological discussion, particularly around sacramentality.

6. CODA

The coronavirus pandemic is an enormous stimulus for a strong and broad rise of e-rituals. In other words, rituals taking place during the pandemic are, to a large extent, e-rituals. Unlike before the outbreak, e-rituals are now embedded in the broader setting of present and accepted

¹⁹ On the criticism of the Jewish Digital monument, see POST & VAN DER BEEK: *Doing ritual criticism* 111-114; L. FARO: *Postponed monuments in the Netherlands. Manifestation, context and meaning* (PhD Dissertation, Tilburg University 2015) 115-171.

online culture. During the pandemic, people have begun to do a lot online: meetings, education from primary school to university, family contact, meeting friends, shopping, and visiting a doctor. Rituals finds their place in that dynamic.

I see many research projects worldwide that particularly want to map the ritual of death and dying during the pandemic.²⁰ Valuable material will be generated there for further investigation of e-rituals in times of disaster and crisis, but also after that. It is now too early to take stock of the new role and position of e-rituals in that context due to the pandemic. Opinions on the future vary widely. For example, to what degree is the strongly emerging role of e-rituals linked to the pandemic, and will it decline thereafter? In the post-pandemic era, will the new position of e-rituals remain? Has there been a breakthrough during the pandemic that will be permanent?

²⁰ See, for the Netherlands, the project 'Funerals in times of corona' of the Funeral Academy: *Uitvaart in tijden van Corona_overview* (totzover.nl) [last accessed December 2020] with references to other projects in the world.

THE MOBILE WITNESS: MOBILE MEDIA AFFECTIVE
WITNESSING DURING DISASTERS

LARISSA HJORTH & KATHLEEN M. CUMISKEY

1. INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic the digital has become intertwined with much of our lives.¹ As work, life, schooling, and socializing during lockdown has been recalibrated through the digital – how we experience, perceive, and remember the pandemic is being shaped in and through this lens. In particular, for many millions of people across the globe, the digital and online is synonymous with mobile media. The intimacy, ubiquity, and immediacy of mobile media affordances have, in turn, shaped how we witness events both near and far and their affective, emotional, and ethical dimensions – what Anna Reading calls ‘mobile witnessing’.² As we have argued elsewhere, mobile media are companions and witnesses to disasters and loss that not only connect to earlier rituals around life-death-afterlife but also expand our tropes of what psychologists call ‘continuing bonds’ with those dying or dead.³ As we suggest in this chapter, rituals around disasters, loss and grief are being curated by mobile media in ways that both extend older practices and create new forms of affective witnessing – that is, collapsing the gap between the mourner and the witness and transforming mobile devices into linking objects with the dead.⁴

¹ This chapter is revised from chapter 6 in the book *Haunting Hands* (New York 2017) and builds upon the work in L. HJORTH & K.M. CUMISKEY: ‘Mobiles facing death. Affective witnessing and the intimate companionship of devices’, in *Cultural Studies Review* 24/2 (2018) 166-180.

² A. READING: ‘Memobilia. Mobile phones making new memory forms’, in J. GARDE-HANSEN, A. HOSKINS & A. READING (eds.): *Save as... digital memories* (Basingstoke 2009) 81-95.

³ D. KASS, P.R. SILVERMAN & S. NICKMAN: *Continuing bonds. New understandings of grief* (Washington, DC 1996).

⁴ P. PAPAILIAS: ‘Witnessing in the age of the database. Viral memorials, affective publics, and the assemblage of mourning’, in *Memory Studies* 9/4 (2016) 437-454.

Increasingly, mobile media plays a crucial role in how we make sense of life, death, and afterlife. In times of disaster and trauma, mobile media is on hand as a vehicle for *witnessing* and *companionship* in which memories of dead and living intertwine.⁵ From events such as the Fukushima earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear reactor disaster in Japan to more recent deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic, how disaster is experienced, understood, conceptualized, discussed, shared, and remembered is shaped by mobile media. It is through the mediated experiences of mobile media as an affective witness that we make sense of our world. Mobile media help with the continuation of bonds – sometimes through perceived connections with the deceased, other times through allowing the bereaved to ‘feel’ connected through the memories of the deceased as part of everyday feeds. When the disaster event is a shared experience, mobile media work to quickly produce sites of collective mourning and memorialization.⁶

In this chapter we reflect on the particular dimensions of mobile media for affective witnessing. We begin with definitions of affective witnessing. We also reflect upon mobile visuality such as selfies as a genre for curating different forms of and for witnessing. We then turn to the example of the Sewol ship sinking in South Korea in 2014, which saw the death of 250 school children and in which mobile media and selfies-as-eulogies figure. In this example, we see the power of mobile media affective witnessing that sees the device as both the companion and witness to the events and also plays a key role in the court case that led to the impeachment of the government. Far from being a rare event, we argue that the emotional dimension of mobile media to both witness and companion plays a key role in how we are experiencing and remembering events, especially amplified during crisis such as disasters and pandemics.

2. MOBILE WITNESSING

The role of the digital to connect us to informal processes of mourning and memorialization is vast.⁷ In particular, research in the fields of memory studies has explored the significance of media to ‘witness’, and

⁵ K.M. CUMISKEY & L. HJORTH: *Haunting hands. Mobile media practices and loss* (New York 2017).

⁶ CUMISKEY & HJORTH: *Haunting hands*.

⁷ A. HOSKINS: *The mediatization of memory. Media and the end of collective memory* (Cambridge, MA 2011); W. ERNST: *Digital memory and the archive* (Minneapolis 2012); J. VAN DIJCK: *Mediated memories in the digital age* (Stanford 2007); A. READING:

thus also simultaneously memorialize and make sense of, events. Cultural studies scholar Anna Reading has talked vividly about the role of mobile camera phones as “witnessing” the “war on terror” in ways that require us to rethink media and ethics.⁸ Through the collection, documentation, and curation process, encounters become events. Digital media play a crucial role in how we understand, reflect, experience, and remember place. In sum, how we witness and make sense of places. The digital mediates, remediates, and ‘mediatizes’ both life and death.⁹ While many examples can be found across numerous public events and moments, they are especially heightened during global pandemics like COVID-19. During the pandemic we saw how the digital recalibrated all facets of life in ways that accelerated our thinking about the relationship between media as a vehicle for both witnessing and sensemaking and how, in turn, that shapes and curates notions of collective publics.

As the weeks turned into months and the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, much of the content was framed in and through the mobile phone. Mobile media, as both intimate and ubiquitous devices, create and curate the ways in which we experience and contextualise the feel of the data. They are devices for datafication – that is, collecting information about users through the device. They are quotidian devices that help to both witness and make sense of our everyday lives and rituals. Devices that become sites of boundedness and frames alongside the potential to transcend all boundaries including those around the intimate experiences of one’s own death.

In 2020, mobile media played a crucial role in how stories and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic emerged globally. In sum, it became the vehicle for both witnessing and sensemaking. We watched new forms of mass dying alone. We witnessed new regulations around funerals that only allowed groups of ten people – thus transforming the ritual of grief around funeral into a digital one. We saw virtually how countries grappled with the challenges. Images of health workers on the frontline covered in personal protective equipment filled mobile devices. We listened to stories of resilience as countries went into lockdown. We

‘Mobile witnessing. Ethics and the camera phone in the war on terror’, in *Globalizations* 6/1 (2009) 61-76; and READING: ‘Memobilia’.

⁸ READING: ‘Mobile witnessing’.

⁹ D. REFLUND CHRISTENSEN & S. GOTVED: ‘Online memorial culture. An introduction’, in *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 21/1-2 (2014) 1.

deployed mobile media to help with social connection in a time of physical distancing. As we have now witnessed in response to shared global trauma over the last two decades, all these stories of fear, courage, change, and loss were viewed, experienced, and felt through our bodies as we cradled the intimate mobile device in our hands.¹⁰

The rituals of sensemaking and witnessing in and through media during the pandemic amplified what anthropologist Penelope Papailias calls ‘affective witnessing’ – that is, the blurring of feelings of loss and grief by both the mourners and witnesses through viral media.¹¹ Using the example of the Alan Kurdi image – in which a drowned young boy came to encapsulate the grief of the Syrian refugee crisis – Papailias argues that the role of ‘affect’ in witnessing today through mobile media requires us to re-examine grief as part of everyday life. Papailias, drawing on Judith Butler, argues that these moments of grief illustrate the inequalities of bodies – that some bodies matter more than others. Affective witnessing demonstrates that grief is not something that can be compartmentalized. It highlights that there is a lot of unacknowledged grief and loss around anticipated futures. Grief, as grief psychologist David Kessler has noted, needs to be witnessed.

As Papailias identifies in her work on witnessing, digital memorialization creates space for affective public witnessing, in which even those who did not bear direct witness or who were otherwise not materially affected by a crisis can participate in the witnessing and memorialization of crises. This mediated space is important because the event(s) and their affects take on a mimetic, viral quality being constantly reproduced and transformed. As Papailias notes, witnessing is always affective: it insists on the intensive relationality of the witness and the witnessed. The real significance of affective witnessing is that it makes space for change, for bodies, subjectivities, and possibilities that are otherwise obscured, for voices and stories that might be silenced or simply unheard.

For Papailias, “virtualization blurs established distinctions, opening a field of new possibilities and, above all, turning the certainty of the event into a new problem: in this case, about how the event relates to the

¹⁰ L. HJORTH & K.Y. KIM: ‘The mourning after. A case study of social media in the 3.11 earthquake disaster in Japan’, in *Television & New Media* 12/6 (November 2011) 552-559; HJORTH & CUMISKEY: ‘Mobiles facing death’.

¹¹ PAPAIIAS: ‘Witnessing in the age of the database’.

present, about our connection to the event and to each other”.¹² Papailias’s work is a reminder that witnessing is always already *embodied* and *mediated*. Deeply imbricated with how we understand intimacy, witnessing (like intimacy) is always mediated – if not by experiences and language then by memory. Affective witnessing, as defined by Richardson and Schankweiler, enables us to “account for both the centrality of affect and emotion to witnesses and witnessing and their inherent relationality”.¹³ Bearing witness is an affective and emotional experience, and devices such as the smartphone now enable a far greater reach of our abilities to witness, observe, or participate in events. Thus affective witnessing foregrounds how “mediation acts to capture, coalesce, and modulate the intensities of witnessing”.¹⁴

Witnessing, in this context, refers to the act not just of seeing images or video of events related to death, but of a personal affective involvement in those events, even if we were not personally physically involved in them. As Papailias notes, distance and difference between mourner and witness collapse. For Papailias the role of virality is crucial in that it “captures the temporality, spatiality, materiality, and mimeticism of these formations [online memorials], as well as their frequent pathologization”.¹⁵ Others, like Andrew Hoskins, also adopt similar terms – memorials as being a contagion of the past.¹⁶ This idea of virality and contagion refers to the way that the immediacy and intimacy of social media can spread the impact of an event through space and time. This is amplified during times of disaster.

Affective witnessing, we argue, has taken on new significance as mobile media accompanies us through disasters and pandemics. In the next section we reflect upon the role of mobile visuality in disasters. Then we turn to the previous case study of the Sewol ship tragedy to reflect upon affective witnessing. As we suggest, techniques like selfies-as-eulogies reflect rituals around loss and connection that can be seen to extend earlier photographic tropes, while also extending the affective nature of the visuality into embodied ways.

¹² PAPAILIAS: ‘Witnessing in the age of the database’ 443.

¹³ M. RICHARDSON & K. SCHANKWEILER: ‘Affective witnessing’, in J. SLABY & C. VON SCHEVE (eds.): *Affective societies* (London 2019) 168.

¹⁴ RICHARDSON & SCHANKWEILER: ‘Affective witnessing’ 169.

¹⁵ PAPAILIAS: ‘Witnessing in the age of the database’ 437.

¹⁶ HOSKINS: *The mediatization of memory* 270.

3. MOBILE VISUALITY AND THE SELFIE AFFECT

Magnifying the intimate nature of mobile media, camera phone practices also play a key role in the changing way memory and image is experienced and shared. While camera phone images are shaped by the affordance of mobile technologies, they also play into broader photographic tropes and genres.¹⁷ At the crossroads between the aesthetic and the social, camera phone practices can provide insight into contemporary digital media.

This phenomenon is magnified in the context of selfies as a barometer for changing relationships between media, memory, and death.¹⁸ Digital data allow new ways in which to construct one's life, death, and after-death.¹⁹ These insights are especially highlighted with mobile media as a witness, repository, disseminator, and magnifier of events. Within this process, new types of genres such as 'selfies at funeral' signal emergent relations between intimacy, mobile media, etiquette, and affect.²⁰

Indeed, the ubiquity and intimacy of mobile media to be on hand all the time has given way to forms of life-dying-death witnessing and companionship that expand upon these earlier tropes. For example, it was the mobile device that filmed the killing of African American George Floyd in 2020 by police who pinned him handcuffed for nine minutes as he repeated "I can't breathe", literally echoing the calls of another

¹⁷ D. PALMER: 'Mobile media photography', in G. GOGGIN & J. HJORTH (eds.): *The Routledge companion to mobile media* (New York 2014); N. VAN HOUSE, M. DAVIS, M. AMES, M. FINN & V. VISWANATHAN: 'The uses of personal networked digital imaging. An empirical study of cameraphone photos and sharing', in *CHI EA '05* (April 2005) 1853-1856; VAN DIJCK: *Mediated memories*.

¹⁸ T. SENFT & N. BAYM: 'What does the selfie say? Investigating a global phenomenon', in *International Journal of Communication* 9 (2015) 1588-1606; P. FROSH: 'The gestural image. The selfie, photography theory, and kinesthetic sociability', in *International Journal of Communication* 9 (2015) 1607-1628.

¹⁹ J. STANYEK & B. PIEKUT: 'Deadness. Technologies of the intermundane', in *TDR* 54/1 (Spring 2010) 14-38; B. DE VRIES & J. RUTHERFORD: 'Memorializing loved ones on the world wide web', in *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 49/1 (2004) 5-26; K. VEALE: 'A virtual adaptation of a physical cemetery for diverse researchers using information science methods', in *Computers in Genealogy* 8/4 (2003) 16-38; G. BOLLMER: 'Millions now living will never die. Cultural anxieties about the afterlife of information', in *The Information Society* 29/3 (2013) 142-151.

²⁰ M. GIBBS, J. MEESE, M. ARNOLD, B. NANSEN & M. CARTER: '#Funeral and Instagram. Death, social media, and platform vernacular', in *Information, Communication & Society* 18/3 (2015) 255-268.

man, Eric Garner, whose murder by a lethal police chokehold was witnessed and broadcast via mobile and social media in 2014. Mobile media footage in many encounters with police not only witnessed the killing but, through its viral circulation on social media, galvanized global support across the world leading to protests and collective consciousness raising around the pandemic of racial injustice. This ability of mobile media to play a specific role in the affective witnessing of events in ways that cause a rapid and emotional response and call to action is a phenomenon that is becoming indivisible from the ways we experience disasters more generally.

Sara Ahmed defines affect as a ‘sticky residual’ that sits on the skin and body.²¹ In the context of mobile-mediated experiences and with the camera phone as a lens into contemporary visual culture, the stickiness of affect now extends to our devices. In disasters, it is the quotidian do-it-yourself (DIY) realism of mobile media images by citizens that galvanize the global public through their affective aesthetics of trauma.²² First person, immersive accounts, alongside attempts to document and piece together details related to the unfolding of the events while also engaging in the memorialization or marking of the losses, are all managed now through mobile and social media and the use of mobile devices.²³ The mobile visibility required for ‘affective witnessing’ or the public sharing of graphic images of events often originate from a persistent and dominant, seemingly intimate, mobile media trope: the ‘selfie’ and in the most tragic cases often the selfies of the soon-to-be deceased.²⁴

The proliferation of ‘selfies’ is now banal as every day mobile phone users engage with their forward-facing camera to capture themselves in the context of their lived experience. Affect is central to Senft and Baym’s definition of the selfie. They define the selfie as both a “photographic object that initiates the transmission of human feeling” and as “a practice – a gesture that can send different messages to different individuals”.²⁵ Selfies as a practice are not just about representing the self but also serve as extensions of the self as they are generated with the viewers of the media in mind. As the production and distribution of user-generated video becomes increasingly

²¹ S. AHMED: *The cultural politics of emotion* (London 2004).

²² PAPAILIAS: ‘Witnessing in the age of the database’.

²³ PAPAILIAS: ‘Witnessing in the age of the database’.

²⁴ HJORTH & CUMISKEY: ‘Mobiles facing death’.

²⁵ SENFT & BAYM: ‘What does the selfie say?’.

accessible to users (alongside live streaming capabilities), ‘selfies’ are no longer simple, brief, captured moments. Selfies have become extended and immersive experiences that can impact the viewer in significant ways. Multiple selfies woven together of a shared experience has the potential to shift what ‘eyewitness testimony’ means in the pursuit of justice.

The production of selfies can almost take on ritualistic like aspects as mobile media users are always at the ready to engage with their devices to represent events as they occur. With mobile devices as constant companions, it is now undeniable that mobile media have become integral parts of the passages of life, death, and after-life – a new kind of phenomenology.²⁶ In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital is increasingly imbricated in the processes of death and dying as a growing global public becomes re-attuned to our understandings of those experiences. Selfies that witness death can be understood as ‘sublime’. For Amanda du Preez, three categories constitute ‘sublime selfies’ – “selfies unknowingly taken *before* death, selfies *of* death where the taker’s death is almost witnessed and selfies *with* death where the taker stands by while someone else dies”.²⁷ Expanding upon du Preez’s death selfie categories, this chapter discusses the role of selfies taken during a mass casualty event whereby users presciently acknowledge the death facing them and deploy mobile media to serve as companion and witness in final moments or as an anticipatory mobile-generated eulogy. The intentionality of the tragic selfie is in recognition of the recipient and in the carefully scripted consideration for it being viewed after death. It is also used as evidence, as first-hand, eyewitness testimony of what happened that is expected to survive beyond the event and even beyond the life of the selfie-taker.

4. SELFIE-AS-EULOGIES: SEWOL DISASTER

When Soo-hyun’s brother failed to return home after the South Korean MV Sewol boat disaster in which 250 people, predominantly high school children, were killed, Soo-hyun cradled her mobile phone constantly as if the device was an extension of him. Adorned with her brother’s picture as a screen saver, Soo-hyun’s mobile phone contained a testament to his life: the individual SMSs he had sent her, the group Kakao IMs, and the Facebook pages and

²⁶ G. BOLLMER & K. GUINNESS: ‘Phenomenology for the selfie’, in *Cultural Politics* 13/2 (2017) 156-176.

²⁷ A. DU PREEZ: ‘Sublime selfies. To witness death’, in *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 21/6 (2017) 744-760.

photos. While Soo-hyun grappled with the unregulated waves of grief that flooded her whole body in the days, weeks and months after the disaster, her mobile phone became a container; not only for her and her family's memorialization of her brother and part of a ritual around continuing their bonds in his after-life, but also a vessel for the growing consolidation of collective grief within Korean culture in the aftermath of the disaster.²⁸

As soon as the Sewol ferry capsized on 16 April 2014, multiple mobile phones were on hand capturing the sheer terror of the events unfolding. While a few of these stories were documented and disseminated in global press via translation from Hangul to English, dozens of stories of mobile media memorialization processes remained untranslated and were shared only on local Korean sites and between users most impacted by the tragedy. After the ferry sunk and over 250 school children died from drowning or hypothermia, it was the mobile media footage that friends and family cradled in disbelief. YouTube began to fill with hundreds of UCC (user-created content) videos, consolidating public anger and outcry. Hundreds of mobile media fragments sent to family and friends by the children who would die began to emerge, with some of these images and videos only being delivered to the receiver after the sender had drowned. With selfies being a mundane practice for many of the high school children, the trope took on new dimensions as children captured their different attitudes to the unfolding situation. Some children realized they would die, and their selfie testimonials bear witness to their feelings of terror, shock, disbelief, fear, and resignation. Others portrayed the events in some semblance of denial, with laughter heard, disembodied in the background, as the viewer could assume that the child taking the video wanted to feel disconnected and removed from what was occurring around them. In this instance, the selfie is unmistakably embedded within the emotional texture of everyday life as an image of misrecognition in all its tragedy. Images and messages sent by the now deceased high school children to their parents and siblings about the unfolding tragedy sealed the mobile phone as the witness to the disaster. Many families were receiving messages and videos from their children unaware that these fragments would be the last moments captured of their children's lives. Here the haunting nature of mobile phone data entangled different modes of co-presence and representation. In the example of Soo-hyun we see how the mobile phone has become the

²⁸ CUMISKEY & HJORTH: *Haunting hands* 123-124.

shrine for channeling and consolidating individual and social waves of grief through its various digital intimate publics across social and mobile media. Mobile phones are a repository for hauntings of the hand and the heart, signaling the continuing bonds of attachment whereby grief does not end.²⁹ While much of the literature on bereavement and online memorials focuses upon the loss and experiences of the mourner, the Korean ferry disaster provided some examples of the role of the soon-to-be deceased in mobile media memorialization.

In death online research, social media has been seen to recalibrate our understandings of offline and online practices and rituals.³⁰ Much of the literature around the way that digital media has changed our relationship with death has focused upon online memorials³¹ and other forms of grieving online.³² Researchers are now beginning to go further and are looking at the way engagement with death online is complicated due to the way that our online and offline lives have become entangled through social and mobile media and thus necessarily also rituals and processes around death, dying, and after-death.³³ The quotidian and intimate dimension of mobile media undoubtedly impacts processes of grief differently than other media. In the disaster, mobile mediated co-presence took on new dimensions in its ability to traverse physical distance and engender psychological closeness alongside its ability to traverse the mortal and immortal.

In the sinking of the Sewol ferry, selfie movies were not about narcissism, but about the numbness and misrecognition that trauma can bring with it.³⁴ These selfies visualized collective trauma and citizenship. Mobile media photography provides a vehicle for continuing these activities while, at the same time, it uniquely allows for these activities to extend across temporal and spatial boundaries.³⁵ Far from narcissistic vehicles, selfies are not only used to connect in moments of trauma and

²⁹ P. ROSENBLATT: 'Grief does not end', in D. KLASS, P.R. SILVERMAN & S.L. NICKMAN (eds.): *Continuing bonds* (Washington, DC 1996).

³⁰ T. KOHN, M. GIBBS, B. NANSEN & L. VAN RYN (eds.): *Residues of death. Disposal reconfigured* (London 2019).

³¹ DE VRIES & J. RUTHERFORD: 'Memorializing loved ones'.

³² VEALE: 'A virtual adaptation'.

³³ C. GRAHAM, M. GIBBS & L. ACETI: 'Introduction to the special issue on death, afterlife, and immortality of bodies and data', in *The Information Society* 29/3 (2013) 133-141.

³⁴ B. WENDT: *The allure of the selfie* (Amsterdam 2014).

³⁵ PALMER: 'Mobile media photography'.

grief but also play a key role in mobilizing the Korean population into a collective action against firstly the boat company and secondly the government.³⁶ The story of the tragedy unfolded in the description of procedures gone wrong. Documentation of this, through the use of mobile media, afforded others the opportunity to redeploy the material to serve not only as a memorial, but also a way in which to learn from the tragedy. As can be seen in the one of the most viewed YouTube clips, “What happened inside Sewol ferry 2014.04.16”, mobile media from the deceased is used not only to continue bonds with *intimates* but also to serve *public* justice in the wake of their deaths. The replaying and editing of the mobile footage served to further formalize and legitimate the collective role of grief and the need to acknowledge grief’s unending nature. In the re-editing of the mobile footage, specters were allowed to live on and memorialization was allowed to cohabitate various online and offline spaces and to enhance citizenship. Here the camera phone footage was not just a *witness* for court prosecutors and trauma-laden images for the families of the deceased, but also functioned as highly effective memorials that quickly spread and consolidated the global public outcry, which then led to the impeachment of the president. The rawness of camera phone imagery, as mementos for lives unfairly taken, became fuel for the palpable grief felt worldwide. Parents across the world felt the unspeakable pain of watching a child’s final image to the world. These images remind us of Roland Barthes’s notion of the punctum: that is the *emotional affect* of these images on spectators.³⁷ For Barthes, it was important to distinguish the punctum from the photographer and also from the object photographed, which he calls the ‘spectrum’. The punctum is the affect that haunts us – an embodied experience whereby a sticky residual is left on our body.

5. CONCLUSION: THE MOBILE WITNESS AS PUNCTUM

When Roland Barthes was mourning the death of his mother, he wrote arguably one of the most poetic explorations of photography, *Camera Lucida*. In *Camera Lucida*, he engages with the complicated

³⁶ D.H. LEE: ‘Women’s creation of camera phone culture’, in *Fibreculture Journal* 6 (2005). Available at <https://six.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-038-womens-creation-of-camera-phone-culture/> [last accessed 21 July 2021].

³⁷ R. BARTHES: *Camera Lucida* (New York 1981).

relationship between representation and memory. Unquestionably, *Camera Lucida* was a book as much about death as it was about photography. It is a study of subjectivity and vulnerability. While Barthes wrote it as a eulogy for his mother, it ended up also being a eulogy for him, with his death from complications from a automobile accident happening only two months after it was published. Barthes's works highlights the entanglement between photography and memory. The speed at which mobile content is created and then shared functions to upend and reshape the relationship between memory and photography. As the selfie producer, engaging with the device can serve as a means to distance one's self from truly facing what is occurring. Is this separation also an attempt to join the audience, to drive the experience out of our minds and toward an intimate public in an attempt to understand, as Wendt argues, the numbness of the moment?³⁸

Much like the high school children in this chapter's case study, the ability of mobile media images to create a type of punctum effect is clear. The slight blurring images produced by many mobile media during the disaster and the faceless audio streams have created a new tapestry between the spectrum and punctum. The selfie images taken by the students not only became highly politicized in an amplified sense of studium, but they also resonated such posthumous punctum that it is hard not to be physically shaken by their affect. Moreover, we see how punctum combines with the Korean-specific notion of *jeong* to create a particularly Korean experience of the tragedy.

The Sewol disaster put in action a phenomenon that will become more pervasive in everyday life: the use of mobile media as visual eulogy by dying individuals and the possibility of the live broadcasting of death. As already mentioned, much of the literature referenced focuses upon the digital traces and specters left by those departed, rather than exploring how those facing death deploy mobile media to create their own mobile-emotive obituary. These digital death captures are further complicated, even enhanced, by the continuous and extensive use of surveillance technology. Footage from surveillance cameras or body cameras can add dimensions to the meaning making around the moment of death. As mobile media and surveillance technology become increasingly deployed, documenting and sharing death, as much as life, is becoming more apparent and expected. When we leave behind digital trails, we

³⁸ WENDT: *The allure of the selfie*.

must ask: which are residual and which become ephemeral ghosts? Will the significance and affect produced by mobile media surrounding the way we die overshadow the significance of how we lived and ultimately how we are grieved?

Mobile media allow for new ways to contextualize and recalibrate death.³⁹ In the Sewol disaster and more recently in the COVID-19 pandemic, we witness the recalibration of the role of the digital in bearing witness, collective mourning and enhanced memorialization. Mobile media are both our companions and witness to how loss and grief is both experienced and memorialized. It's also blurring lines between mourners and witnesses – what has been called affective witnessing. Mobile media can remediate older rituals such as memorialization and grieving; and they can also, as intimate media, affect us in ways that earlier media technologies could not. By studying the role of mobile media during disasters we can begin to understand the complex overlay between memorialization, continuing bonds, and affective witnessing that many are experiencing today during the pandemic. This requires us not only acknowledging that intimacy is always mediated but also that witnessing has various complex gradations that shape and are shaped by our highly mobile mediated worlds.

³⁹ S. GOTVED: 'Research review. Death online – alive and kicking!', in *Thanatos* 3/1 (2013) 112-180.

'YOU'LL DIE OF OLD AGE, I'LL DIE OF CLIMATE CHANGE!
CHILDREN AND DISASTER RITUALS

SUZANNE VAN DER BEEK

1. INTRODUCTION

In her study on children in religion, Susan Ridgely argues that children are not often included in our understanding of religious practices.¹ She claims that children are usually not included in religious studies, because we understand them to be uncritical bystanders who simply follow the religious ideas and practices of their parents. This, she claims, mirrors the absence of children's voices in religious practices: "Scholars assumed that adults are the sole creators and promoters of religious traditions and beliefs, overlooking any roles that children play in the creation or modification of religion as they respond to adult efforts to nurture their faith."² This disregard for children's agency does not only inform religious practices or the academic understanding of those practices. Rather, it is a reflection of the marginal position that children occupy in society at large. Both in religious practices and in daily life, "children appear primarily as reflections of adult concerns about the present or as projections of adult concerns for the future."³ This notion of the child as passive, uncritical, and therefore marginal, is based on the understanding that experience is a necessary ingredient for conscious and responsible participation: as long as the child has not been exposed to the necessary life experience, they are not capable of actively participating in social, political, or ritual practices.

In this chapter, I explore how our understanding of the child as defined by a lack of experience informs their position in disaster rituals.⁴ I will argue that this lack of experience often positions that child as either a

¹ S. RIDGELY: *The study of children in religions. A methods handbook* (New York 2011).

² RIDGELY: *The study of children in religions* 1.

³ RIDGELY: *The study of children in religions* 1.

⁴ Many thanks to Hans-Georg Eilenberger, with whom I originated the idea for this chapter, and Martin Hoondert, for his feedback on earlier versions of this text.

'grievable' ritual object that has lost their potential life experience, or as not-yet-adults that have to be educated in the ritual repertoire of adults. I will continue on to claim, however, that we may re-formulate the 'lack of experience' into a 'promise of future experience'. By doing this, we can observe how children can claim agency in rituals that relate to disasters that are yet to take place. In order to explore this argument, I will draw on the ritual activities that children create in the context of climate change protests.

2. POSITIONING THE CHILD IN DISASTER RITUALS

In her extended introduction to a special issue of *Children, Youth, and Environment*, Lori Peek argues that children's experience of disasters has historically been overlooked by both academics and practitioners.⁵ Despite the fact that large numbers of children continue to be affected by disasters in ways that are particular to their social and psychological position, children remain excluded from discussions that shape both research and policy agendas. Anderson points to children's marginalized position in society to explain this lack of engagement with children in disaster management.⁶ Peek calls for a re-positioning of the child in disaster research plans when she writes:

Although children are at special risk in disasters, they are not passive victims. Thus, (...) children and youth can participate in disaster preparedness activities in their homes, schools, and communities that would likely minimize some of the risks that they face.⁷

There are some indications that children are gaining a more central position in disaster research, including research on children's mental health issues⁸

⁵ L. PEEK: 'Children and disasters. Understanding vulnerability, developing capacities, and promoting resilience – An introduction', in *Children, Youth and Environments* 18/1 (2008) 1-29.

⁶ W.A. ANDERSON: 'Bringing children into focus on the social science disaster research agenda', in *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 23/3 (2005) 159-175.

⁷ PEEK: 'Children and disasters' 4.

⁸ I. WEISSBECKER, S.E. SEPHTON, M.B. MARTIN & D.M. SIMPSON: 'Psychological and physiological correlates of stress in children exposed to disaster. Review of current research and recommendations for intervention', in *Children, Youth and Environments* 18/1 (2008) 30-70.

and on the role children can play in communicating risk information to their peers and family.⁹

In we narrow down our scope to the field of *disaster rituals*, we find that children are generally positioned in one of two ways: they are positioned either as victims to be mourned or cared for through rituals, or as future adults who need to learn the appropriate ritual practices.

In the first instance, the child is a ritualized object. The child victim is usually considered as exceedingly tragic because they are robbed of a promised life, a life that lay ahead of them. This loss of potential life experience makes the child victim additionally ‘grievable’.¹⁰ We can think here of ritual sites such as the monuments for stillborn children. Through ritual activity on these sites, people commemorate the children that died before, during, or around birth. In her study in these ritual sites in the Netherlands, Laurie Faro presents how the grief around the loss of a child is expressed through ritual activity.¹¹ She also demonstrates how these practices have changed over time as the social practices of grieving a child changed. The social acceptance of grieving a stillborn child is a rather recent development, and many (grand)parents are even now starting to work through the grief of a lost child via these ritual sites.¹² The child is here positioned as the victim of a tragedy and therefore as object of mourning or care, usually by adults.¹³

In the second instance, the child is a ritualizing subject. Children are included in rituals in order to learn the necessary ritual repertoires. This ritual education is considered of extra importance because children will have to develop the skills to ensure that these rituals will be performed in the future. We can think, for example, of the position of the child in the Jewish Passover Seder ritual, in which the child is educated about the historical Jewish escape out of slavery as related in the Haggadah.

⁹ K.R. RONAN [et al.]: ‘Promoting child and family resilience to disaster. Effects, interventions, and prevention effectiveness’, in *Children, Youth and Environments* 18/1 (2008) 332-353.

¹⁰ J. BUTLER: *Frames of war. When is life grievable?* (New York 2016); J. BUTLER: *Precarious life. The powers of mourning and violence* (New York 2020).

¹¹ L. FARO: ‘Monuments for stillborn children and disenfranchised grief in the Netherlands. Recognition, protest and solace’, in *Mortality* (2020) 1-20.

¹² See also: R. WOODS: *Children remembered. Responses to untimely death in the past* (Liverpool 2007).

¹³ Note that a child can also be the object of mourning or care when they are not deceased. We can find a similar positioning of the child in rituals that care for children that have been faced with, for example, the divorce of parents, assault, or health issues.

This ritual is explicitly set up to fulfill the command to ‘tell your son’ about Jewish history, thereby ensuring the passing on of this tradition.¹⁴ We see a similar position for the ritual child in commemorations of war and conflict. For example, in order to ensure that knowledge about and care for victims of the Second World War continues in the future, ritual designers are making efforts to include children in their commemorations. In their study on the socialization of rituals, Manja Coopmans and Marcel Lubbers reflect on the concern about the loss of ritual commemoration when we lose the generation who has lived through the Second World War.¹⁵

Communicative memory has a limited time span that normally reaches no further back than eighty years, the time span of three interacting generations (...). With the Second World War now more than seventy years ago, forms of socialization are changing. People who directly experienced the war are replaced by people familiarized with the war indirectly through stories told by family members. For some, even this is no longer possible. Recent reports suggest that interest and participation in Dutch Remembrance Day and Liberation Day is declining (...), *highlighting the urge to research what is ‘needed’ to keep remembering*.¹⁶

The strategy that is employed in making sure we ‘keep remembering’ is explicitly positioning young people at the center of the commemoration rituals.¹⁷ Most prominently, children are involved in the Dutch National Commemoration ceremonies on 4 and 5 May. They are visible as they lay down a wreath on the national monument for war victims, as they read out a specially written poem, and as they present the ‘children’s speech’ (‘kinderlezing’).

Both of the positions described here are informed by the understanding of the child as a potential adult or, rather, a person who through

¹⁴ V.L. OCHS: *The Passover Haggadah. A biography* (Princeton 2019).

¹⁵ M. COOPMANS & M. LUBBERS: ‘What is ‘needed’ to keep remembering? War-specific communication, parental exemplar behaviour and participation in national commemorations’, in *Nations and Nationalism* 23/4 (2017) 746-769.

¹⁶ COOPMANS & LUBBERS: ‘What is ‘needed’ to keep remembering?’ 747.

¹⁷ The Dutch committee for war commemoration (‘National Comité 4 en 5 mei’) has an extended program for involving children in the annual ritual activities plus an educational catalogue to inform children about the significance of the commemoration. See their website: www.4en5mei.nl, specifically their section on children’s education called *Voor kinderen*: www.4en5mei.nl/educatie/voor-kinderen [last accessed 16 December 2020].

experience will eventually become an adult. In the first case, the child as a ritualized object is considered a worthy part of the ritual particularly because they are robbed of future experience. In the second case, the child as ritualizing subject needs to develop ritual skills so they will be able to perform this ritual function when they become adults. The notion of experience, or the lack of experience, seems central to the positioning of the child in disaster rituals.

3. CHILDREN, EXPERIENCE, AND POWER

In his 1913 essay titled ‘Experience’, Walter Benjamin reflects on the central position of that concept in the regulation of children’s perceived agency.¹⁸ Writing from the perspective of the child reader, he opens his piece by stating, “In our struggle for responsibility, we fight against someone who is masked. The mask of the adult is called ‘experience’”.¹⁹ This mask is used to discourage children from anticipating the promise of future change. The adult, who has already gained experience, knows not to expect anything from life, because life ends up being the same set of disappointments for everyone, despite their former hopes and dreams. He describes the adult as follows:

he, too, was once young; he, too, wanted what we wanted; he, too, refused to believe his parents, but life has taught him that they were right. Saying this, he smiles in a superior fashion: this will also happen to us—in advance he devalues the years we will live, making them into a time of sweet youthful pranks, of childish rapture, before the long sobriety of serious life. Thus the well-meaning, the enlightened.²⁰

In this short essay, Benjamin points out how the lack of experience prevents children from being taken seriously in ‘adult matters’ such as political discussions. The adult claims a superior position to the child based on their accumulated experience.

This regulation of children’s agency by adults holds a central position in the study of children’s culture. Maria Nikolajeva coined the term *aetonormativity* to refer to the ways in which notions of childhood are

¹⁸ W. BENJAMIN: ‘Experience’, in H. EILAND (ed. & transl.): *Early writings. 1910-1917* (Cambridge 2011) 116-119.

¹⁹ BENJAMIN: ‘Experience’ 116.

²⁰ BENJAMIN: ‘Experience’ 116.

regulated by adult normativity.²¹ Within a society that is based on a hegemonic adulthood, childhood is systematically othered and holds only a marginal position. As a result, our understanding of children is created, regulated, and distributed by adults. In a critical re-evaluation of Nikolajeva's notion of aetonormativity, Clémentine Beauvais argues that the distinction in power relations between the adult and the child is not as simple as a division between the powerful adult and the powerless child.²² Crucially, the child will grow up to become the adult and so the distinction between these parties is not based on any stable claim of authority, but solely on a lack of experience that will be remedied by time.

Because of this anticipated shift in power, the anticipated transference of power that is inherent in the notion of aetonormativity (or hegemonic adulthood), the child carries within themselves a potential power. Rather than using absolute categories like the powerless and the powerful, Beauvais suggests we study how the child grows from 'mighty' to 'authoritative'. Might, she claims, is drawn from the future potential that children hold, while authority relates to the power to influence and make decisions that adults hold. The relation between these two forms of power is based on the assumption that the balance will shift when the child grows up to be an adult. She writes that

Children are mighty because their specific form of 'power' is dependent on the existence of a future for them in which to act. They are, consequently, diametrically opposed to authority, though they are evolving towards it. What one loses in might, one gains in authority. This is because the essential variable is time, and the values which societies have taught us to see as associated to time – experience and expertise, primarily. To be mighty is to have more time left; to be authoritative is to have more time past.²³

Beauvais argues for an approach to power as distributed in different qualities among children and adults. Whereas adults have authority based on lived experience, children possess might based on anticipated experience. This means that adults can claim authority over matters that

²¹ M. NIKOLAJEVA: *Power, voice and subjectivity in literature for young readers* (London 2010).

²² C. BEAUVAIS: 'The problem of "power": Metacritical implications of aetonormativity for children's literature research', in *Children's literature in education* 44 (2013) 74-86.

²³ BEAUVAIS: 'The problem of "power"' 82.

have already happened and exclude children from certain discussions and activities relating to past events. On the other end, this also suggests that children, understood as future adults, can claim power in discussions and activities that relate to future events. When referring to developments that have yet to take place, children's lack of experience is re-evaluated and understood as a promise of future experience. At the same time, the wealth of experience that adults rely on to claim authority is re-interpreted as a lack of future experience. In the context of anticipated events, then, children hold a power that is largely denied them in matters in the past or the present.

When we aim to understand the position of the child in disaster rituals, it is therefore important to reflect on the temporal perspective of those rituals. Based on Beauvais's theory, we understand that children hold a different position in rituals that look back at past disasters than rituals that look forward to future disasters.

4. EXPERIENCE AND ANTICIPATION IN DISASTER RITUALS

Disaster rituals come in many shapes and forms. When we take a temporal approach to disaster rituals, we can position the ritual activity chronologically to the disaster it relates to. This presents us with three different categories of disaster rituals: ritual prior to the disaster, ritual during the disaster, and ritual after the disaster. In his introductory chapter to this volume, Paul Post points out that "we can see a strong emphasis on rituals after disasters in modern Western culture."²⁴ Based on Beauvais's theory, this implies a strong emphasize on disaster rituals that centralize the adult's experience. We have seen that in these rituals, children are usually positioned as ritualized objects (to be mourned or cared for by adults) or as developing ritualizing subjects (to be educated in ritual skills by adults). In both of these capacities, the authority of the adult seems to be more powerful than that of the child.

However, we also find ritual activity prior to a disaster. I will refer to these activities as anticipatory disaster rituals. The temporal distance between the ritual activity and the anticipated disastrous event ranges from anything between a few minutes, such as a prayer that is uttered when one sees a traffic crash about to happen, to a time span of years or decades. An example of the latter is the ritual activity that is happening

²⁴ POST in the introduction to this handbook, p. 15.

today in anticipation of the disasters that will come about due to global climate change.²⁵

These rituals around anticipated disasters open up the potential for a new ritual position of the child. For it is the notion of experience, again, which sets apart the anticipated disaster from other types of disasters: these are types of disasters that have not yet been experienced, that will only be experienced in the future. This holds especially for the long-anticipated disasters – the disasters that will take decades to manifest. These instances can create a split in a community: the young members of the community are more likely to still be alive to experience the disaster, while the older members will probably have been deceased by the time the disaster has manifested to its full extent.

In his introductory chapter to the *Handbook of Disaster Studies*, Ronald Perry points out that “disasters are inherently social phenomena”.²⁶ A violent event or an occurrence that leaves behind substantial damage only becomes an actual disaster when it affects the social structure of the communities involved. Perry proposes that we understand a disaster by the impact it has on a group or community. In the context of anticipated disasters, this impact on social structures manifests itself already long before the disaster damage, for it creates a break between the people who will and those who will not experience the consequences of the disaster in the future. The impacted group in the case of climate change disasters is largely the generation that has not yet reached maturity at this moment. We can broadly argue that the children of today will experience the anticipated disaster tomorrow, whereas many of the older members of society will likely not be here to experience this.

As a consequence, the rituals around these anticipated disasters allow for a re-positioning of the ritual relations between adults and children. When it comes to claiming a position in the activity around these anticipated disasters, children’s future-based might grants them a special form

²⁵ This chapter frames climate change as an anticipated disaster because the majority of its effects will manifest in the future. In doing this, I do not mean to deny the disastrous effects that climate change has already had in many different parts of the world. For discussions on past and present disasters caused by climate change, see: H. REID: *Climate change and human development* (London 2014); V. THOMAS: *Climate change and natural disasters. Transforming economies and policies for a sustainable future* (London/New York 2017).

²⁶ R. PERRY: ‘What is a disaster?’, in H. RODRÍGUEZ, E.L. QUARANTELLI & R.R. DYNES (eds.): *Handbook of disaster studies* (New York 2007) 1-15, p. 12.

of power that is lacking in adults' experience-based authorities. This shift can be perceived very clearly in the activities around the anticipated disasters that will come about due to climate change.

5. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ANTICIPATED DISASTERS

The world's climates have always been changing. However, in the span of roughly a century, human activity has pushed these changes to such an extent that it results in irrevocable changes. Prime among these changes is the warming up of the earth due to the release of carbon dioxide and other gasses. This process of global warming results both in heat waves and fires, and the melting of glaciers and ice caps, the rise of sea levels, and finally in floods.²⁷ This global process is already affecting different parts of the world, even if the Global North remains relatively unaffected. Organizations like the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) predict that climate change will create a range of different social and environmental disasters in the future.²⁸

The anticipation of these environmental disasters is a central concern in what Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens termed our 'risk society'.²⁹ Coined in the 1980s, this concept refers to a new stage of modernity in which societies create a constant stream of disastrous events due to their preoccupation with perpetual social improvement and industrial development. Beck argues that "in the course of the exponentially growing productive forces in the modernization process, hazards and potential threats have been unleashed to an extent previously unknown".³⁰ We are aware of the fact that the fast pace with which we develop and manufacture our technologies creates a constant stream of risks to the earth's environment. At the same time, many people disassociate themselves from the environmental disasters related to human-induced climate

²⁷ These claims are based on the information provided by the royal Dutch meteorological institute (KNMI) via their website. T. DIJKSTRA: 'Klimaatverandering', www.knmi.nl/producten-en-diensten/klimaatverandering [last accessed 13 September 2020].

²⁸ The IPCC has so far published five 'assessment reports' between 1990 and 2014 (the sixth report has been announced), in which relevant researchers review the most up-to-date knowledge on climate change. These reports can be consulted on their website: <https://www.ipcc.ch/reports/> [last accessed 15 December 2020].

²⁹ A. GIDDENS: *Consequences of modernity* (Stanford 1990); U. BECK: *Risk society. Towards a new modernity* (Los Angeles 1992).

³⁰ BECK: *Risk society* 19.

change. Giddens argues that the perpetual risks we are now faced with, make it almost impossible for people to engage with these risks in their daily lives. In the anticipation of global environmental disaster, we are likely to limit our attention to the smaller, short-lived changes that we can enact on an individual level. He argues that

Global risks have become such an acknowledged aspect of modern institutions that, on the level of day-to-day behaviour, no one gives much thought to how potential global disasters can be avoided. Most people shut them out of their lives and concentrate their activities on privatised 'survival strategies', blotting out the larger risk scenarios. Giving up hope that the wider social environment can be controlled, people retreat to purely personal occupations: to psychic and bodily self-improvement.³¹

In the face of global environmental disasters, rituals can provide a repertoire through which people can translate their apathy into action. Even if apathy and disassociation still seem to be the most common strategy to cope with anticipated environmental disasters, we also signal an increasingly large group of people who act on their knowledge of these anticipated disasters via critical rituals.

Much of the ritual activity in anticipation of climate change disasters understandably has a critical tone, for the knowledge of an anticipated disaster implies the possibility to prevent that disaster. These rituals then are often manifestations of socio-political discomfort and are inspired by performances from activist traditions, including marches, rallies, home-made signs, and rallying cries. In his book on ritual criticism, Ronald Grimes discusses the critical potential of rituals.³² Grimes claims that criticism has an important function in understanding rituals: "Criticism involves discovering, formulating, utilizing, and questioning presuppositions and criteria. It is an exercise of judgment that makes value-commitments and value-conflicts overt."³³ This chapter is particularly involved with something Grimes refers to as 'criticism by rites',³⁴ which refers to the ways in which rituals can be used to criticize larger societal issues. Grimes here gives the example of Gandhi's use of *satyagraha* in the Indian fight for independence.

³¹ A. GIDDENS: *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age* (Cambridge 1991) 171.

³² R.L. GRIMES: *Ritual criticism. Case studies in its practice, essays on its theory* (Columbia 1990).

³³ GRIMES: *Ritual criticism* 15.

³⁴ GRIMES: *Ritual criticism* 17.

With this conceptualization of the critical dimension of ritual activity, Grimes's discussion fits comfortably within Paul Post's definition of rituals as set out in the opening chapter of this volume. Post also stresses the way in which ritual activity is embedded in a specific socio-cultural context. He defines ritual as "a more or less repeatable sequence of action units which take on a symbolic dimension through formalization, stylization, and their situation in place and time".³⁵ In the case of anti-climate change protests, we find ritual dimensions in the repetition of standardized performances of both language (mostly visible through repetition of certain phrases and specific rhetoric strategies) and activities (including the stylized congregation in marches, holding up protest signs, and participating in online or offline rallying cries). These protests derive a lot of their strength by their recognizability – people recognize these actions from the long tradition of public protesting, which make them effective. Through these stylized performances, the participants address the concerns of their specific place and time (here, concerns around climate change).

Post goes on to point out that "On the one hand, individuals and groups express their ideas and ideals, their mentalities and identities through these rituals, on the other hand the ritual actions shape, foster, and transform these ideas, mentalities and identities".³⁶ We can find both of these dimensions in the ritual activity around the anticipated disaster of climate change. First (and perhaps foremost), people participate in these activities in order to voice their 'ideas and ideals' regarding climate change. Second, these activities transform public opinion and perhaps political policies. They are often explicitly meant to reach people who are uninformed about the anticipated disasters connected to climate change and to spur them into action. By understanding these protests as ritual activity, we can look beyond the strictly political message of the performances and find other layers in them, including solidarity, grief, and ideological reflections.

6. CHILDREN IN CLIMATE CHANGE RITUALS

The ritual activities around climate change are strongly informed by a generational split. As a form of anticipatory disaster rituals, the position of the child in these activities is rather different from the one we have seen

³⁵ Paul Post in the introduction to this handbook, p. 3.

³⁶ Paul Post in the introduction to this handbook, p. 3.

in rituals like the Passover Seder ritual or national war commemorations. First, children are invoked rhetorically, by both adults and children, in anti-climate change protests as the future generation that will have to face the consequences of contemporary decisions around climate change (“Think of your children!”). Children are in these instances still ritualized objects, although their suffering has yet to take place in the future.

However, children are also increasingly involved as ritual subjects in different kinds of protests themselves. More and more, children are active in creating and participating in critical activities around climate change. This happens most prominently through the global *School Strike for Climate* movement, also referred to as the *Fridays for Future*. The face of this global movement is Greta Thunberg, who started her *skolstrejk för klimatet* in August 2018 when she refused to go to school for a number of weeks and instead sat down in front of the Swedish parliament to protest the lack of action taken by world leaders to combat further global warming.³⁷ Many children of all different ages have joined her protest and organized school strikes and protest marches all over the world. On 15 March 2019, young people reportedly organized more than 2000 protests in 125 countries.³⁸ Two months later on 24 May 2019, the movement organized a second global protest that reportedly involved 1664 marches across 125 countries.³⁹ The biggest protests the movement has inspired was the *Global Week for Future*, which took place in September 2019. In what has been referred to as ‘the largest climate strikes’ in history, these protests involved over six million people from 185 countries.⁴⁰ In these marches, children

³⁷ C. ALTER, S. HAYNES & J. WORLAND: ‘Time 2019 person of the year. Greta Thunberg’, <https://time.com/person-of-the-year-2019-greta-thunberg/> [last accessed 16 December 2020].

³⁸ J. GLENZA, A. EVANS, H. ELLIS-PETERSEN & N. ZHOU: ‘Climate strikes held around the world – as it happened’, in *The Guardian*, 15 March 2019 (updated 19 September 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/live/2019/mar/15/climate-strikes-2019-live-latest-climate-change-global-warming> [last accessed 16 December 2020].

³⁹ S. HAYNES: ‘Students from 1,600 cities just walked out of school to protest climate change. It could be Greta Thunberg’s biggest strike yet’, in *Time*, 24 May 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190526085735/http://time.com/5595365/global-climate-strikes-greta-thunberg/> [last accessed 16 December 2020].

⁴⁰ M. TAYLOR, J. WATTS & J. BARTLETT: ‘Climate crisis. 6 million people join latest wave of global protests’, in *The Guardian*, 27 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/27/climate-crisis-6-million-people-join-latest-wave-of-worldwide-protests> [last accessed 16 December 2020].

expressed their concern for the disasters that lie ahead of them through signs, rallying cries, and social media content. Since April 2019, the movement also organizes online protests. Although this digital leg of the movement started to facilitate engagement by people who are not able or willing to join physically (e.g., due to physical disabilities or financial restraints),⁴¹ the online protests became the main form of activity following the COVID-19 pandemic in the beginning of 2020.⁴²

The *School Strike for Climate* actions reposition the child in relation to the adult in a number of ways. First, the global protests organized by the *School Strike for Climate* movement explicitly refer to the marginalized position that children occupy in institutional politics. The large-scale actions that were organized in 2019 tied in with important dates in a political system that children are excluded from: the May protests were timed to influence voter behavior for the elections of the European Parliament and the September protests coincided with the UN climate summit. As no one with a life experience of less than eighteen years is allowed to join these systems, children are by definition excluded from these procedures. However, through these protests, young people questioned this exclusion and managed to influence the political debate. What is more, by combining their protests with skipping school they resisted the system that they are assigned to as children: the school system. The call for an inclusion of the (adult) political system is then connected to a refusal to submit to the (child) educational system.

This call for inclusion in political debates was substantiated by a discourse that undermined adults' ability to make constructive decisions regarding climate change. Children use the climate strikes to explicitly criticize adults for not acting earlier and preventing the disaster from building to the size it is becoming via signs that read "You'll Die of Old Age, I'll Die of Climate Change", "I am Ditching School Because You are Ditching our Future!" or "Denied a Vote, Denied a Say, Now

⁴¹ B. PYTEL: 'Can't strike for the planet? Digital striking provides an alternative', 22 November 2019, <https://www.earthday.org/youth-digital-striking-fridays-for-future/> [last accessed 16 December 2020].

⁴² E. WITT: 'How Greta Thunberg transformed existential dread into a movement', in *The New Yorker*, 6 April 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/how-greta-thunberg-transformed-existential-dread-into-a-movement> [last accessed 16 December 2020].

Denied a Future”.⁴³ This criticism reflects the generational shift that shapes the anticipatory disaster rituals around climate change. It also demonstrates clearly the shift in power between children and adults: whereas we are used to adults including children in their rituals to remind them of past disasters (e.g., war violence), here we find children including adults in their rituals to remind them of future disasters. We see, therefore, in these actions a new positioning of the child.

A second form of repositioning that we can see in these climate strikes is done through the particular cultural lens that these young protesters use. In voicing their critique on adults, children re-interpret adult rituals through their own cultural lens. To a certain extent, children make use of well-established actions, including protest marches, protest signs, and rallying cries. In the hands of children, however, we also see the introduction of a kind of ritual repertoire that is distinct from adult practices. For example, young protesters often make use of popular (youth) culture to voice their critique. They carry signs that refer to popular songs or singers (e.g., “The Planet is Hotter than Shawn Mendes”⁴⁴) or to popular internet memes (often-used memes include the “This is Fine”-meme⁴⁵ and the ‘Ralph in Danger’-meme⁴⁶). At other times, protesters explicitly use child-like humor, such as a sign that reads “Clean up the [earth], it’s not Uranus”.⁴⁷ Via this

⁴³ All three signs can be seen in images featured in M. OLMSTEAD: ‘The best signs from the global climate strike’, in *Slate*, 20 September 2019, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/09/global-climate-strike-best-signs.html> [last accessed 16 December 2020].

⁴⁴ Shawn Mendes is a popular singer/songwriter from Canada. This sign can be seen in a picture tweeted by May Louise Doherty, @amyroudoherty, on 20 September 2019.

⁴⁵ The ‘This is fine’-meme shows a dog calmly sitting on a chair while the room around them goes up in flames. It originated as a part of a webcomic by K.C. Green and is commonly used to point out denial in the face of a hopeless situation. See ‘This is Fine’, entry in the database *Know Your Meme*, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/this-is-fine> [last accessed 16 December 2020]. This meme can be seen on a sign in a picture tweeted by Jeva Lange, @Jee_vuh, on 20 September 2019.

⁴⁶ The ‘Ralph in danger’-meme shows the character Ralph sitting on a bus chuckling ‘I’m in danger’. It originated as a screenshot from an episode of the TV series *the Simpsons* and is commonly used to denote someone is in danger. See ‘Ralph In Danger’, entry in the database *Know Your Meme*, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/ralph-in-danger> [last accessed 16 December 2020]. This meme can be seen on a sign in a picture included in ‘The best signs from the School Strike 4 Climate across New Zealand’, in *Stuff*, 27 September 2019, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/climate-news/116153591/the-best-signs-from-the-school-strike-4-climate-across-new-zealand> [last accessed 16 December 2020].

⁴⁷ This sign can be seen in a picture included in S. MARSH & A. EVANS: ‘School climate strikes expected to be largest yet – as it happened’, in *The Guardian*, 24 May 2019

language, young people claim their own voice in the debate around climate change. They do not imitate adult discourse or present themselves as future adults, but speak from the youth culture that they are a part of.⁴⁸

7. CONCLUSION

In the context of disaster rituals, much like in the context of society at large, children are usually positioned as marginal or passive. Due to their lack of experience, they are not granted the authority that adults have to claim agency in ritual practices. However, unlike adults, children can derive power from the promise of future experience. This power, described by Beauvais as ‘might’, allows children to claim agency in rituals that relate to events that will transpire in the future. Based on the promise of future experience, children claim a say in the critical rituals around anticipated disasters. The protest marches around climate change demonstrate how children re-position themselves in this debate through ritual activities. First, by timing their actions to coincide with major political events, they claim participation in a political system that normally excludes them. Second, by explicitly laying blame with adults for not acting sooner, they criticize adults for setting up the future disastrous events. Third, by making use of their own language in the discourse around climate change they create a new form of ritual behavior that is embedded in children’s culture.

In ending this chapter, I want to note that this increase in children’s ritual power, does not mean that they also possess the authority to effectively influence the decision-making processes around climate change. So far, this authority remains firmly in the control of the adults. In her address to the European Economic and Social Committee in February 2019, Thunberg pointed out: “People always tell us that they are so hopeful. They are hopeful that the young people are going to save the world, but we are not. There is simply not enough time to wait for us

(updated 19 September 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/live/2019/may/24/school-climate-strikes-expected-to-be-largest-yet-live-coverage-greta-thunberg> [last accessed 16 December 2020].

⁴⁸ This particular culture is even more evident in online forms of protests. Via different media platforms that are shaped by children’s culture, such as TikTok or Snapchat, young people can make use of their own platforms and language to claim a voice in the debate about climate change. These instances can be found via thematic hashtags such as #ClimateChange, #GlobalWarming, or #StrikeForClimate.

to grow up and become the ones in charge.”⁴⁹ In this generational split, based on those who will and those who will not experience the disasters created by climate change, the child holds an ambiguous position, as both lacking lived experience while possessing the promise of future experience, and both holding a central position in critical discourse around climate change while remaining stripped of any actual authority to effectively influence the decisions made about climate change.

⁴⁹ G. THUNBERG: ‘You’re acting like spoiled, irresponsible children’, in G. THUNBERG: *No one is too small to make a difference* (London 2019) 34-40, p. 34-35.

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