

Rituals Between Mind and Society

4-5 November 2021, Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia

Book of Abstracts



**Institute of Ethnology
and Social Anthropology**
Slovak Academy of Sciences

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Rituals Between Mind and Society

4-5 November 2021, Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia

The workshop is dedicated to the study of rituals and their social functions, with a special but not exclusive focus on cognitive and evolutionary approaches. We encourage empirical and theoretical papers from anthropology, psychology, religious studies, and other humanities and social sciences. Two general topics frame the workshop:

1. Collective rituals as an instrument of social regulation

Social scientists have long been studying complex relationships between collective rituals and many forms of social regulation. Durkheim speculated that collective rituals bond group members and minimize status differences. Conversely, Leach argued that rituals mirror and maintain social inequalities and hierarchies. Van Gennep focused on how rituals transform individuals' social statuses, and functionalists viewed rituals as mechanisms to redress social conflicts. Recent evolutionary approaches consider collective rituals as adaptive behaviors that promote cooperation. Rituals can create or maintain collective identities and represent "arenas" for displays of group commitment and social norms adherence, among others.

2. New ideas, challenges, and pitfalls in the cognitive study of ritual

Since the inception of the Cognitive and Evolutionary Science of Religion, rituals have been one of its central topics. They were approached from many different points of view, and CSR scholars investigated many different research problems regarding rituals. On the one hand, CSR opened and is still opening new theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of ritual. On the other hand, this also brings new challenges and hidden traps.

Organizing Team

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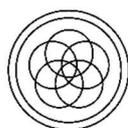
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Michal Uhrin

The workshop is organized by



**Institute of Ethnology
and Social Anthropology**
Slovak Academy of Sciences



FACULTY OF SOCIAL
AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES
Comenius University
Bratislava



**Slovak Association
of Social Anthropology**

Workshop Program

Thursday, 4 Nov

- 9:30 *John Shaver*
Invited talk **Investigating anthropology's "dirty little secret" yields novel insights into culture and religion**
- 10:30 *Coffee break*
- 10:45 *Eva Kundtová Klocová*
Rituals for nam: ancestor and sorcery beliefs and their effect on parochial prosociality in Mauritius
- 11:15 *Peter Maño*
Ritual form and ritual choice among Hindu Mauritians
- 11:45 *Jan Krátky*
Investigating ritual's anxiolytic effects: The case of Hindu Puja among Marathi community in Mauritius.
- 12:15 *Lunch*
- 14:00 *Michal Uhrin*
An ethnographic case study of low-cost & high-frequency versus high-cost & low-frequency strategies
- 14:30 *Renato Matoso*
Rituals and the development of social learning.
- 15:00 *Coffee break*
- 15:30 *Radek Kundt & Martin Lang*
Evolution of human ritual behavior
- 16:00 *Vladimír Bahna*
Why is the adaptation/by-product debate of religion and ritual ill-defined? Cultural epidemiology vs. organismic analogies

Friday, 5 Nov

- 9:30 *Konrad Talmont-Kamiński, Silvia Boschetti, Robin Kopecky & Jelena Priplatova*
Effect of religious affiliation on assessments of ritual efficacy
- 10:00 *Klaudia Komar*
Secularisation and the cultural context of spiritual practices
- 10:30 *Coffee break*
- 10:45 *Justin Lane*
What is so special about religion? Using AI to study ritual systems
- 11:15 *Tamás Biró*
Circumcision, immersion and dietary restrictions as rituals: Jewish rituals extending the Lawson–McCauley model
- 11:45 *Lunch*
- 14:00 *Andrej Mentel*
Rituals and group solidarity: An ethnographic case study
- 14:30 *Dan Rezníček & Radek Kundt*
US Capitol storming: The effects of rituals on the perception of prestige and dominance of pro-group aggressors
- 15:00 *Jordan Kiper & Richard Sosis*
Propaganda, rituals, and social coercion in authoritarian regimes: A quasi-religious system
- 15:30 *Coffee break*
- 16:00 *Dimitris Xyglatas*
Invited talk **Extreme rituals as social coordination mechanisms**

Abstracts

9:30 – 11:30 4 Nov

Investigating anthropology's "dirty little secret" yields novel insights into culture and religion

John Shaver

School of Social Sciences
University of Otago.

Anthropologists collectively hold a "dirty little secret": we know that informants often inaccurately report their behaviour, but rarely, if ever, do we acknowledge this, let alone attempt to remedy the issue. Keys to improving the accuracy of behavioural measures include: a) estimating the extent of inaccuracies in self-report, b) isolating the sources of inaccuracies, and c) developing novel methods to overcome biases. Here I compare self-reports of church attendance to observed attendance across 48 services in a rural Fijian village. Findings suggest that self-report is not reliably associated with observed attendance, but that inaccuracies in self-report are systematic and can be partially attributed to gender differences in norms for childcare. Comparing data derived from these two methods, moreover, reveals interesting patterns of gender differences in religious syncretism that are not evident in either method alone. Further, third-party ratings of church attendance by fellow villagers are more reliably associated with observed church attendance than self-report. Together these findings suggest that: 1) informants inaccurately report their religious behaviour, 2) self-report biases are culturally patterned and systematic, and 3) researchers interested in estimating behavioural variation should consider employing third-party methods to avoid biases inherent to self-report. Thus, investigating anthropology's "dirty little secret" not helps to improve accuracy, but can also provide insights into culture and religion.

10:45 – 11:15, 4 Nov

Rituals for nam: ancestor and sorcery beliefs and their effect on parochial prosociality in Mauritius

Eva Kundtová Klocová

Laboratory for the Experimental Research of Religion
Masaryk University

Nam (the spirit of a deceased person) beliefs are quite ambiguous because the spirit may be linked to ancestor worship but also to the practice of sorcery (illegal in Mauritius). Importantly, previous studies suggested that sorcery beliefs and practices can have a damaging impact on social bonds and trust, but such research is often limited by social stigma associated with sorcery and relevant comparison with other local deities is often missing. In our study, participants endorsing the sorcery mode of belief in nam together with performing rituals toward nam were more likely to break game rules for selfish outcomes in the Random Allocation Game (compared to the ancestor worship mode). These results complement studies testing evolutionary models of religious morality finding that beliefs in moralizing and punitive gods decrease local favoritism and increase resource-sharing with distant co-religionists, by providing data related to local (low or non-moralizing) supernatural agents.

11:15 – 11:45, 4 Nov

Ritual form and ritual choice among Hindu Mauritians

Peter Maňo

Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology,
Slovak Academy of Sciences

People's motivations to partake in religious rituals often relate to external socio-cultural forces such as tradition, ancestry, and peer-pressure, or deep personal convictions centered around devotion, gratitude, or spiritual experience, among others. Simultaneously, however, devotees may also have pragmatic motivations for practicing rituals, such as the need for protection, wellbeing, or socializing, or may see those rituals as a means of fulfilling their wishes. Importantly, the deity addressed in the ritual largely defines the scope and area of divine intervention and help. But all else being equal, why do people choose to engage in the specific rituals that they do, especially given that some are much costlier than others? Our fieldwork suggests that perceived ritual efficacy could be a key cognitive factor at play: people seek rituals that they consider appropriate (in terms of their structure and focus) and proportionate (in terms of their costs) to their needs and expectations. This almost contractual logic

of ritual performance is best demonstrated by the concept of promise that is quintessential to the biggest religious festivals of three Hindu communities in Mauritius discussed in this talk.

11:45 – 12:15, 4 Nov

Investigating Ritual's Anxiolytic Effects: The case of Hindu Puja among Marathi Community in Mauritius

Jan Krátký

Laboratory for the Experimental Research of Religion,
Masaryk University

Anthropologists study rituals as a special kind of precautionary mechanism. Already in the classic era of a field ethnography, it was noted that rituals facilitate inter-group cooperation and readiness towards anticipated threat. Nevertheless, only recently and due to motivation stemming from evolutionary theory, these topics started to be isolated and studied in a controlled manner. I would like to present a field experiment that studied the anxiolytic effect of morning pooja ritual among women of Marathi Hindu community in Mauritius. It is a widely accepted everyday ritual that Hindu Mauritians conduct routinely every morning, either in their private home altars or at the local temple. Following anxiety-inducing paradigm that colleagues and I developed in the lab, we studied how the occasion of a ritual conducted in a public shrine helps to cope with anticipated stress. I will argue that this ritual in a publicly accessible religious facility may serve as a stabilized cultural practice that helps assuage anxiety and thus cope with anticipated threats that devotees face in their everyday lives.

14:00 – 14:30, 4 Nov

An ethnographic case study of low-cost & high-frequency versus high-cost & low-frequency strategies

Michal Uhrin

Department of Ethnology and Museology,
Comenius University in Bratislava

I am interested in the perceived effectiveness of various strategies used by outsiders (out-groups) to become members of the village community (in-group). The paper draws on the empirical data collected during ethnographic research in a village in western Slovakia. In recent decades, the inhabitants of the surrounding towns have been buying houses and real estates directly in the village or its vicinity. These new residents are in some cases perceived as “unknown and intruders” (emic term). The theoretical perspective of the double inheritance theory is used to interpret the data. The paper aims to outline how the “original inhabitants” of the village reflect the various strategies used by outsiders to become members of the village community (in-group). These strategies include, for example, participation in low-frequency, high-cost (religious) rituals, behavior, and investments and participation in high-frequency, low-cost (religious) rituals, behavior, and investments. Results show that the “immigrant” inhabitants of the municipality use different strategies with different degrees of perceived efficiency by “original inhabitants”. The “original inhabitants” perceive the participation in high-frequency & low-cost (religious) rituals, behavior, and investments as the most trustworthy signals of group commitment.

14:30 – 15:00, 4 Nov

Rituals and the development of social learning

Renato Matoso

Philosophy Department
Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro

The relationship between ritualistic behavior and cultural transmission is widely recognized, especially with regard to the importance of ritualistic behavior for the fidelity of cultural transmission (Watson-Jones, & Legare, 2016). However, for most authors who study this relationship, human rituals come to the scene only after the full development of our capacity for social learning. For these authors, human rituals are specially designed for the transmission of symbolic or ideological cultural information (Henrich, 2009). In my presentation, I will argue that ritualistic behavior plays a much more important role in this relationship, constituting one of the social strategies responsible for the very development of our capacity for social learning. According to Brett Clacott (2008), in order to explain the evolution of human's capacity for social learning, it is necessary to present a minimal sequence of transformations that would have taken us from the condition of agents with the capacity for social learning found in great apes to the condition of agents whose cognitive development is

fundamentally linked to social learning. In the model I will present, the development of ritual behavior is a key moment in this sequence of transformations. In this model, social learning depends not only on individual cognitive adaptations, though these are certainly important, but also on the production of an adaptively structured environment for the transmission of cultural knowledge. Thus, individual cognitive adaptations and the social practice of rituals would have formed a feedback loop responsible for the development of human's capacity for cultural learning.

Starting from a widely accepted decomposition of the psychological mechanisms involved in social learning: imitation, shared intentionality, and selective learning (Tomasello, 2014), I will demonstrate how each of these mechanisms is facilitated by the social practice of rituals. Next, I will indicate how the model I propose fits into the archaeological evidence about the technical and symbolic development of the human lineage. Finally, I will briefly discuss whether my hypothesis implies the acceptance of genetic-cultural co-evolution (Richerson & Boyd, 2004) for human's capacity for social learning or whether my hypothesis is closer to the cognitive gadgets theory (Heyes, 2018).

15:30 – 16:00, 4 Nov

Evolution of human ritual behavior

Radek Kundt

Laboratory for the Experimental Research of Religion,
Masaryk University

Martin Lang

Laboratory for the Experimental Research of Religion,
Masaryk University

*Proposing an evolutionary model of the origin of ritual in the hominin lineage, we treat collective ritual as a complex signaling system that facilitates mutualistic cooperation. In our model, we first synthesize the literature dealing with hunter-gatherer ethnography and hominin archaeology and identify similarity signals, coalitionary signals, and signals of commitment to collective action as the main building blocks of the signaling system. Subsequently, we turn to primatology and paleoanthropology to trace these signals in both non-human primates and past hominins. Adding the proximate level to our analysis, we pinpoint distinctive neurocognitive mechanisms scaffolding the three types of ritual signals and track down their presence. Finally, we connect this evidence with the prevalent socio-ecological selective pressures for cooperative communication and suggest that by the arrival of *H. Sapiens* collective ritual already constituted an important adaptation overcoming collective action problems.*

16:00 – 16:30, 4 Nov

Why is the adaptation/by-product debate of religion and ritual ill-defined? Cultural epidemiology vs. organismic analogies

Vladimír Bahna

Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology,
Slovak Academy of Sciences

The Epidemiology of Representations was one of the founding background theories for cognitive anthropology and the cognitive science of religion. Currently, however, without ever being really applied to consequences, its position in the field is mostly reduced to complimentary mentions in introductory chapters. This paper tries to cast new light on some key features of the theory in the context of the adaptation vs. by-product debate about religion. Most modern-day adaptationist approaches to religion (and ritual) build their argumentation within a 'society as a (super)organism' analogy in which cultural phenomena, like rituals, moral norms, and religion, etc., play a functional role in the persistence and maintenance of the whole system (a social group). To make the debate terminologically symmetrical, I suggest an ecosystemic analogy (as an epidemic is an ecosystemic phenomenon). The never-ending debate whether religion (and ritual) is an adaptation or a by-product contains inherent fallacies that can be illuminated when we frame the opposition as organismic vs. ecosystemic analogy. Views of culture as an extended phenotype complying with the former or as a symbiont complying with the latter are not mutually exclusive but rather address different aspects of the same but complex phenomenon. Still, concepts like adaptation/exaptation, by-product/spandrel, ultimate vs. proximate explanations, and foremost the very notion of adaptive functions are specific to the evolution of organisms. When applied to more open ecosystem-like systems, their meanings change, multiply, or are not appropriate at all. In organism-like systems, a functional role of a trait or a component in the system is to a big extent self-explanatory through natural selection. But this is far from being true for the evolution of ecosystem-like systems, and functional analysis is here rather descriptive than explanatory. Even when we have convincing evidence that a cultural trait (i.e., ritual) has positive effects on group persistence and success in a between-group competition, it is still not evidence in favor of an adaptationist explanation of this very trait as it is not disqualifying competing explanations that apply for the very same evidence.

9:30 – 10:00, 5 Nov

Effect of religious affiliation on assessments of ritual efficacy

Konrad Talmont-Kamiński

Institute of Sociology,
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&

Institute of Philosophy
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Silvia Boschetti

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Robin Kopecky

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Jelena Priplatova

Institute of Philosophy
Czech Academy of Sciences

Existing studies of magical and religious beliefs have been less than univocal in whether they are correlated, with different methodologies leading to very different results. A plausible explanation for this is that while these kinds of beliefs have a shared cognitive basis, cultural factors often exclude the possibility of espousing both. To study whether this is the case, we propose to present subjects with descriptions of three rituals and to judge their likely efficacy. The descriptions presented to different subjects will only differ in terms of who is described as performing the ritual: a religious authority from their own religious group, a religious authority from another religious group, or a person claiming occult powers. The answers provided by subjects will be analysed in terms of their relationship to self-reported measures of religiosity, the hypothesis being that differences between the assessed efficacy of in-group and out-group ritual performers will correlate with external religiosity while internal religiosity will be correlated with overall higher assessed efficacy of both in-group and out-group ritual performers. At the workshop we plan to present at least the results of pilot studies.

10:00 – 10:30, 5 Nov

Secularisation and the Cultural Context of Spiritual Practices

Klaudia Komar

Institute of Sociology,
University of Białystok

Spiritual practices with the capacity to affect mental states - such as prayer, meditation, breathwork and fasting - have been utilized within a religious context in almost every culture and tradition over the past several millennia. Through spiritual or religious practices people can acquire states of calm and gratitude, as well as increasing the sense of well-being and, most importantly, have experiences deemed mystical. However, performing such practices in a secular setting may lead to similar results. I examine the role of the secularisation of these practices in the process of secularisation in general and propose an exploratory, correlational questionnaire-based study to investigate the relationship between changes in how spiritual practices of this type are interpreted and the contexts in which they are placed and broader attitudes towards religion. I hypothesise that the secularisation of spiritual practices serves to deepen tendencies to move away from institutionalised religion.

10:45 – 11:15, 5 Nov

What is so special about religion? Using AI to study ritual systems

Justin Lane

ALAN Analytics

&

NORCE Center for Modeling
Social Systems

&

Center for Mind and Culture

Today debates around the nature of religion as an adaptation appear to be bolstered by the idea that religion is itself something special. However, new techniques rooted in AI are suggesting alternative viewpoints that challenge some adaptationist accounts of religion. In this presentation, new AI models that focus on religious violence and the rise of secularity will be discussed in light of what psychological mechanisms go into religious belief and behavior and what that tells us about religions status as an adaptation or byproduct. In addition, I will present and discuss an AI based religious leader, capable of producing new human-like sermons, and what research questions we can answer using this powerful new AI platform.

11:15 – 11:45, 5 Nov

Circumcision, immersion and dietary restrictions as rituals: Jewish rituals extending the Lawson–McCauley model

Tamás Biró

Department of Assyriology and Hebrew Studies,
Eötvös Loránd University

& Jewish Theological Seminary,
University of Jewish Studies

The model of religious rituals by Lawson and McCauley (1990) played a seminal role in establishing CSR, but subsequent scholars failed to appreciate it as a formal model of religious phenomena. This fact is surprising, as formal (mathematical, computational) models have been central to the cognitive enterprise. My talk shall reintroduce the Lawson–McCauley model (although in a slightly altered form), and show how a uniform handling of rituals, narratives, precepts and other actions with different modalities can account for religion as a complex system. More specifically, I shall show how an extension of the Lawson–McCauley model is possible and necessary to account for Jewish rituals.

14:00 – 14:30, 5 Nov

Rituals and group solidarity: An ethnographic case study

Andrej Mentel

Institute of Social Anthropology,
Comenius University in Bratislava

Since Durkheim's work, ritual is often seen as a tool for enhancing social (or intra-group) solidarity and empowering the members of the ritual group. According to this view, mutual help and emotional arousal connected with the ritual may help the participants to cope with adversities. Although this view is supported by empirical evidence, there are more possible complementary mechanisms how does ritual work.

On the level of the group dynamics, the investment of time, money and other personal resources into the collective activities (including rituals) may serve as a commitment signal and thus enhance the group solidarity. However, rituals are not the only possible way how the group members signal their commitment. Therefore, the fundamental question is whether religious rituals in this regard are anything specific compared to other types of joint coordinated activity.

One possible answer could be based on the works of Atran and Henrich (2010). According to them, religious rituals often involve various tools to promote faith and devotion by stimulating certain emotions. The main tool here is the use of music, rhythm and synchronization of body movements.

In the ethnographic case study from Central Bosnia, I demonstrate the validity of this hypothesis by comparing three confessional communities. These are communities inhabiting the same locality, but differing in the nature of rituals. According to the assumption, the highest degree of intra-group solidarity is specific to the group whose rituals contain the rhythm and synchronization of body movements to the greatest extent.

14:30 – 15:00, 5 Nov

US Capitol storming: The effects of rituals on the perception of prestige and dominance of pro-group aggressors.

Dan Řezníček

Laboratory for the Experimental Research of Religion,
Masaryk University

Radek Kundt

Laboratory for the Experimental Research of Religion,
Masaryk University

On 6 Jan, 2021, a mob of Donald J. Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol building, trying to disrupt the transfer of power to President-elect Joseph R. Biden, Jr. During the storming, one of the invaders—Ashli E. Babbitt—was fatally shot by a Capitol police officer. While various studies suggest that religious worldviews mold and divide American political identities, not much is known about the effects of religious predictors on the perception of prestige and dominance of individuals who are willing to act aggressively for the good of their group, hypothetically becoming more prestigious due to their high level of displayed parochial altruism. We

studied whether group affiliation, ritual attendance, costly taboos, and the perception of God as punitive and benevolent influence how Americans perceive prestige and dominance of the officer and A. E. Babbitt. Our findings suggest a complex picture showing, among other things, that ritual attendance predicts the prestige of both actors.

15:00 – 15:30, 5 Nov

Propaganda, rituals, and social coercion in authoritarian regimes: A quasi-religious system

Jordan Kiper

Department of Anthropology
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Richard Sosis

Department of Anthropology,
University of Connecticut

Scholarship on evolutionary theory and mass mobilization has recently approached authoritarian propaganda as a solution to political cooperation, whereby inflammatory speeches, mis- or dis-information, and rumors function not to persuade audiences but rather to coordinate coalitions. Such propaganda, it has been argued, aligns the attention of individuals already disposed to authoritarian beliefs and conflict. Yet, despite offering new insights on epistemic vigilance, an evolutionary view of propaganda must also consider the role of ritual. Specifically, historical regimes that drift toward or embrace authoritarianism often contend for political power during sociopolitical crises by employing a combination of propaganda, ritual, and social coercion. Of these, ritual functions to render authoritarian movements with a sense of sanctity, to connect individuals and would-be coalitions, and to signal commitments through various performatives. Further, rituals bind individuals into an emerging social order that enables the very communication of propaganda as a means of coordinating coalitions and instantiating methods for coercing behaviors. In this presentation, we examine this combination as it is used by political groups that impose what we show is a quasi-religious system, which often functions, albeit for a short period of time, to support authoritarianism or totalism. We demonstrate this by briefly surveying regime practices in Nazi Germany, Milošević-era Yugoslavia, and present-day Hungary. These case studies suggest that recent authors are correct: propaganda is typically insufficient for changing people's beliefs. However, these case studies suggest that prior beliefs and commitments are also insufficient for mass mobilization. Instead, collective rituals and social coercion, along with myths and a sense of the sacred which are enacted by rituals, are critical for allowing propaganda to function as an expression of collective identity, around which masses can display commitments and social norm adherence.

16:00 – 17:00, 5 Nov

Extreme Rituals as social coordination mechanisms

Dimitris Xygalatas

Department of Anthropology
University of Connecticut

Around the world, people engage in ritual activities that involve obvious expenditures of effort, energy and resources without equally obvious payoffs. Anthropologists have long proposed that such costly behaviors persist because they convey certain benefits to their practitioners and their communities. But how can we study these ostensible benefits, given the contextually sensitive nature of such cultural practices? This talk will present an interdisciplinary research program that combines laboratory and field methods to explore the puzzle of extreme rituals in real-life settings, specifically focusing on recent empirical evidence on the signaling functions of extreme ritual practices

Special issue of Slovak Ethnology

In connection to our workshop topic, the Slovak Ethnology journal is preparing a special issue dedicated to rituals as instruments of social regulation. The special issue is edited by Vladimír Bahna (Slovak Academy of Sciences) and Konrad Talmont-Kamiński (University of Białystok)

Call for papers

<https://uesa.sav.sk/?q=en/call-special-issue-slovak-ethnology-volume-70-number-22022-topic-rituals-instruments-social>

Important deadlines

- Contributors are kindly requested to submit their abstracts and keywords no later than 15 Nov 2021.
- The final manuscripts will be expected no later than 28 Feb 2022.

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