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Exploring Ritual Fields Today

Edited by

Martin Hoondert and Paul Post

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Editorial

Introduction to Special Issue: Exploring Ritual Fields Today

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Due to the COVID-19 crisis and the related restrictive measures, many of our (daily) rituals have changed. At the same time, new rituals have emerged. The usual habit of greeting each other with a handshake or a kiss has been replaced by a gesture of bowing, a nod of the head, or a hand on the heart. Weddings have been canceled or postponed to after the crisis, and funerals take place with a limited number of participants. Rituals, although appearing to be traditional and fixed, are very much contextual and subject to change. Indeed, rituals are not performed in a vacuum, nor are they independent of time and place. Rituals are deeply influenced by the cultural, social, economic, and political contexts in which they appear. Trends in culture also lead to ritual changes. Thus, the study of rituals is a dynamic field, and it is exactly this idea that is reflected in this Special Issue of *Religions* that is focused on "Exploring Ritual Fields Today."

Through the contributions to this Special Issue, we want to project an image of what a ritual is today and of the contemporary ritual studies. In this introduction, we present the main theme of this Special Issue, review the separate contributions, and provide an overview of ritual studies as an academic field. We chose to approach this issue from a Dutch perspective, for that is the context in which we, as the editors and nearly all the authors, are based.

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1. Approaching Rituals Today

1.1. Ritual

We start with a working definition of a ritual, derived from the work of many other ritual studies scholars, including, among others, Ronald Grimes. We define the concept "ritual" in a broad and open way as follows:

> ... [A 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. (Post 2015)

It is by no means our intention to suggest that we can clearly demarcate the boundaries of the concept with this working definition. Instead, the definition serves as an indication of what we can call a "core ritual" or a "full ritual," but it does not necessarily exclude other practices from having a ritual dimension. In ritual studies, we distinguish between rituals, ritualizing, and ritual-like practices (Post and Hoondert 2019, p. 10). Here, we follow Catherine Bell (1997), who presents alongside full rituals, ritual practices, and ritual behaviors with a ritual character (pp. 138–69). As an example, we can refer to current practices after a disaster or terrorist attack. In such a context, we see all kinds of practices that aim at expressing compassion, solidarity, anger, and protest. We have seen how cities all over the world expressed their solidarity by marking characteristic buildings with lasers and LED lights in the colors of the French flag after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in November 2015. Another example is the popularity of bee tattoos after the Manchester Arena attack during a performance by Ariana Grande in 2017 (the bee is the symbol of Manchester). A third example can be drawn from the current COVID-19 pandemic. In the first few months of March–May 2020, we witnessed people singing songs of hope from their balconies and applauding the staff of overcrowded hospitals (e.g., in The Netherlands, the UK, and Spain). These examples involve practices with a ritual character, but are they "full rituals"?

Not everyone in ritual studies is happy with this search for a definition, even if it is only for a provisional and open working description. Many have taken a different route in looking for a series of "qualities of ritual" as they search for a so-called polythetic definition (Grimes 1990; McClymond 2016; Rappaport and Rappaport 1999; Snoek 2006). A polythetic definition works with a set of characteristics that may be applied to a particular phenomenon but do not necessarily have to, as opposed to a monothetic definition that uses exclusive criteria that all have to apply in a particular case. Those qualities or characteristics can take various forms. For instance, they can be "family characteristics of ritual," as proposed by Grimes (2014, p. 194). Grimes mentions various ways in which people ritualize their practices, including by traditionalizing, elevating, repeating, singularizing, prescribing, stylizing, and situating them in specific places and times. Others, like Gerard Lukken, list characteristics and qualities as functions or dimensions that together provide an image of what a ritual is and is capable of. Frequently mentioned functions of a ritual are channeling feelings and emotions, paying attention, expressing ideas and ideals, coping with contingency, and socializing (Lukken 2005; Post 2003).

In our opinion, both approaches to defining the concept "ritual" complement each other. On the one hand, we can use an open working definition, while on the other, we can employ the aforementioned sets of characteristics, strategies, and functions in the description, analysis, and evaluation of ritual practices.

1.2. Ritual Fields and Repertoires

In current ritual studies, the insight has been shared that rituals are definitely not traditional in the sense of being invariable and not subject to change. On the contrary, rituals are mobile, dynamic, and changing. Rituals can be found in several spaces and cultural domains. We distinguish six "ritual fields" (i.e., cultural domains in which rituals can be traced). We present these ritual fields briefly here, but not without first stating that these fields are closely related to each other and partly overlap (see also Post 2013):

1. The cycle of the year and the seasons can be ritualized. Bell refers to these as calendrical rituals, which are in many cases determined by the moon or sun calendar.
2. The cycle of life is another ritual field in which we encounter rituals related to birth and death. Some are calendrical and return every year, while others are occasionally practiced. In this field, as well as in the cycle of the year and seasons, time is a key word.
3. Religion is, even in secularized countries, an important space within which rituals take place.
4. Memory culture is oriented toward dealing with the past in a ritual way. There is an extensive commemorative culture regarding the First and Second World Wars. Commemorative practices range from grassroots rituals (Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2011) to postponed rituals (Faro 2015). After an accident or an attack in the public domain, we see all kinds of grassroots rituals as flowers, lights, and notes are left on the spot. Roadside memorials are also widespread. There is also ritual marking that literally finds its place only after decades, as in the case of the Holocaust *Mahnmal* in Berlin that was not opened until 2005.
5. Artistic practices are very often ritualized. In the museum and the theater, ritual rules apply, and for many people, artistic practices function as meaning-making practices in the same way as religion does.
6. Leisure culture, such as sports and tourism, is full of rituals. One might think of the soccer player who kisses the sign of the cross before the match starts or the long-distance runner on his way to an ancient pilgrimage site. In this ritual field, we also see many debates regarding heritage.

Within these ritual fields, we can distinguish several so-called ritual repertoires. Although there is a direct relation between the fields and the repertoires, the focus of a ritual repertoire is not so much on a cultural domain as it is on being a unit of ritual practices that share a certain coherence in terms of form and design, or manifestation and participation. A good example of a ritual repertoire is food rituals. We can trace them within the field of religion (e.g., Eucharist, the Last Supper, and offerings of food in Hindu rituals), but also in the field of life cycles: No birthday celebration can be held without cake and other delicacies. Another example is silence or meditation. This repertoire is part of the fields of religion, artistic practices (e.g., the rule not to applaud after each section of a concerto), and memory culture (e.g., the one or two minutes of silence as an expression of respect to victims of war and violence).

As already indicated, these ritual fields are important for understanding the dynamics regarding rituals in contemporary culture. In the so-called network culture, there is a constant "flow" between and through these fields. Two examples make this clear. First, an abbey or monastery in (post)modern Western Europe is still a religious center of prayer and contemplation. At the same time, it is a place for relaxation, heritage, or nature experience, health and well-being, and good and honest food. Second, the popularity of the Camino[1], the old pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, is directly linked to the fact that this ritual is embedded in almost all fields. For some, the pilgrimage is a religious endeavor, whereas for others, it is a sporting adventure or a cultural-historical route along interesting heritage centers.

2. Ritual Studies in The Netherlands

As said at the start, we as the editors and most of the authors in this issue are based in the Netherlands, in which ritual studies is a small but dynamic field of research. The situation of ritual studies in the Netherlands concerns a relatively small and rather well-organized area of all kinds of partnerships and platforms of cooperation. At the same time, research in ritual studies is diffuse because it is fragmented across more than ten universities and as many faculties, departments, and research institutes.

We start with the multidisciplinary platforms and networks that bundle the research. First, we must consider the Institute of Ritual and Liturgical Studies (IRILIS)[2], currently coordinated by the Protestant Theological University (PThU) in Amsterdam. The primary participants of this network organization include the PThU, the Humanities and Theology Schools of Tilburg University, the Center for Religion and Heritage of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of Groningen University, the Center for Thanatology and the Benedictine Center for Liturgical Studies, both at Radboud University in Nijmegen, and the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht. The IRILIS mainly manifests and profiles itself through a series of publications, of which *Netherlands Studies in Ritual and Liturgy* and *Liturgia Condenda* are the most important. The IRILIS is currently working on a large international handbook project on disaster rituals.

Each participant of the IRILIS brings their own expertise and profile in ritual studies. The PThU[3] researches liturgical rituals mainly in the context of practical theology (with researchers including Marcel Barnard Mirella Klomp). Recent themes have included meals and food, the Passion, and youth culture. The Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Culture[4] focuses on current funeral rituals, rituals in care centers like hospices, online rituals, rituals of victimhood, space, and place, rituals and religious diversity, absent rituals, and, in particular, ritual music, such as music in cremations and the popularity of passions and requiems (researchers include Martin Hoondert, Albertina Nugteren, Janieke Bruin-Mollenhorst, Paul Post, and Herman Beck). The Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital

[1] In 2005, there were 93,924 pilgrims who officially registered their pilgrimage in the pilgrims' office in Santiago de Compostela; in 2019, this number reached 347,578 (Oficina Peregrino).
[2] https://www.pthu.nl/irilis/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).
[3] https://www.pthu.nl/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).
[4] https://www.pthu.nl/irilis/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).

Culture has initiated two platforms for cooperation between academics and experts or professionals outside of academia. The Funerary Academy[5] is a platform of researchers and professionals in the funeral industry, and the Camino Academy[6] has initiated research in the field of pilgrimage, with a specific focus on the route to Santiago de Compostela.

Within the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology[7], the emphasis is more on liturgy, theology, and ritual through a sociology of religion perspective (with researchers including Sam Goyvaerts and William Arfman). The Groningen Center for Religion and Heritage[8] focuses on the interplay of religion and heritage from a theoretical and practical perspective (with researchers including Todd Weir and Andrew Irving). Their projects focus on material culture, such as church buildings.

The Nijmegen Center for Thanatology[9] (led by Eric Venbrux) conducts research into the socio-cultural and religious aspects of death, dying, and bereavement. Particular attention is paid to the processes of change in the funeral culture through comparative research.

At the University of Humanistic Studies[10] (Utrecht), Joanna Wojtkowiak conducts research into the psychological, spiritual, and existential aspects of rituals, and life cycle rituals in particular. The University of Humanistic Studies offers an education program for celebrants who are trained in ritual practices in secular and/or non-institutional religious settings.

The (European) ethnology research group of the Meertens Institute[11], which is part of the Humanities cluster of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam (with researchers including Peter Jan Margry, Irene Stengs, and Ernst van den Hemel), has initiated projects that focus on the culture of everyday life, identity and heritage, new forms of religiosity, the framing of rituals, healing practices, and the culture of remembrance in the public domain. A great deal of research is currently taking place within the context of the HERILIGION program, which refers to the heritagization of religion and sacralization of heritage.[12] At Utrecht University, there is another influential research group led by the anthropologist of religion Birgit Meyer. Meyer conducts research on popular culture and heritage, material and visual culture, religious and ritual sounds, food practices, religious buildings, and space. After the conclusion of the international research program Iconic Religion[13], the project *Religious Matters in an Entangled World* was initiated.[14]

In Rotterdam (Erasmus University) at the School of History, Culture and Communication, the research group led by Stijn Reijnders[15] has been working on projects at the intersection of media, culture, and communication for years. The focus here has been on "locating imagination" through research into tourism and place-oriented practices. These projects concern cultural heritage, food culture, the significance of battlefield tours for the military, and the attraction of film locations.

In addition to universities and academic centers, there are universities of applied sciences where interesting research on rituals is conducted from a practical perspective. We find it important to mention the Breda University of Applied Sciences, where Rami Isaac conducts research into tourism and memorial culture, dark tourism, and risky traveling. There is also the Reinwardt Academy in Amsterdam that trains heritage and museum professionals. This academy is currently conducting a research program on "emotion networks" and dealing with the past led by Hesther Dibbits. Hogeschool Windesheim in

5 https://www.totzover.nl/funeraire-academie/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).
6 https://www.caminoacademie.nl/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).
7 https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/nl/over/schools/theologie (accessed on 8 October 2020)
8 https://www.rug.nl/research/centre-for-religious-studies/centre-religion-heritage/?lang=en (accessed on 8 October 2020).
9 https://www.ru.nl/ct/english/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).
10 https://www.uvh.nl/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).
11 https://www.meertens.knaw.nl/cms/nl/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).
12 https://heriligion.eu/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).
13 http://heranet.info/projects/hera-2012-cultural-encounters/iconic-religion-how-imaginaries-of-religious-encounter-structure/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).
14 https://religiousmatters.nl/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).
15 https://www.eur.nl/people/stijn-reijnders (accessed on 8 October 2020).

Zwolle (with the researcher André Mulder[16]) also conducts research into ritual counselors and rituals in healthcare.

Death Research in the Netherlands (Dood Onderzoek Nederland, DONE) is a growing national network of researchers in death studies.[17] Senior and junior researchers from almost all Dutch universities have regular meetings, organize seminars, and cooperate in research projects regarding death, dying, bereavement, and grief.

If we now take stock and look at what ritual studies in the Netherlands focus on, certain emphases emerge. In general, almost all research in the domain of ritual studies in the Netherlands is about dynamics and change, the role of emerging rituals, and the ways in which ritual repertoires can be rooted in an ever-changing and fragmented culture. Cultural, religious, and ritual diversity and the search for identity are common keywords in this research. We also note that research into e-rituals is relatively scarce (van der Beek et al. 2019). We may expect that the COVID-19 pandemic and the sudden boom of all kinds of rituals online may be an incentive to study this area in the near future.

3. Outline of This Special Issue

The eight articles of this Special Issue represent both the ritual fields and repertoires, as described in the first section, and ritual studies as an academic, multidisciplinary platform, as described in the second section.

In her work, Joanna Wojtkowiak represents the field of life cycle rituals in her exploration of the ritualization of pregnancy and childbirth. While traditional birth rituals have been decreasing in popularity, new rituals have emerged, such as mother blessings and humanist naming ceremonies. Her article is a good example of the dynamics of rituals in showing that in a new, cultural environment, new rituals are invented, re-invented, and transferred from one context to another.

The articles by Albertina Nugteren, Sam Goyvaerts et al., Christoph Jedan et al., and Kim van der Weegen et al. fit in the same category of life cycle rituals. Albertina Nugteren critically reviews Western responses to Hindu widow-burning in India. Although this rare ritual practice has been banned for almost 200 years, it still evokes Western interest and criticism. Nugteren pleas for a contextual approach of rituals and, in accordance with it, a place- and time-sensitive type of ritual criticism. What strikes us as especially insightful in her well-informed article is the fact that Western scholars, through the culturally determined terminology they use, do not really understand the full meaning and impact of a ritual. Regarding "co-cremation," a concept that reflects a Western view of an Indian Hindu ritual practice, Nugteren writes the following:

> It was not the death of her husband that had made her a widow, but her choice between two rituals would make her either a widow (containing everything the life and status of a widow implied) or a *satī*. For her, this was not simply a choice between life and death, but a choice between two religious paths, either of which would define her as a good woman, and would define both rituals as demonstrating her womanly power for the salvation of her husband. Whatever choice she would make, this soteriological power changed her, momentarily, from a victim to a victor.

Sam Goyvaerts and Nikolaas Vande Keere investigate the transformation of a Roman Catholic Church into a contemporary space for spirituality and commemoration. The concept of place is key in their study, as they link recent changes in funeral rituals in Flanders, Belgium, with the adaptive reuse project of a small church, which has been re-designed as a columbarium church, with the surrounding landscape being used for a spiritual and ritual "journey." This symbolizes the transition from life to death and from a life with the physical presence of the deceased to a life without it. Rather than considering the reuse of the church a spiritual loss, Goyvaerts and Vande Keere show how it can offer

16 https://www.windesheim.nl/onderzoek/deskundigen/mulder (accessed on 8 October 2020).
17 https://www.totzover.nl/done/ (accessed on 8 October 2020).

the opportunity to reinforce and open up the traditional symbolic and ritual meaning of the Christian liturgy to the larger community. The article by Goyvaerts and Vande Keere demonstrates that ritual fields overlap. Accordingly, the article fits the fields of religion (through the church building and Christian liturgy) and life cycle rituals (through cremation and death rituals) with a close link to memory culture (i.e., the columbarium as materialization of memory).

In the article by Christoph Jedan, Sonja Kmec, Thomas Kolnberger, Eric Venbrux, and Mariske Westendorp, place is the key concept as they analyze a cemetery in the south of the Netherlands as a ritual space. From a ritual-spatial perspective, they show how cemeteries not only form an ensemble of ritual spaces that are reliant on preexisting communities, but they also evoke, produce, and maintain communities. Using several spatial theories, the authors consider the cemetery as a pluralistic ritual space that is continuously (re)constituted and (re)negotiated by administrators, users, and their allies.

A fourth and last article in the field of life cycle rituals is presented by Kim van der Weegen, Martin Hoondert, Agnes van der Heide, and Madeleine Timmermann. In this case, the authors investigate ritualized care practices in a hospice using an open and broad approach to rituals and ritual-like practices. In doing so, they distinguish between several types of rituals: (1) Care practices in the morning, (2) meals, (3) care practices in the evening, (4) care practices in the dying phase, and (5) a farewell ritual after a patient has died. Some of these practices are part of the daily routines, while others fit the category of life cycle rituals. Due to the environment of the hospice and the situation of the patients in the phase of dying, all actions take on a symbolic significance in their relation to the moral value of the "good death."

Another article regarding the reuse of church buildings is presented by Kim de Wildt, in which she focuses on the circumstances that precede the reuse of (Roman Catholic) church buildings: The deconsecration or profanation of the building. As such, the article fits the ritual field of religion. De Wildt explores the tension between the "legitimate" way (in the sense of canon law) to deconsecrate a church building and the growing pastoral need for deconsecration rites. With respect to deconsecration rites, a shift has taken place in the perception of reasons as to why such a rite should be conducted. In contrast to historical requirements that were mainly focused on such acts for the purpose of defining the "legitimate" way of relegating the church to profane use, the well-being of the affected parishioners today seems to be the main reason for the performance of such rites. Based on her critical review of current ritual practices, De Wildt proposes a distinction between the act of church deconsecration and the last farewell celebration.

The two remaining articles belong to the field of religion. Thomas Quartier, a Benedictine monk himself, answers the question of what ritual practices laypersons affiliated with a particular Benedictine monastery (so-called oblates) perform. The key concept in this article is "ritual transfer," through which monastic rituals, which are partly calendrical, are transferred to a new context (i.e., the lives of laypersons living outside the monastery). Quartier's qualitative research sheds some insight into the difficulties of transferring Christian, monastic rituals to a secular context. In the other article, John Eade reflects on two totally different types of pilgrimage: the one to the Catholic shrine of Lourdes, France, and the one to the pre-Christian shrine of Avebury, England. The focus of his research is on leadership, power, and authority in ritual invention and performance. In particular, the pilgrimage to Avebury shows the overlap of the ritual fields, as many walkers are not involved in institutional religion and express a wide variety of reasons for traveling along both ancient and emerging routes of pilgrimage. The popularity of walking seems to be an important impetus for the increasing popularity of such pilgrimages. An overlap of the fields of religion (sacred sites), leisure culture (walking), and memory culture (heritage) seems to position the pilgrimage as a successful and popular ritual despite secularization and a decrease in church attendance.

The articles in this Special Issue show the dynamics of rituals in current societies. These dynamics are not only linked to the changing character of the rituals themselves, but also to the overlapping of the ritual fields and the transfer between them.

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Article

Ritualizing Pregnancy and Childbirth in Secular Societies: Exploring Embodied Spirituality at the Start of Life

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Abstract: Birth is the beginning of a new life and therefore a unique life event. In this paper, I want to study birth as a fundamental human transition in relation to existential and spiritual questions. Birth takes place within a social and cultural context. A new member of society is entering the community, which also leads to feelings of ambiguity and uncertainty. Rituals are traditionally ways of giving structure to important life events, but in contemporary Western, secular contexts, traditional birth rituals have been decreasing. In this article, I will theoretically explore the meaning of birth from the perspectives of philosophy, religious and ritual studies. New ritual fields will serve as concrete examples. What kind of meanings and notions of spirituality can be discovered in emerging rituals, such as mother's blessings or humanist naming ceremonies? Ritualizing pregnancy and birth in contemporary, secular society shows that the coming of a new life is related to embodied, social and cultural negotiations of meaning making. More attention is needed in the study of ritualizing pregnancy and birth as they reveal pluralistic spiritualities within secular contexts, as well as deeper cultural issues surrounding these strategies of meaning making.

Keywords: ritual; ritualizing; childbirth; pregnancy; spirituality; meaning making; embodiment

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"Childbirth is one site at which personhood gets negotiated and enacted."

(Kaufman and Morgan 2005, p. 322)

1. Introduction

Birth is the first transition in every human life. Birth is, first of all, a biological process. The baby develops throughout pregnancy in a female body. During birth the baby is transitioning into an organism out in the world. However, birth is not just a biological act. It is surrounded by many social and cultural meanings as well. Giving a name to the baby, for instance, is the social acknowledgement of that new living "thing" as a person. Though we cannot remember our own birth, those who were present at our birth can share their memories and stories about our beginning. Birth is a socio-cultural life-passage, which means that by the coming of a new child, not only the baby transitions into a new state, but also the mother, father, brothers, sisters, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and so on, transition into a new social role.

The coming of a new human being is related to expectations and meanings from society. While it is a unique individual who comes into to the world, the newcomer is also a new member of society. Similar to other life passages (such as adulthood, marriage or death), considering birth as a social transition means that the pre-status or social order is temporally in a state of *liminality* (Turner 1969; Van Gennep 1960). The social order is in a state of temporal anti-structure or chaos. Parents-to-be are preparing mentally, materially or even spiritually for the coming of their child and the transition into becoming parents. Family members and friends are searching for their new roles in the life of this new human being. Experiencing the birth of a baby can be related to feelings of happiness and joy, as well as ambiguity and uncertainty. The coming of a new member of society has been traditionally marked by rituals. Birth is therefore understood as the first rite of passage in a human life (Van Gennep 1960).

A literature review of previous research has shown that pregnancy and birth reveal many existential questions and notions of spirituality (Prinds et al. 2014). Recently, research has increasingly been focusing on spirituality at the start of life (Crowther and Hall 2018; Crowther et al. 2014a, 2020; Wojtkowiak and Crowther 2018; Prinds et al. 2016). In line with Davis-Floyd (1992), many authors have been contributing to the understanding that pregnancy and birth are highly ritualized in Western, secular contexts (e.g., giving a name to the baby, keeping the sonogram as a memorial object, sending a birth card) (Burns 2014, 2015; Cheyney 2011; van Gysgem 2017; Freedman 2011; Prates et al. 2018; Reed et al. 2016). Interestingly, there is, however, not one collectively shared ritual or ceremony that acknowledges the transition into new life in Western secular societies. At the other end of life's spectrum, death, a funeral is held for everyone who dies, whether one is religious or not. Atheists and the religiously non-affiliated are buried or cremated and the event is accompanied by a collective ritual. At birth, we do not see the same ritual significance in Western society. We do observe, however, the emergence of new, alternative ceremonies at the start of life, such as a "blessingway ceremony" or "mother's blessing"[1] (Burns 2015) and humanist or secular naming ceremonies for babies (Gordon-Lennox 2017; Wojtkowiak et al. 2018). In this article, I will study meaning making and spiritualty at the start of life from a ritual perspective. I will study notions of spirituality at the start of life and explore new ritual fields, such as these emerging ceremonies.

The research question is: what can we learn from ritualizing pregnancy and birth about notions of spirituality at the start of life in contemporary Western, secular contexts? The focus is explicitly on secular or semi-secular contexts, and not on religious rituals (such as baptism) in order to reveal new cultural tendencies and strategies of meaning making. The method to answer the research question is an explorative, theoretical review of existing literature on spirituality, birth and ritual. The literature comes mainly from philosophy, sociology and ritual and religious studies. Two examples of new ceremonies will be described in order to illustrate how rituals reveal strategies of meaning at the start of life. The first example, the mother's blessing (Burns 2015), is a re-invented social ritual for pregnancy. The second example, humanist naming ceremonies for newborns, ritualizes the birth of a baby. Both rituals are re-invented from traditional ritual and have been re-discovered in secular societies.

In order to answer the main question, first, I will start by discussing some philosophical perspectives on pregnancy and birth and focus on the concept of natality and embodiment. Both are meaningful at the start of life and shed new light on understanding existential and spiritual questioning at the start of life. Second, I will describe the changing ritual and social contexts of birth in Western, secular societies. Then, I will unravel the term "spirituality" in relation to birth. Fourth, I will describe two examples of emerging rituals: the mother's blessing and humanist naming ceremonies. Finally, the article will end with discussing the insights from this analysis on ritualizing pregnancy and birth and notions spirituality at the start of life.

2. Philosophical Perspectives on Pregnancy and Birth

Birth and death are both fundamental human experiences. Every living being is born and will die. However, only about 50% of the population gives birth. Only women or people with a female biological reproductive system can be pregnant and give birth to a baby. This biological fundament excludes male bodies from the experience of carrying a child in their bodies. Nevertheless, both women and men are always in relation to their own birth. Everybody is born. Then, most people experience the meaning of the birth of a child, when they become parents, aunts or uncles or grandparents. The biological

[1] I will use the term "mother's blessing" throughout the text.

reality of birth is always related to social and cultural meanings. What is more, as I want to argue here in this article, birth also leads to existential and spiritual questioning. Birth is a fundamental life passage, which means that it is meaningful for the individual and community. A new member enters community and is welcomed and introduced.

Next to the joy and happiness felt at birth (Crowther et al. 2014a), giving birth is related to physical pain. The pain is necessary for the baby to be able to be born. What is more, birth opens up possibilities, which also means that birth is the beginning of endless uncertainties (Arendt 1958). Carrying a baby in one's body is on the one hand the most intimate experience imaginable and at the same time it is a stranger and yet unknown person who is living inside one's body (Naka 2016). It is not clear yet who this person is and will be. How will she look like and behave? As Naka (2016) writes, "reproduction consists of giving birth to another being, it is inherently a relation to the Other" (Naka 2016, p. 120). Pregnancy and childbirth, next to the joy, celebration and happiness, also bring forward ambiguous and uncertain feelings (Wojtkowiak and Crowther 2018), such as 'what kind of mother or father will I be?', 'what kind of person will my child become¿, 'will I be a good parent?' or 'do I want this child to be born?'. These types of profound questions that parents (to be) might ask themselves reveal moral and existential questioning. In other words, these are questions of meaning.

In Western philosophy, understanding, analyzing and theorizing pregnancy and birth as existential fundament have, especially compared to death, been largely neglected (Prinds et al. 2014; Wojtkowiak and Crowther 2018; Schües 2008; Hennessey 2019). Hennessey (2019) published a book on birth, imagery and ritual and discusses the lack of theoretical foundations of understanding birth as an existential transition. Hennessey (2019) compares the biggest academic publishers and journals in the field of philosophy and religion (e.g., Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, *Journal of Religion*, *History of Religions*) and found that the term "birth" only constitutes about 25–50% of the number of publications compared to death (p. 10). The term "childbirth" is even less represented with about 1–3% (p. 10). Schües (2008) argues that the lack of philosophical attention towards the subject of birth is related to the societal, everyday understanding of birth (p. 15). This lack of theoretical foundations is striking, considering the fact that every human being is born and therefore has a beginning, in the same sense that every human life has an end. Recently, philosophical studies on the existential meaning of pregnancy and birth have been emerging, unraveling fundamental meanings of this transition (Bornemark and Smith 2016; Hennessey 2019; Schües 2008). It is, therefore, of great importance to reflect on the meaning of pregnancy and birth from an existential and spiritual perspective. What does it mean to be born? And what does it mean to give birth? Studying rituals around pregnancy and childbirth can shed some light on the existential and spiritual negotiations at birth and how humans make meaning of this biological act.

Arendt was one of the first authors who saw birth as existential beginning by referring to the concept of natality, which was originally discussed in her book *The Human Condition* in 1958. Arendt has put birth at the center of a meaning perspective. Being born means, according to Arendt, not only *having* a beginning, but *being* a new beginning. Being a new beginning means that one is able to politically act in the world. Humans are natal beings; they can initiate and influence the world. Birth is thus a biological fact that directly influences one's identity and meaning in life. Arendt was one of the first thinkers who gave a more positive outlook on birth. Previously, in classical philosophical literature, birth was seen as an unfortunate coincidence (Schües 2008, p. 31ff). The eternal soul was seen as being trapped in a mortal body (which manifests at birth) or birth was only seen as meaningful in terms of the birth of one's ego or ratio. Natality, which manifests at our biological birth, focuses on the human potential for action and the possibility to change the world. Arendt makes her point clear in relation to death: "Action, with all its uncertainties, is like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die, but to begin something new" (Arendt 1958, p. 246). The beginning of a new human being is grounded in the relation. We are always in relation to our own birth and therefore to the person who gave us life.

This is why the study of rituals surrounding birth is of great interest. In rituals, natality and the relationship between the newborn and her parents, family or community are re-negotiated. In rites of passage, the social transition is marked by the use of ritual symbols and language. In Western, secular societies, we see a new interest in ritualizing birth, such as the baby shower, gender reveal or "baby-party" (when family and friends are all invited to visit the baby for the first time). However, these ritualizations are, first of all, a personal choice, hence not a collective obligation. It is not clear yet to what extend these forms of ritualizing address a deeper layer of meaning or even spirituality. A baby shower or gender reveal are probably meaningful to the parents and those involved, however, the question is: to what extend do new forms of ritualizing, such as a baby shower, differ from a "party"[2]?

Johnson (2008) argues throughout his book *The Meaning of the Body* that there has been a lack of theoretical reflection on embodied meaning making in Western philosophy. Johnson discusses, among others, thinkers such as Dewey and Merleau-Ponty in order to develop a perspective on meaning making that does not separate the body from mind but connects them. According to this view, we should rather speak of an "embodied mind" or "phenomenological body" for the understanding of how humans make meaning in the world (Johnson 2008). He furthermore argues that philosophical thinking needs to acknowledge aesthetics as a way of thinking and making meaning in the world, instead of setting aesthetics apart into solely the field of arts and culture.

Rituals are by all means embodied enactments of meaning and therefore most interesting as examples of meaning making and embodied spirituality. What is more, rituals aesthetically translate reality into symbolic form (Wojtkowiak 2018). Rituals create a reality that is at aesthetic distance to the actual experience. Rituals give room to feel emotions and identify with the experience, but at the same time create some distance to the actual experience through symbolic enactment. Rituals thus do not represent the world as it presents itself to us, but as we imagine it. In a ritual we can imagine a world, which through symbolic actions becomes temporally our actual world (Geertz 1973). Furthermore, Crossley (2004) argues that rituals are a "form of what Marcel Mauss (1979) has termed "body techniques"" (p. 33), defined as "(culturally) specific uses of the body" (p. 33). Crossley explains that body techniques does not mean that the body is used as an object in the world, but, in line with Merleau-Ponty, inhabits the world. Embodied experience is seen as a "practical and pre-reflective knowledge and understanding" (Crossley 2004, p. 37). This means, similar to what Johnson (2008) states, our bodies are a source of knowledge and understanding of the world. Studying rituals at the start of life, thus, teaches us about how we give meaning to the world, including the role of the body in meaning making. In pregnancy and birth, the embodied reality of carrying and birthing a child is very prominent.

3. Ritual Meanings of Pregnancy and Birth in Western Society

Rituals are ways of giving structure to uncertainties and ambiguous feelings, while at the same time they can destabilize the status quo and existing group identities (Grimes 2014; Bell 1997). Rituals can be of guidance during existential questioning, prescribing a specific embodied and spiritual "infrastructure". For instance, baptism guides parents with certain spiritual rules and moral values, which is experienced and strengthened through participating in a baptism ritual. The baby is blessed and welcomed into a religious community. At the same time, using Grimes (2002) words, a ritual, "unlike an ethical principle, can thrive on ambiguity. A rite can acknowledge the seriousness of the act [. . .] without having to resolve the moral issues." (p. 315). Ritual can be of moral orientation, but this does not mean that it always prescribes them explicitly. What is more, in societies where traditional rituals are not common anymore, these moral and social guidelines become more vague or pluralistic and new ways of meaning making are enculturated, for instance, the increasing interest in

[2] See for discussion of these terms: (Grimes 2014, p. 211ff).

parenting literature. Bookstores and the internet are filled with advice on how to care for and raise a baby. While the existing and growing knowledge on care for a child is a source of guidance, it can also lead to even more insecurity, due to many contrasting pieces of advice. What is more, rational or scientific knowledge does not necessarily give answer to existential questions.

In contemporary Western societies, the context of birth has been greatly influenced by sociological and technological changes (Conrad 2007; Davis-Floyd 1992). Birth rates in Western societies (as well as other industrialized societies) have been decreasing steadily (Kiernan 2004). Fewer children are born, mothers and fathers become parents at an older age and parenthood is more or less a personal choice. The "Western way" of birthing has been mainly influenced by medicine and technology (Davis-Floyd 1992).

In Western society, pregnancy and birth were not shared publicly, in most cases not even with the father-to-be who was not allowed to be present during the birth for a long time. Only in the last 30 years or so, pregnancy and birth have become more visible in our society. The image of the nude and pregnant body of actress Demi Moore on the cover of Vanity fair in 1991 was shocking at the beginning, but started a movement and more celebrities started to show off their "baby bumps" in the media.[3] Women's fashion started to also change and maternity clothes made the pregnant belly more visible. The pregnant belly became something to be proud of and not something to hide. This new visibility of pregnancy brought new ideals of motherhood: a mother should look a certain way (Prinds et al. 2020). On the internet, birth photography and the sharing of birth stories have been trending within the last years, making pregnancy and birth more visible.

What is more, traditional religious rituals have been decreasing in Western, secular societies. Since the 1970s, baptism has been decreasing steadily in many Northern and Western European countries (Alfani 2018). To give an example: in the Netherlands, which is a strongly secularized society, approximately 21.5% of the population consider themselves Catholic.[4] In 2018, 10,380 babies were baptized in the Catholic community the Netherlands, which is 6.24% of all babies born in that year. In Belgium, 45% of all newborn are baptized, significantly more than the Netherlands, but the trend shows a steady decrease between 2010 and 2016 with −34.5%.[5] In Sweden, 44% of babies were baptized in 2016 and in France, between 2010–2013, an average of 37% of babies were baptized (Alfani 2018). While baptism remains common in some countries, such as Poland (100% in 2015) and also Italy (with 79% in 2015), we see that in many Northwestern European countries the percentages decrease. These statistics show us that depending on the country a baby is born, choosing this collective religious rite may be a personal choice and the trend shows a decrease. In Northwestern European countries, the majority of babies are not baptized. It is yet unclear to what extent alternative ceremonies are offered or whether parents do refrain from any. In comparison, after death, a funeral or some form of body disposal is necessary and families can choose what kind of rituals accompany the funeral. In the case of birth, there is not a direct necessity to have a social gathering or collective ceremony to announce the birth of a baby.

Grimes (2002) notices that in contemporary Western, secularized societies, birth is more a *passage*, rather than a *rite of passage*, due to the lack of collective rituals around pregnancy and birth. Davis-Floyd (1992) has contributed an important perspective to our understanding that birth in Western societies is also highly ritualized within a medical setting. In her well-known book *Birth as an American Rite of Passage*, she argues that medial practices in hospitals are also significant practices of ritualizing birth. Western medicine and technology have become prominent, not only in the care for the pregnant and birthing woman, but also in the way we give meaning to birth. Other authors have followed Davis-Floyd and further discussed the ritual dimension of pregnancy and childbirth (McCallum and dos Reis 2005;

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3 The photograph taken by famous photographer Annie Leibowitz has been chosen as one of the 100 most influential images of all times by Times magazine: http://100photos.time.com/photos/annie-leibowitz-demi-moore/.
4 https://www.rkkerk.nl/kerk/kerkprovincie/kerncijfers/.
5 https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2018/03/05/minder-dan-helft-van-alle-kinderen-wordt-nog-gedoopt/.

Cheyney 2011; Burns 2014, 2015; Jacinto and Buckey 2013; Freedman 2011; van Gysgem 2017). There are, however, different modes or densities of ritual (Grimes 2010, 2014). Daily ritualizations, the participation in a social ceremony or liturgy, represent a different ritual layer. Ritual in medical settings has ritual aspects but differs form a ceremony that is intentionally marked as a social gathering and puts attention towards a specific life-event. All ritual layers are significant in enculturation and meaning making. However, the absence of ritual ceremony at the start of life is striking and brings us to the later described two examples.

4. Spirituality at the Start of Life

Spirituality at the start of life has been gaining attention in the literature (Callister and Khalaf 2010). Crowther has written extensively within the last years on the importance of acknowledging spirituality at the start of life (Crowther and Hall 2015, 2018; Crowther et al. 2014a, 2014b, 2020). Ignoring the subject of spirituality at childbirth neglects a fundamental aspect of humanity and care practice as well. Similar to end of life care, the beginning of life also deserves focus and attention regarding questions of meaning and spirituality (Wojtkowiak and Crowther 2018). Crowther et al. (2020) define spirituality as "an aspect of our lives that brings meaning, sense of purpose, unifies our life narrative, feelings of interconnectivity and of deepening relationships with self and others ('others' being seen and unseen). It may be connected to religion and a belief in a quality of divinity but not necessarily. Spirituality is part of our wellbeing and includes psychological, emotional and cultural aspects of being and becoming" (Crowther et al. 2020, p. 2). McGuire (2008) writes that material bodies are linked to spirituality through "healing, sexuality, and gender, through fertility, childbirth and nursing, and a myriad other forms of embodied practices" (McGuire 2008, p. 118). Ammerman (2010) describes spirituality in pluralistic terms, not necessarily being experienced in *either* religious *or* secular terms, but often a mix of them.

Ammerman (2010) defines spiritualty in five dimensions. First, spiritualty refers to a moral dimension in terms of what people experience as the good and what is distinguished as right or wrong (Ammerman 2010). Second, spiritual experiences come forward when people feel awe, wonder and beauty in the world. This refers to majestic experiences. Third, spirituality is found in the mysterious: experiences that we cannot explain. Fourth, spirituality brings forward a connection with others that goes beyond the boundaries of one's self (Ammerman 2010; Knoblauch 2009). A spiritual connection goes beyond the self, such as in unification or loosing oneself within the other. Finally, questions of meaning are also found in spiritual experiences: asking yourself, what is the meaning of this life event? A spiritual experience is something that we cannot grasp, that is out of the reach of rational and scientific explanations, which perhaps explains the fuzziness of the concept (Watts 2020).

What can we learn from rituals in understanding meaning and spirituality at the start of life? A survey study (n = 517) in Denmark, a secular society, revealed that 65% of first-time mothers pray during their pregnancy (Prinds et al. 2014). However, only 33% believed in God and 37% in a higher power (Prinds et al. 2016). The most common reported forms of prayer were an inner dialogue with God (46%) or an inner dialogue addressing something greater than the self (40%). Only 26% of mothers prayed in the context of a church. These descriptive statistics reveal a tendency of existential and spiritual search for meaning and contemplation among new mothers. From a literature review, we learn that in the reported empirical studies across the world, women describe many references towards meaning making and spirituality in relation to becoming a mother (Prinds et al. 2014). Mothers describe the birth of their child as the "most significant thing I have ever done" (p. 737) or a deep connection with previous generations, as well as something that goes beyond a rational understanding. Other research shows similar results referring to birth as a deep transitional experience (Crowther and Hall 2018). When linking these results to the previous description of spirituality, we recognize all of the previously described notions of spirituality emerging at childbirth.

In Table 1, the five notions of spirituality by Ammerman (2010) and others (Knoblauch 2009) are described in relation to the start of life. The different notions of spirituality, such as the moral, majestic, mysterious, unification and questions of meaning, are not necessarily separative dimensions but contemplative. For the sake of clarity, I have stated them as separate notions, but in reality, they do cross-over. The examples are meant purely as illustration, not as a complete or fixed description of spirituality at the start of life. In the next section, I will further investigate these notions from a ritual lens, by analyzing two cases.

Table 1. Spirituality at the start of life.

Notions of Spirituality	Examples at the Start of Life
Moral (What is a good life? What is right and wrong?)	- What does it mean to be a good parent? - What does one wish for the child in terms of a good life?
Majestic (beauty, awe and wonder)	- Joy and celebration of welcoming a baby. - Wondering who this person will be.
Mysterious (feelings of uncertainty, the unknown)	- The unknown. - The unborn is still a stranger. - Birth is the beginning of endless uncertainties.
Questions of meaning	- Birth as new beginning, endless possibilities and uncertainties.
Unifying with the other or something outside of the self	- Carrying a baby in one's body (two-in-one). - Recognizing aspects of yourself in the baby.

5. Re-Inventing Rituals of Pregnancy and Childbirth

In the following section, two examples of emerging ceremonies will be described in order to explore the earlier notions of spirituality within more concrete examples. The first example is called the "blessingway ceremony" or "mother's blessing", referring to a blessing of the mother-to-be during her pregnancy (Burns 2015). The second example are secular, humanist naming ceremonies where the baby is welcomed into community. Both examples will be described from existing literature (Burns 2015; Gordon-Lennox 2017; Wojtkowiak et al. 2018) and additional information found on websites, such as blogs, newspaper articles and secular celebrant institutes across the world (US, Northwestern Europe, Australia and New Zeeland).

Both rituals would, according to Grimes (2010) typology, be described as ceremonies (p. 38). Grimes (2010) differentiates ceremonies from other modes of ritual, such as ritualization and decorum, as more intentional and on a larger scale[6]. A ceremony has an invitation and a specific date and time. The differentiation of these modes is important, according to Grimes (2014, p. 203ff), as they reveal a specific ritual density or layer. Ceremonies are enforced and declarative and thus make a social statement about what matters within a group. They ask for ritual actors to participate in the ceremony.

By describing these two examples, I aim to unravel some existential and spiritual needs surrounding pregnancy and birth in secular and pluralistic contexts. The earlier discussed philosophical and spiritual themes are meant as theoretical foundations for these case descriptions. The mother's blessing is chosen because it tells us something about ritualizing pregnancy (the separation of the mother from her earlier social status). The naming ceremony can reveal something about integrating the newcomer into community.

5.1. Ritualizing Pregnancy: Mother's Blessing

The mother's blessing is inspired by the traditional Native American Navajo blessingway ceremony (Biddle 1996). Biddle conducted an ethnographic study at a Navajo reservation and interviewed

[6] Ritualization is what people do unconsciously and decorum is what they think one "ought to do" (Grimes 2010, p. 37). Decorum is face-to-face between two or a distinct number, and ceremony involves large-group interaction.

56 women of whom 14% had had a blessingway. Traditional blessingway ceremonies consist of singing, chanting and sharing stories to wish beauty, good and harmony to the mother-to-be.[7] The songs and stories are shared during pregnancy and childbirth. The singer, who is a traditional medicine man, performs the songs. Biddle (1996) explains:

> "The Blessingway relates back to the legends and therefore establishes a connection with them and with the world today [. . .] Wyman explains the translation of the word Blessingway, "Hozhoonji". The stem, "Hozhen", is like the Greek "arete", which is usually translated as excellence, but covers all forms of human excellence and implies an ideal of wholeness and harmony. The Navajo term includes everything that a Navajo thinks is good... concepts such as the words beauty, perfection, harmony, goodness, normality, success, well-being, blessedness, order, ideal do for us. The ending, "-iji", expresses in the direction of, side, manner, way, and so we translate the name as Blessingway.". (p. 20)

The songs and stories are important for the mother-to-be and shape her view of childbirth and family life. Through the chants the woman is spiritually connected to her ancestors and the past and future (Biddle 1996, p. 22).

A new type of mother's blessing has been ritualized within secular contexts. The ritual reveals pluralistic elements. It does not "demand" a specific worldview or spiritual background but has references towards different religious or cultural rituals. The name and concept have been taken from the Navajo tradition. What is more, some mother's blessings can include an "altar" being made for the mother or Henna tattoo belly paining. Henna tattoos are traditionally used in wedding rituals in South Asian, Middle Eastern, and North African cultures.

A modern mother's blessing is described as a "celebration of a woman's transition into motherhood that's rooted in Navajo culture. It is a spiritual gathering of the woman's closest friends and family who come to nurture the mama-to-be with wise words, positivity, art and pampering."[8] During a mother's blessing the mother is blessed by other significant women before the baby is born. Most of the time, the other participants are her mother (in law), sister(s), aunts and friends. However, variations are possible and sometimes males are also present. Although mother's blessings still appear in the margins, they are growing in popularity, spreading around Western societies, such as the UK[9], USA[10], The Netherlands[11], Belgium[12] and Germany[13].

From an Australian interview study with 30 women who had planned or underwent a mother's blessing during pregnancy it was revealed that the ritual is seen as a conscious choice against the mainstream baby shower (Burns 2015). During a regular baby shower, material gifts are given to the mother, which are intended for the baby. The interviewed women in this study explained that they did not connect to the meaning or purpose of a mainstream baby shower and they missed a meaningful exchange. They claimed to not be looking for "just gifts" and "silly games". Another difference is that the mother-to-be is at the center of the ceremony and not the baby. During the ceremony, symbolic gifts are given to the mother in the form of wishes, symbolized by beads, which are then threaded into a cord or string. The beads and wishes are brought in preparation of the ritual. The giving and threading of beads is the central moment of the ceremony and enacts the blessing of the mother.

The focus on female participants during a mother's blessing stresses the importance of gender-focus in this pregnancy ritual. Although men also experience birth as a significant life passage, the biological and embodied aspect of pregnancy and birth are shared among women or persons with a female

7 https://www.britannica.com/topic/Blessingway.
8 https://www.milowekids.com/the-mag/your-guide-to-throwing-a-virtual-blessingway-baby-shower-or-gender-reveal.
9 http://www.sueboughton.co.uk/blessingway-ceremony.
10 https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-16247/tired-of-baby-showers-try-a-blessingway-ceremony.html.
11 https://geboortenis.nl/creeer-je-eigen-blessingway/.
12 https://innata.weebly.com/blessingway.html.
13 https://mummy-mag.de/blessing-way-das-besondere-ritual-fuer-werdende-mamas/.

reproductive system. Perhaps this is why during this ritual the presence of other females is preferred. Excluding men from this ritual stresses the importance of a gendered, female community. McGuire (2008) quite rightly states that "spirituality involves people's material bodies, not just their minds or spirits" (p. 97). Within the temporal space of the mother's blessing, women's material bodies, with the pregnant body at the center, as well as material, ritualized objects, embody "the sacredness of the divine" (McGuire 2008, p. 791). The body of the pregnant mother-to-be is ritualized in many ways, such as combing her hair, massaging her shoulders, washing her feet and belly painting.

As pregnancy is a significant and irreversible bodily transition, the woman carries the baby that is growing inside of her, the embodied meaning of pregnancy is stressed in the ritual. Burns (2015) acknowledges that she was unsure about using the term "feminist spirituality" in interpreting her data, but the interviews reveal that the presence and participation of the female group is of great importance. Statements such as "I wanted that feminine energy" (Burns 2015, p. 788), which is not seen as a reaction against male presence ("I've got some beautiful men in my life, but I just wanted an afternoon of feminine energy" (Burns 2015, p. 788)) stress the role of the importance of a female community.

What is more, the ritual starts with matrilineal introductions: each woman introduces herself in terms of her maternal line, such as "daughter of", "granddaughter of", etc. The matrilineal introductions enact the female community beyond the physically present or living female relatives and can go back to female ancestors. Beginning the ritual with this introduction round immediately states the ritual space within a transcendent, inter-generational meaning. This is in line with what Schües (2008) explores as the generative meaning of birth: every birth, although unique in itself, is related to what has come before and will come after. The baby is born into a world that already exists. It is a new beginning within an existing community. Birth is always relational.

Other rituals during the mother's blessing are painting on the pregnant belly, belly plaster casting and wrist weaving (a ball of wood is passed along and wrapped around one's wrist sharing some words about the symbolism of this connection). Most of these rituals are taking place sitting (on the floor in a circle), which creates an intimate space among the participating women.

During the mother's blessing, the female participants are not passive observers, but they actively enact their relationship with the mother-to-be. The central moment of the ceremony, the symbolic gift giving and stating of wishes, points at negotiating the uncertain future of the mother-to-be. A female community is enacted through the different rituals that are part of the mother's blessing. The blessing is an enactment of what people wish as good and beautiful to the mother.

Birth, same as death, is a mysterious event. As described earlier through the concept of natality (Arendt 1958), birth is the beginning of new possibilities. Pregnancy is a relationship with a "stranger" within one's body. In this ritualizing, we see negotiations of what the community wishes for the mother and baby. As birth is a transition and new beginning, during this ritual the participants give a glimpse of what they wish the unknown future to be, hence the ritual being a reaction to the mysterious and unknown. Stating a wish also has a moral dimension: what you think is good is what you wish to somebody else. The entire ceremony is accompanied by food and other delicious threats, the mother-to-be, as well as the other participants, dress up, for example, using flowers as decoration in their hair. The beautiful attributes express a relation to the majestic. The wishes that can refer to beauty and positivity also refer to the majestic.

5.2. Ritualizing Birth: Secular and Humanist Naming Ceremonies

In Western contexts we also see the emergence of secular or humanist naming or welcoming ceremonies for babies. This ritual, inspired by traditional baptism, is a re-invented way of welcoming the baby into one's community. European humanist organizations, such as Humanists UK[14] or the

14 https://humanism.org.uk/ceremonies/namings/blog/what-is-a-humanist-naming-ceremony/.

Norwegian Humanist Association[15], offer this ceremony as an alternative to a traditional, religious baptism. The motivation for a baby naming is described as "[p]eople choose to have a humanist naming ceremony because they want to bring family and friends together to celebrate one of life's key milestones. They are ideal for families who want to mark the occasion in a way that isn't religious."[16] The ceremony takes between 20 and 60 min and can be accompanied by a humanist or secular celebrant. In the United States, the Celebrant Institute provides celebrants across the country who can create and perform a baby naming.[17] A naming ceremony is personalized and uniquely created for each family. Parents and other significant others can, for instance, state their hopes and wishes for the baby. Music and readings can also be part of the ceremony. Some physical symbol might be given to the baby, such as for guidance or something that the child can open or read later in her life. 'Guideparents' might be presented to the community and they can also express their wishes to the baby. As this ritual is individually crafted for each family, the location, length, content and other ritual elements are chosen for the occasion. The naming ceremony is presented as an alternative to a religious baptism or christening. On the websites of the secular and humanist celebrant institutes[18] one can find ideas and examples from naming ceremonies, such as poems to choose from (see Figures 1 and 2).

"Wishes for a Child"
by Joanna Miller
May you know the gift of friendship
Feel the sun upon your face
May you win displaying dignity
And accept defeat with grace
May you marvel at the wonders
Of nature and the earth
May you value education
And know your own true worth
May you live and love with honesty
And do the thing that's right
May you stand up for the helpless
And sleep in peace at night
May you thrive upon a challenge
And sing and dance and laugh
May you know the joy of parenthood
And follow your own path.

Figure 1. Example of a poem for a humanist naming ceremony.

In Norway, where humanist ceremonies are held for about 3.7% of all newborns (a total of 2248 naming ceremonies in 2015)[19], the naming of babies is a collective ceremony where a group of babies are named at the same time. The babies are mostly 4 to 12 months old. The parents do not need to be a member of the Norwegian Humanist Association to name their baby in a humanist ceremony. Some parents choose the baby to wear a traditional white baptism dress, which is a reference towards traditional religious baptism, while others choose other clothing. There are no restrictions to what the baby should wear.

15 https://human.no/om-oss/english/ceremonies/.
16 https://humanism.org.uk/ceremonies/humanist-namings/.
17 http://www.celebrantinstitute.org/family-children-ceremonies.html.
18 https://humanism.org.uk/ceremonies/namings/blog/poems-for-a-humanist-naming-ceremony/.
19 Norwegian Humanist Association 2015, personal communication.

Swiss secular celebrant Gordon-Lennox (2017) writes that naming ceremonies generally serve two functions: "First of all, the newcomer is publicly received into the group. Second, the group implicitly or explicitly acknowledges its responsibilities for the new person" (p. 94). Gordon-Lennox (2017) further elaborates ingredients for a meaningful ceremony, such as promises, symbolic gestures and music "that are coherent with the values of the parents [which they] want to transmit to their child" (p. 95). Moreover, she advises to include a pledge from the guideparents. She also stresses that it is important to choose material that is sincere, touches people's emotions and is not "nice for the parents", such as a classical music piece. Instead, parents should choose music that a child would choose. According to Gordon-Lennox, the newcomer is at the center of the naming ceremony, but in relation to her parents. The other significant people, such as aunts and uncles, grandparents and friends, stand around that relationship between parents and child. An example of parents' promises can be found in Figure 2.

Lucy
We promise to *love* you without clinging to you.
We promise to encourage your *confidence in yourself* while keeping our fears to ourselves.
We promise to share the best of our *two cultures* with you by teaching you how to celebrate their festivals and to respect the principles to each one.
(Gordon-Lennox 2017, p. 97)

Figure 2. Example of parents' promise to baby.

The description of wishes for Lucy shows that the parents make promises to the child ('to love and not to cling') and they position themselves in their intercultural context ('to share the best of both cultures'). These promises are individually crafted for each child. The naming ceremony is an example of re-inventing a traditional ritual while giving more space for personal choice and preference. Especially when the ceremonies are crafted specifically for one family, such as in the UK or US, parents have lots of options to choose from. Having a collective naming ceremony, such as in Norway, however, underlines the communal aspects of welcoming and celebrating the arrival of a newborn together with other babies and parents. The dynamics between individualism and collectivism become visible in this ritual.

The focus of secular naming ceremonies is on unique wishes and aspects of the self. The newborn is a unique, new person. However, at the same time, the choice for a naming of the baby in a family setting acknowledges the importance of community in the baby's life. The newcomer is acknowledged within a social group. The stating of promises of parents and guideparents are examples of how the good life is ritualized in the naming ceremony. Parents choose what kind of elements they think are meaningful, such as music, text or a physical symbol. Therefore, the naming ceremony also reveals ritualized strategies of giving meaning to birth and this new life, as well as notions of spirituality. The wishes for the baby express a search for meaning and confrontation with the mysterious, as well as moral obligations. What we consider a good life is what we wish for the baby. Furthermore, the ceremony shows the importance of responsibility in the life of the baby, also revealing one's social bond to the baby. Becoming a guideparent gives the person a special role in the baby's life. During the ceremony this role is enacted among family and friends. A naming ceremony is a celebration: it focuses on the joyful aspect of a child coming into the world. At the same time, there is also space for seriousness and reflection, which makes this social gathering different from a party. Having a naming ceremony, presenting the newborn to society or one's community, is possibly a way of dealing with the unknown or mysterious aspect of spirituality at birth: the baby's future is yet unknown. This little person is still a stranger, but by expressing one's values and wishes for the future, giving her a name and acknowledging her relationships and status in the community, this unknown future becomes somewhat more concrete and is established in relation to others. The naming ceremony illustrates how natality (Arendt 1958) is enacted into symbolic form. The newcomer, the baby, is celebrated by her community, and the new roles in the life of the child, such as parents and guideparents, enact their roles in the life of this new member of society. The relationship with this yet unknown person is made more concrete and tangible. Parents have the opportunity to state what their wishes for her future will be and how they hope their relationship will develop.

6. Discussion

The question of this article was: what can we learn from ritualizing pregnancy and birth about notions of spirituality at the start of life? First, I discussed some philosophical perspectives on birth. Mainly, natality and embodiment were discussed in relation to meaning making and the changing ritual and social-cultural contexts of birth in Western, secular societies. A discussion of Ammerman (2010) notions of spirituality in relation to birth has shown that birth is related to fundamental existential and spiritual questions. The descriptions of emerging rituals, the mother's blessing and naming ceremonies, furthermore, showed expressions of spiritual questions.

Analyzing these two cases brings forward the importance of understanding the role of embodiment in meaning making of pregnancy and birth. The here described cases of ritualizing pregnancy and childbirth show the importance of the use of body techniques in creating meaning for new life (Crossley 2004). During a mother's blessing the body of the pregnant mother-to-be is pained on or the belly is casted. The sitting in a circle with a group of females puts the bodies of women at the center of a shared, intimate space. In order to participate in a mother's blessing, one needs to possess specific "embodied cultural competencies" (Crossley 2004, p. 35), which means (1) having a significant bond with the mother-to-be, (2) being a female or having a female body and (3) being pregnant (in case of the central actor). During the mother's blessing, the pregnant body is central in the ritual action. In the naming ceremony the embodied presence of the baby is also at the center: it is of importance that the baby is physically presented to the world. People want to hold the newborn, which gives them a sense of significance in their relationship with the baby. As birth is the beginning of new life, these new rituals also enact this new beginning by presenting hopes and wishes for the future, which represents the meaning of natality (Arendt 1958).

Both ceremonies are social gatherings at the start of life. One during pregnancy and the other after the baby is born. The wishes and promises that are symbolically enacted during the ceremonies show that the pregnant mother and the newborn are acknowledged by the social group. The pregnant woman and the fetus are both in a state of *liminality* (Turner 1969). They are in transition. The social acknowledgement of the mother and baby manifests at birth. Through ritual action this new, unstructured state is made more tangible. The mother's blessing reveals notions of *communitas*: an equal, temporal, cohesive sense of togetherness (Turner 1969). The mother's blessing focuses strongly on a specific population or group and the present women participate actively and equally during the different ritual parts of the ceremony. The sitting in a circle or the floor embodies this equal state. Research by Burns (2015) has shown that the female community is an important element in this ritual. To be able to interpret in greater depth to what extent notions of *communitas* and spirituality are experienced during these re-invented rituals would ask for a more in-depth interview study. In an ethnographic or interview study one can ask more specifically about the extent to which women do experience the mother's blessing as spiritual.

An interesting, or perhaps even paradoxical, characteristic of these newly emerging ritual fields is that the social gathering is often personally chosen by the mother-to-be or the parents. This differs from traditional ritual, which is embedded and embodied in the community. These new rituals are introduced by those who are at the center. The community that is enacting the ritual needs to learn and embody the ritual, often for the first time. It would be interesting to investigate more how these new forms of ritualizing influence notions of *communitas*. A ceremony is an intentional social interaction, but to what extent does it 'succeed' within these new ritual fields?

Re-inventing pluralistic ritual also brings forward complex and sensitive questions about cultural exchange. Analyzing the mother's blessing, which in many descriptions is referred to with the traditional term “blessingway ceremony” and the openness towards how it is inspired by a specific culture, the Native American Navajo (Biddle 1996), ponders to what extent we need to discuss the topic of cultural appropriation.[20] One of the websites describing mother’s blessings says: “Out of respect for the Navajo I will use the name blessingway”[21], but also, “The Navajo don’t approve of the name being used”.[22] Another article explicitly uses the term “cultural appropriation” in discussing this new ritual: “It’s also is the perfect opportunity to engage in meaningful research and discussion on the topic of cultural appropriation. Be aware of the language you use and whom it belongs to and consider where certain rituals originate. Talk to the people whom they belong to, respect them and pay them if appropriate.”[23] The author also states that already in 2004 Navajo feminists had drawn attention towards their dissatisfaction with the term being used in this new ritual context and that they rather suggest the term “mother’s blessing”. Another blogger who describes her experiences with her mother’s blessing writes that she believes it is possible to be inspired by indigenous ritual, but also that “we must never commodify it, or use it tokenistically”.[24]

Cultural appropriation is a complex issue, broadly defined as “the use of a culture’s symbols, artefacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture” (Rogers 2006, p. 474). What is most important in understanding cultural appropriation is that it happens when there is a power distance or power relation. Cultural exchange, defined as “the reciprocal exchange of symbols, artifacts, rituals, genres, and/or technologies between cultures with roughly equal levels of power” (Rogers 2006, p. 477), is an ideal version of multi-cultural exchange. However, in the case of the mother’s blessing we may rather speak of cultural dominance, defined as “the use of elements of a dominant culture by members of a subordinated culture in a context in which the dominant culture has been imposed onto the subordinated culture, including appropriations that enact resistance.” (p. 477). As Native Americans have been forcefully repressed by the White dominant culture, it is striking that today these traditional rituals are re-used by the same cultural group that has been repressing the culture in the first place. The subject of cultural appropriation remains complex and might not be solved with a short statement such as “this is not allowed”, but in ritualizing and re-using and re-inventing rituals in Western societies, we need to discuss the topic of cultural appropriation more. What is ethical ritualizing? What can be used in new rituals and what requires deeper thinking and more ritualizing? Grimes argues in an interview with Gordon-Lennox to not use the foreign and exotic in new rituals but to use what you are familiar with. Grimes states: ritualize “with the stuff in your drawers” (Gordon-Lennox 2017, p. 52). I think that the topic of cultural appropriation deserves more attention in ritual studies literature, when analyzing and discussing re-inventions of existing rituals.

Finally, the here analyzed rituals question whether we should speak of secular rituals here. The rituals both reveal references towards existing, religious ritual, such as the white gown during the baby naming or the re-use of traditional elements from other cultures. These new ritual fields express negotiations between the secular and religious, as well as different cultures. We might more accurately speak of pluralistic ritualizing. Rejowska (2020) writes on humanist weddings in Poland: “even when actors try to create a performance from the very beginning, references to some previous conceptions, traditions or particular symbols, are inevitable” (Rejowska 2020, p. 5). On the one hand, secular and humanist ceremonies are a movement against traditional, religious ritual, placing a focus on the individual within a social ritual (see Rejowska 2020). On the other hand, these rituals are clearly inspired by traditional, religious (Christian or native, indigenous) ritual. As Rejowska states, “humanist ceremonies function in a given cultural context and draw inspiration mostly from the Christian tradition” (p. 12). New rituals focus on the individuality and uniqueness of a person,

20 https://newbornmothers.com/blog/mother-blessings-cultural-appropriation-and-what-to-do-instead.
21 https://www.bellybelly.com.au/pregnancy/blessingway-what-is-a-blessingway/.
22 Ibid.
23 https://newbornmothers.com/blog/mother-blessings-cultural-appropriation-and-what-to-do-instead.
24 https://lulastic.co.uk/parenting/readings-and-activities-for-a-mothers-blessing-blessingway/.

but at the same time they create a sense of community through this ceremonial social gathering and interaction. Ritualizing pregnancy and birth in secular societies reveals what Ammerman (2010) defines as "pragmatic plurality" (p. 156). For the sake of meaning making, people reach out to different sources, some of them secular, some religious.

7. Conclusions

Pregnancy and birth rituals celebrate natality. They enact natality: the newcomer and the new beginning are welcomed and celebrated. Spirituality at the start of life has been found in different notions, from the majestic, to the mysterious, unification and questions of meaning. The here described ceremonies enact and embody strategies of meaning making and spirituality. Birth as a new beginning is a source of embodied spirituality but it is not clear cut or finished. The discussion of ritualizing pregnancy and birth in these new ritual fields is 'only' at the beginning. The inter-cultural negotiations in emerging rituals are still ongoing and asking for more dialogue on the topic of ritualizing in pluralistic and secular contexts.

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Article

The Challenge of Chronotopicity: Female Co-Cremation in India Revisited in the Light of Time–Space Sensitive Ritual Criticism

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Abstract: Rituals are embedded in a particular time and space, and so are their objects and meanings. The 'chronotope' we focus on here is the occasional—partly self-chosen, partly societally forced—ritual death of Hindu widows along with their deceased husbands. Although never widely practiced, widow-burning caught the imagination of Europeans as illustrating both Hinduism's 'barbarity' and its 'high conjugal ideals'. Although *satī* had been outlawed since 1829, in 1987 a new case inflamed opposing sentiments. In 2002, in a passage called 'Ritual Criticism and Widow Burning', Ronald Grimes drew attention to it as a rite of passage that calls for normative comments and ritual criticism. Since then, in circles of ritual studies Hindu, widow-burning has occasionally been repeated as one of the ritual practices in need of condemnation. In order to put this rare practice, banned since almost 200 years ago, back into a proper time–place perspective, both its ritual details and its sociocultural contexts are revisited. Finally, we propose some case-specific factors that could serve as retrospective ritual criticism. We conclude with a plea for time–space sensitivity.

Keywords: *satī*; widow-burning; India; ritual criticism; chronotopicity

1. Introduction

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the spectacular phenomenon of Indian women committing ritual suicide by entering their dead husbands' funeral pyres strained the limits of cross-cultural understanding. When the British conquered India, they came face to face with practices they could neither understand nor condone, and in the Indo-British colonial encounter, this occasional funerary practice became one of the prime examples of what they considered the 'horrid rites of Hindustan'. Yet, there was European fascination as well, mostly with the bravery of the woman. We have found this ambivalence expressed through early travelers' accounts, ranging from ancient 'historiographies' (Karttunen 1989; 1997, pp. 64–67); through Venetian traveler–merchant Marco Polo's *Il Milione* (put on paper by Rustichello in 1298) and Portuguese General Albuquerque (the later Viceroy), who managed to temporarily abolish the practice around Goa in 1510 (Major 2006, 2011); and to British merchant missionaries, whose role in abolition was merely an offshoot of a much grander design, the conversion to Enlightenment rationality and/or Christianity (Mani 1998). Whereas, from the European perspective, widow-burning became an alibi for the colonial civilizing mission, by the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, it also became a potent signifier for the oppression of women and the degradation of the once-great Indian civilization as a whole. The colonial divide necessitated a complex mediation, structured not only by relations of domination and subordination, but also by anxieties about the so-called noninterference. It was a fundamental principle of the British government to exercise 'toleration' in matters of religion, and to the orientalizing imagination, India was a place where religion held unbridled sway over both feelings and facts (Figure 1). In this context, the rhetoric of reform had a wobbly basis, to say the least. Although the desirability of legislative prohibition was increasingly supported by indigenous reformers as well, especially in the state of Bengal (Ramos 2017), co-cremation was otherwise defended as an inviolable aspect of Hindu tradition and as a religiously sanctioned ritual (Weinberger-Thomas 1999). While during British colonial rule in India the widow tended to be portrayed as a tragic victim, her own voice and agency were shockingly marginalized and practically absent in all descriptions, deliberations, and decisions.

Figure 1. 'Widow Burning in India'; illustration by the Wesleyan Missionary Society (a public domain image, https://archive.org/downloads/wesleyanjuvenil08socigoog/wesleyanjuvenil08socigoog.pdf).

In the above lines, the tendency to regard ritual acts as a model of and a model for a particular cultural world—that of Hindu subjects under colonial rule—is obvious. To counterbalance this, we should at least make an attempt to understand the practice as a ritual in its own right as well (Handelman 2004; Kapferer 2004). In addition to a representation of co-cremation as some trait essential to 'eternal' Hinduism (*sanātana dharma*), or as an arena in which colonial and anticolonial forces were played out along with the related conflicts of social, economic, and political rivalry, the ritual practice should be afforded its own integrity as well. Accordingly, we should allow the interior dynamics of this ritual to speak not only of the underlying sociocultural order, but also of its own autonomous position distinct from such an order; we should prevent such a presentation from slipping into an inherently and exclusively functionalist interpretation. At the end of this article we will have shown that, as rituals, both *satī* and accepting widowhood required rites of passage in which the ritual actions were more than representations: Hindu widows most literally had to cross a threshold in a matter of hours. Without that step, the widowed wife would remain in a liminal situation for the rest of her life.

Under various names, there may have been, in India, an ancient but never widely practiced ritual technically (and possibly euphemistically) related to as co-cremation,[1] but culture-specifically better known as *sahamaraṇa* (dying together), *sahagamaṇa* (going together), *anumaraṇa* (following in death),

[1] Or con-cremation, the term used by M. Monier-Williams, in *Indian Wisdom* (Williams 1875, p. 258, fn. 2).

anugamaṇa (going along with or after someone), *anumṛtyu* (the practice of following someone in death), and *anvārohana* (climbing the pyre after someone). It was only much later (in 1787) that the word *satī* (indicating both the practice and the woman who had performed it) came into vogue; the British typically made this into the infamous 'suttee'. A few other fringe names exist, such as *me-satya* in some Hindu milieus of colonial Bali (rumored to be the proud exclamation of the widow: 'mine is the truth'). The practice of co-cremation, as an anthropologically neutral and overarching term, may be compared to other related practices with similar technical terms, comprising various time-, space- and ethnically specific practices of co-death or co-disposal, such as co-interment (being buried together) and co-immersion (being immersed together in a body of (mostly flowing) water). Those generic technical terms do not necessarily indicate conjugality, like they do in the Hindu case, nor do they indicate the imbalance that one had died first and that the other person followed him alive, either willingly or unwillingly. War and epidemics all over the world may long have been occasions for any type of joint or even mass disposals, and romance anywhere may have induced an occasional self-chosen death after a partner's demise. In Hindu India,[2] there has indeed been a tendency that such practices gained a certain prestige in ruling families, in which both the code of honor and the code of property may have inspired the customary right (respectively duty) to accompany the deceased male to the beyond.

How this Hindu conjugal practice—a widow following her deceased husband to the funeral pyre and being cremated alive with him—came to have some acclaim is not supported by a singular unilinear story. Instead, we have a fragmented narrative through the ages, with an overrepresentation of 'foreign' reports: alleged eyewitness accounts, written by Greek historiographers, early European and Middle Eastern merchants, Mughal rulers (1526–1857), and imperial–colonial travelers. As a first introductory window into the practice, we draw attention to the widely spread (both in time and space) etymological connotation of the word 'widow'. The contemporary English word has an all-over Indo-European lineage, and goes back to a Proto-Indo-European verb (*uidh), meaning to (be) separate, to (be) empty, to (be) divide(d), as well as to be destitute, to lack.[3] Even now, the Sanskrit word for widow (*vidhavā*) signifies lonely, solitary, bereft, and more specifically: husbandless. Although the same is valid for the widower, it has long been customary law among Hindus that widowers could easily remarry, whereas widows at times and in certain milieus could not. This imbalance in perspectives may have some explanatory power from a socioeconomic point of view. The salience of widow-burning over time has indeed much depended on the conditions of whether widows in particular regions and under particular regimes had the right to inherit and/or remarry, or not.[4]

At the end of the first millennium CE, possibly as a response to a growing critique (both internally and externally), some defenders of the practice of self-immolation of widows, schooled in Vedic and Hindu scriptures, began to point at authoritative texts as well. In defense of co-cremation, a cryptic and highly ambiguous text from the *Atharvaveda* (AV 18.3.1)[5] was often referred to as the locus classicus:

> Choosing the husband's world, this woman lays herself down beside his lifeless body.
> Faithfully preserving the ancient custom, bestow upon her both wealth and offspring.

But if one continues reading (AV 18.3.2-8), one can't help but notice the dramatic performative reversal:

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[2] In Hindu philosophy, but also as a basis for Hindu common sense in general, there is the acknowledgement that every phenomenon should be understood in the light of *deśa-kāla-pātra*, meaning: in the light of place (country, habitat, ambiance, atmosphere, occasion), time (proper time, time period, age, phase, cosmic cycle), and the subject (person, performer, the individual in his/her circumstances). Applying this to the phenomenon of *satī* would result in a welcome de-essentializing of the practice, recognizing also that it has been performed relatively rarely and has always been contested. For the line of argumentation in this article, it is crucial to emphasize that the practice has been banned for almost 200 years. See also notes 7, 31, and 42.

[3] Compare Latin *vidua*, German *Witwe*, and French *veuve*.

[4] See note 18, below.

[5] With a parallel in *Ṛgveda* 10.18.7-8; see further below.

> Come, rise unto the world of the living, o woman, since the man by whose side you now lie, is lifeless. [. . .] Rise, abandon the dead, re-join the living.

Evidently, there is more to this than meets the eye: was it meant to be a merely symbolic gesture—a performance, a ritual re-enactment possibly based on a long extinct archaic practice—when she joined her deceased husband for a moment? Was she meant to return to the world of the living, the social world? If so, what is hinted at with the contradictory promise of wealth and offspring in the first stanza? How could the gods (and their spokespersons, the funeral priests) promise her wealth and offspring when she was to be cut off from life? Those and other textual enigmas will be explored in Section 3.[6]

In Section 2 we describe widows' co-cremation according to its ritual aspects. In this, we try to refrain from interpretation and contextualization in an attempt to present co-cremation in the bare ritual components traditionally known to us.

In Section 3 we contextualize the phenomenon: the ever-returning trope of sacrifice; as well as matters of widowhood, iconography, auspiciousness, and a woman's *dharma* as a wife and a widow.

In Section 4 we explore some textual passages covering more than two millennia.

In Section 5 we zoom in on British and independent India: *satī*/suttee as a political issue; the case of Roop Kanwar in 1987, and the now extremely rare ritual of *satī* as still constituting a contradictory highly ambiguous interpretive category.

In Sections 6–8, some tentative conclusions and critical considerations are given; also, we make a plea for a place- and time-sensitive type of ritual criticism.

This structure required a multimethodological approach. In order to let a ritual—and its ritual variations—speak for itself first, we composed a collage of ritual components, as they may have determined the procedure itself, with some of its variations through time and space. Apart from ritual studies and religious studies, we used insights from performance studies as well as from the study of material culture, such as relating to the shrines, votive objects, and goddess worship. For the phenomenon's contextualization we took recourse to the type of texts that are most often quoted as either inspiring the practice or contesting it. Apart from the religious 'validity' of the practice as allegedly found in ancient texts, and later commentaries or digests, we needed to look into the social and legal realities of women within those milieus in which the practice of a widow's self-immolation has had some sanction. In order to understand how the 'foreign male gaze', from Alexander the Great's 'historiographers' and 'ethnographers' to contemporary feminists, journalists, and comparative ethicists, has impacted the formulation of both its inspiring and its horrifying character, we needed insights from travel writing, orientalism, feminism, and subaltern studies.

Yet, it goes almost without saying that all such forays are subservient to the central question that we hoped to contribute to this Special Issue on contemporary ritual: was it justified, and cross-culturally fair, when Ronald Grimes, with his vast readership among scholars of rituals, discussed India's long extinct practice of widows' co-cremation as a topic of contemporary ritual criticism?

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6 Brick (2010, p. 205): 'Considering the complete absence of any mention of *sahagamana* in both Vedic literature and the earliest works of the *Dharmaśāstra* tradition, it seems reasonable to conclude that this practice first gained enough popularity within Brahmanical culture to warrant mention at approximately the time when [. . .] composed their works on *dharma*', broadly in the second half of the first millennium CE. For historical accuracy, it is crucial to note here that by far not all Sanskrit authors who mentioned the practice expressed their opinion, let alone endorsed it as a meritorious alternative to ascetic celibacy for at least some women. If a position was taken in these earlier commentaries and digests, the practice was often refuted. At some point much later, commentators in late Dharmashastric texts of the medieval period, who were obviously directly engaged with one another in a complex pan-Indian discourse, began to refer the practice to Vedic scriptures. Locus classicus was the cryptic and variously translated Ayurvedic passage quoted above and its Rigvedic parallel cq precursor in RV 10.18.7. Such reference to alleged Vedic sanction was often made only indirectly, via a problematic passage in the *Brahmapurāṇa*, probably in an attempt to find Vedic support for the practice. The name of the commentator most strongly linked to this 'Vedic argument' is Raghunandana (c. 1500 AD), who may have either misread the text or purposely falsified RV 10.18.7. See also Section 4.

Although the platform of ritual studies is known for its plurality of methods and its multidisciplinarity, every author has a pedigree and a distinctive mark of one's own. In this article we took the position of the in-between researcher, who had been thoroughly trained in South Asian languages and cultures, and gradually began to move over to disciplinary fields such as religious studies and ritual studies. To be honest, the initial trigger had been confusion, and then irritation: why 'freeze' and 'essentialize' a long-extinct distant practice, and propose it as a topic for ritual criticism on a par with current practices of clitoridectomy? For this research we used our South-Asian expertise to sketch the settings in which Hindu practices of female co-cremation historically occurred, and we use insights into ritual performances to zoom in on *satī* as one of three ways traditionally open to a Hindu widow. Due to the fact that we have to 'set something straight' at this cross-cultural frontier after three decades of ritual criticism, during which the topic of co-cremation rather lamely and lopsidedly hobbled along,[7] we end this article with a few suggestions for a more embodied and more embedded perspective.

2. Widows' Co-Cremation in Hindu India: Its Ritual Components

First of all, the term *satī* (colonial English: suttee) has three basic meanings.[8] Satī, as a proper name, is the name of a goddess (see Section 3); the term *satī* in general is a honorific term for a married woman, a term that gives her a saintly quality; and it is a colonial term for the practice of a widow's self-chosen death on her deceased husband's funeral pyre. Our main focus was on the third, although the first two may occasionally enter the stage.

In order to present the ritual procedure of widow-burning in its ritual components we must understand the centrality and drama of ritual sacrifice in Hindu traditions. In Hindu cosmogony, one of the most persisting images of creation is through sacrifice. Fire sacrifice is what set the cosmos going, and fire sacrifice, endlessly repeated, is what keeps it going right now. A Hindu's last rite of passage (comprising of dying, death, and disposal) is traditionally acted out as a sacrificial process, and its name indicates this: *antyeṣṭi*, one's final and ultimate sacrifice, a total gift, a sublime offering in which one's physical constituents break down through fire and return to the five basic elements. In a way, a widow who followed her husband onto the funeral pyre ritually re-enacted the same cosmogonic process and thereby more than doubled the efficacy of the act.

According to Hindu tradition, formally death is only real until the body is fully cremated, and *prāṇa* (the individual life force) has left through the top of the skull. The extremely brief period[9] between the husband's physical death and the beginning or end of the open-air cremation process may also have marked the moment when a wife chose to follow him in death. This may have been merely a performative act—a symbolic gesture, just as we saw above, in *Ṛgveda* 10.18.7-8 and *Atharvaveda* 18.3.2-8—or real self-immolation. How this may have actually looked varies from description to description. One of the first eyewitness accounts was from members of Alexander the Great's armed forces in India. The Greeks provided us with the following account, through Strabo.[10] In 316 or 317 BCE a Hindu general by the name of Keteus (originally Ketu, or even Khatri, i.e., a kṣatriya of the warrior class; see also Williams 1875, p. 258) had died in battle. One of his wives, eager to commit *satī*,

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7 There may have been a (hitherto unexposed) reason that the Hindu co-cremation case rather tracelessly disappeared from Grimes's later notes on ritual criticism. In the years right after Roop Kanwar's case, it had been a hot topic in wider western academic circles, but soon died down there. It might also be a matter of self-correction, of course. Compare Grimes (1988, 1990, 2002, 2013). See also our notes 2 and 31.

8 *Satī*, as a term indicating broadly a 'good woman, faithful wife', has a totally different origin than the term *sādhvī*, although they ultimately mean the same. The first is derived from √sat (to be, to exist; one of the other derivations is *satya*, truth), whereas the latter is the feminine form of *sādhu* (straight to the goal, right, successful, and indeed obedient). The crowd's expletive "sādhu, sādhu"—often accompanying the widow's procession to the pyre—means "well done, bravo!"

9 Ideally, the deceased should be cremated before the next dusk or dawn, whichever comes first.

10 The transmission is generally believed to have been made through two participants in Alexander of Macedonia's expedition (c. 327 BCE), namely Aristobulus of Cassandreia and Onesicritus; both are referred to by Diodorus (first century BCE). These now lost works may still have been available to historian-geographer Strabo (c. 63 BCE–c. 23 CE), or at least in fragments.

was decked out and decorated in auspicious red as if for a wedding. She was escorted to the cremation ground by a train of female relatives, who sang songs in praise of her virtue and good fortune. Near the pyre, she took off her jewelry and other ornaments, which she distributed among the women of her cortège. Her brother (or brother-in-law?) helped her onto the pyre. Before the wood pyre was kindled, the entire army marched around it three times. The widow lay beside her husband, and as the flames seized her no sound of weakness or pain came from her lips. The account further emphasizes that some of the foreign spectators were moved by admiration for her heroic action, others could not help but pity her and consider it a savage custom, and again others praised her and counted themselves fortunate to witness this auspicious occasion.

Whether voluntary widow-burning at that time was exceptional or indeed occasionally practiced among women of the higher warrior classes, we cannot tell. However, what we can tell from this account is that some ritual components related here have remained more or less essential through millennia: (1) the widow's festive bridal attire, (2) her auspiciousness, (3) the songs of praise, (4) the more intimate cortège as contrasted with the great spectacle at the cremation site, (5) the distribution of her jewelry, and (6) the heroic serenity with which the bride greeted the flames. A seventh aspect, the mixed reception, is another constant, but we will come back to that only later on.

As a ritual repertoire, it shares details with other Hindu rites of passage, particularly the wedding. Ritually speaking, the woman was not a lamenting and lamentable widow, she was a joyful bride, eager to be reunited with her husband in death. Accounts may differ in details. In this case, we read that it was the army that made the triple circumambulation around the pyre, whereas this rite was normally performed by the eldest son first, and later by close relatives. In the Greek record it sounded like a kind of military salute (or tribute) to the deceased general, and may be a mere footnote to the widow's side of the story. A third variation can be found in the distribution of jewelry. In later accounts, especially those with a decidedly anti-Brahmanic stance, it was often reported that the Brahman priests received (or forcefully took) the jewelry as payment for their funerary services. A fourth variation can be found in the way the widow 'climbs' the pyre, 'jumps' into the fire, 'lies down next to her deceased husband', or 'sits down and lovingly places his head on her lap'. The greatest variation, however, must have been whether the widow acted of her own volition or was in some way talked round, drugged, coerced, or even forcefully dragged towards the pyre. In some reports it has been hinted at that a widow could become so terrified by the leaping flames that she struggled to escape, to her own shame and that of her family. In some colonial reports a further variation may have occurred: British officers may have arrived in time to cancel the entire procedure, drove the crowd of spectators apart, and fined the culprit (mostly the widow's in-laws), or, in quite a different register, rescued the lady in distress, for whom, naturally, the heroic rescuer developed an instant romantic crush, particularly when she happened to be young and beautiful. Although in most reports the procedure was described as synchronous—i.e., ideally the wife joined her husband on the pyre before the fire was lit, resulting in a proper *sahagamana*, respectively *sahamaraṇa*—this obviously was not always the case.[11] Moreover, not every determined widow became a *satī* right away: there may have been practical reasons for a lapse of time intermittently, such as distance,[12] but it could also be that at the moment of hearing about her husband's death the newly widowed wife did not qualify, such as in case she was under age, pregnant, or had small children. In such a situation, she could solemnly declare that she would postpone *satī* until she would formally qualify. This formal declaration of ritual intent was a crucial part of any proper Hindu co-cremation. Any sacrificial ritual in Hinduism is only valid if it has been preceded by this formal declaration of intent: *saṃkalpa*. In a way this ritual requirement

[11] *Saha*- means along with, in the sense of together. Some contemporary authors imply that the proper term to be applied when there is no synchronicity (but instead an obvious time difference) would be *anu*-, meaning along with, but in the sense of after: *anugamana, anumaraṇa*.

[12] The Greek report makes the impression of synchronicity. This would imply that the Indian army had allowed spouses to accompany their highly placed husbands on military tours.

could make or break a co-cremation, as the widow needed to speak out the formula in person. Apart from its otherworldly consequences, this could imply two things: in case of its omission the entire procedure could later on be assessed as invalid, and therefore condemned as either suicide or homicide; and secondly, it could be assessed as invalid because of coercion, force, the use of opium to drug the widow's senses, or indecent haste.

3. Contextualizing Co-Cremation

In order to understand the societal system behind the co-cremation of widows, voluntary or forced, it is necessary to explore the cultural and ethical values around the married woman. The logic of *satī* emerges out of a matrix of marital formations as an alternative to widowhood. What then, was so special about a married woman, and why was widowhood considered to be so inauspicious that some newly widowed wives chose joining their deceased husbands in the flames over life as a widow?

First, there is a myth, the myth of the goddess Satī. To cut a long myth short, goddess Satī, who was married to the great but rather 'untamed' god Śiva, once found out that her husband had been dishonored by her father Dakṣa, who had failed to invite him to a great sacrificial offering. As the ultimate consequence of her husband's dishonor she entered the fire. The self-immolation of wives partly[13] rests on this myth of goddess Satī (Hawley 1994; Ramos 2017). Not only do they have the name in common, in the ancient story Satī had entered the sacrificial fire as the dramatic gesture of showing loyalty to her husband. The rationale behind the practice of *satī* is thus related to notions of how a woman should ideally behave towards her husband. The technical term for this behavioral code is *pativratādharma*, namely the *dharma* that is appropriate to a married woman. Central to her duties is care of her husband. A devoted wife ideally brings well-being to the husband, the family, and the overall community (Harlan 1994). Given this hierarchical relation, the husband ought to outlive his wife. If the husband dies first, this is considered a disruption in more ways than one. As the wife had generally left her own native family at the time of her wedding and became adopted into the community of her husband's lineage, the widow traditionally occupied an anomalous position. She herself often marked this transition by withdrawing to the margins of her family-in-law, renouncing participation in all auspicious family rituals. Breaking her bangles (which used to mark her auspicious married state), removing the red powder from the parting of her hair, and shedding all jewelry or bright colors, she was expected to live out her life as a carrier of inauspiciousness. Moreover, she might be treated badly or even banished from the house of her in-laws. Ritually, however, her function would be paramount: she was expected to scrupulously perform all the calendrical rituals required to guarantee her dead husband's well-being in the hereafter. Her anticipation of such a life of widowhood may well have brought her to the point that she favored *satī* as a more elevated alternative. Or, in some cases, she may have been forced by her in-laws, and possibly priests, to do so (Oldenburg 1994b).

In addition to the argument related to the inauspiciousness and material deprivation of a widow's state, there is another. The practice of *satī* may well have emerged among martial communities in frontier zones, as we saw above in the Greek report. In western and northern India, *kṣatriyas'* prime activity in the early days was the defense of land and cattle, and heroic sacrificial death-in-action became highly valued. It has been argued that this found a female parallel in shared death—the widow following her husband after he had died on the battlefield—for at least two reasons: first, that the male notion of honor and property extended to his wife (or wives), who should not fall into the hands of others; and second, that *kṣatriya* women had generally been reared in the spirit of heroism anyway.[14]

[13] It is important to note here that her husband Śiva had not died, but had merely been dishonored. Still, his wife literally died of shame.

[14] Especially among the Rājputs—living in the northwest regions where a succession of invaders had entered the continent—there was a special but extremely rare form of chivalric suicide by Hindu women: *jauhar* or *jauhar satī*. *Jauhar* was the act of collective self-immolation to avoid capture and abuse by foreign invaders. The term *jauhar* is commonly derived from Sanskrit *jatugṛha*, literally a house plastered with lac and other highly combustible materials. This house was intentionally and purposely set on fire while women and childeren were inside, in order to save their honor when husbands and

This special form of heroism (*vīrya*) became iconographically represented in many memorial stones of warriors (*vīra*; often *bir* in the vernacular) on horseback, depictions in which the warrior is always accompanied by his wife who stands next to him, with her hands in the gesture of paying homage to him (Courtright 1994). What is striking about such memorial stones is that the ladies make this respectful gesture with their bangles perfectly in place on their wrists, indicating that they were seen as married and not as widowed, even in death. The famous *satī* stones, found across the entire landscape of India, sometimes became, over time, more abstract in expression. For instance, when nothing but a raised right arm is depicted, or merely a lady's hand or a palmprint (supposedly the print of the palm of her hand on stone, still with traces of the auspicious red powder with which she had decorated herself; see Figure 2).[15] In many places this auspicious red color is maintained even now, as married women still visit such sites 'to derive strength' and 'to gain *śaktī*' by putting their own hand palms in the palmprints allegedly left there in the past by virtuous widows on their way to their husband's pyre (Courtright 2011).

Figure 2. Fort Palace in Jaisalmer, with *satī* palmprints (Albertina Nugteren).

Places where a widow had followed her husband in death have often become places of pilgrimage. The pilgrim's destination may be a single memorial stone, a wayside shrine, or a proper temple. The story of a singular historical *satī* may have been at the basis of such a site, but often the historical and the devotional get fused. The story of the goddess Satī likewise forms a network of local and regional shrines, especially in Rajasthan (Harlan 1994). The idea is that a human *satī*, first by her self-chosen death and then by her continued service to her deceased husband in the hereafter, partakes in a particular form of divine power, called *śakti* or *sat*. This power may be considered to be beneficial for devotees, but, as the other side of the coin, may easily be turned into a curse as well. Some historical

armies faced inescapable military defeat. This makes it, in the words of Wendy Doniger, 'a kind of prophylactic suttee' (Doniger 2010, p. 611). Although in collective memory, both in India and in Britain, *jauhar* is often connected with Muslim invasions—the most famous *jauhar* is that during the Mughal siege of Chittorgarh in 1568—the practice was at least a millenium older. Even Arrian, in Book VI of his *Anabasis* (second century CE), referred to a military clash between Macedonian and 'Agalossoi' armies, during which civilians, fearing defeat, set fire to their home town and cast themselves into the flames. See, for instance, Hawley (1994).

15 Although we call them handprints or palmprints, they are in most cases the exact opposites, and in that sense palindromic in form. The existence of daubed palmprints on walls must have originated in actual impressions (concave), which over time became reproduced in elevated form (convex). The same counterintuitive reversal is found in the cult of Buddha's footprints.

satīs have thus transcended the status of a simple lineage goddess and have grown into community goddesses, both loved and feared.

4. Textual Passages

There are two sources in the ancient scriptures that are regularly referred to in the debates on the practice of *satī* (Sharma et al. 1988; Datta 1990; Hawley 1994; Major 2007; Brick 2010). The one mentioned above (*Atharvaveda* 18.3.1-8), if partially read, can easily be considered as advocating 'this ancient custom' (*dharmam purāṇam*), whereas the larger part (2–8) gives the impression that 'lying with the deceased husband' is not at all 'dying with the deceased husband' but merely a symbolic gesture. In some commentaries, it is said that her brother should be the one to help her rise, in some other comments it is posed—more logically, in a patrilinear joint family system—that it was the brother-in-law who rightfully took her hand and accepted her as a co-wife. The reference to wealth and offspring may indeed make more sense this way. Even more cryptic is the parallel passage from *Ṛgveda* 10.18.7-8:

> Let these [accompanying] women, who are not widows, and who do have good husbands, sit down, [their eyes] shining with clarified butter used as collyrium;
>
> May the wives, whose eyes are tearless, who are free from disease, and who are well-decorated, occupy the front seat [respectively: step into the fire].[16]
>
> Oh, woman! Rise, up towards the world of the living; you lie down near this departed [husband]; Come, the state of being a wife to the husband who held your hand, and whose love for you has now been fulfilled, [is over].

Should we read this passage, being part of a Vedic funeral hymn, as advocating *satī* or not? The first part was to be repeated when the wife was made to sit near the corpse, as in any cremation ceremony, and the second half was employed when she was instructed to rise. While some have read this as the remnants of ancient customs (providing the dead man with weapons, ornaments, clothes, food and possibly his widows as accompanying him to the hereafter), others have pointed at the dynamics between the two half-passages: the widow should first sit or lie down, then rise and return to the world of the living, and possibly to a new married life with her brother-in-law. Over the course of time the middle passage has been understood in either of two ways, reading *agne* ([sit, or step] in(to) the fire) instead of *agre* ([sit] in front)!

It is often stated that such ambiguous Vedic verses had been incorporated into *satī* ritual around the sixteenth century to accord Vedic-Brahmanic legitimacy to the practice, such as by Raghunandana, a *paṇḍit* from Varanasi. This probability redirects us to text genres such as the *Dharmaśāstras*[17] and *Dharmanibandhas*[18] for providing a more reliable setting in which we may find a clue for the emergence of (or at least the ideology about) *satī* as an actual and lawful practice. The *Dharmaśāstras*, an extensive

16 As we will see below, any translation of this part is problematic. There have been variations such as "let them occupy the seat in front (first)", but also alternative renderings such as "let them first go up into the dwelling' or even 'let them first mount the womb", or, more dramatically and meaningfully: "let them step into the fire". The controversy centers around the meaning of the word *yoṇi* here (womb, or seat) as well as about reading either *agre* (first, or in front) or *agne* (in(to) the fire).

17 *Dharmaśāstras* (roughly the first millennium CE) are texts rooted in the *Dharmasūtras*, which are dated to the second half of the first millennium BCE. They are both law books on *Dharma*, containing guidelines for individual and social behavior, including ethics and personal, civil, and criminal law. The later *Dharmaśāstras* consititute commentaries on the earlier *sūtras*, as well as elaborate treatises on duties, and thus form an expansion to the *Dharmasūtras*.

18 *Dharmanibandhas* are one further step in the *Dharma* literature: digests and commentaries written from the early twelfth century onwards. For historical accuracy it is crucial to note that *Dharma* texts are prescriptive, not descriptive. Yet, as a genre that spans some 2.5 millennia, one can guess that they at least reflect something of the evolving regional, ethical, ideological, cultural, and legal practices (Olivelle 1999, pp. 175–8; 2006, pp. 184–5). The genre of *Dharma* texts gained an entirely new status, when in the early colonial period they were declared to be 'the law of the land in South Asia' by the British administrators.

compilation of sociomoral prescriptions produced by Brahmanic traditions, ranged from one or two centuries BCE to probably the end of the first millennium CE. In them, there was a widespread tendency to value the widow as a person who best honors her husband's memory not by self-immolation on his pyre, but by living a life of chastity, frugality, and commemorative rites in support of her husband, especially memorial rites to keep him fulfilled in the hereafter. It is only later that the topic of a wife's co-cremation began to enter Dharmashastric discourse, possibly under influence of royalty and certain martial classes. One explicit example from the *Viṣṇusmṛti-Dharmasūtra* (25: 14) still presents a middle position:

> When a woman's husband has died, she should either practice ascetic celibacy or ascend [the funeral pyre] after him.
>
> (quoted by Brick 2010, p. 204)

While this sounds fairly general there are other instances that indicate that at that time the position in the *satī*-debate tended to be class-specific:

> Due to Vedic injunctions a Brahmin woman should not follow her husband in death, but for the other social classes tradition holds this to be the supreme Law of Women. When a woman of Brahmin caste follows her husband in death, by killing herself she leads neither herself nor her husband to heaven.
>
> (commented by Brick 2010, p. 206)

Only in the *Dharmanibandha* texts—a genre of later commentaries and digests, stemming from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries—are there more extensive discussions on *satī*, both on its preconditions and on ritual instructions. As we saw above, the practice may have gained some ground between the ninth and eleventh centuries AD, among some locally confined martial classes. It may have gained a somewhat wider acclaim in the centuries leading up to the nineteenth century. To this we should add that gradually some Kashmiri and Bengali Brahmans appear to have adopted it in imitation of their rulers or for reasons of their own.

A tentative conclusion so far is that in pre-Vedic times there may or may not have been a custom of funerary gifts including the deceased's living wife or wives. In the Vedic passages referred to above, this may be hinted at as 'the ancient custom', although by then long extinct. But there may have been circles of ruling families, especially in situations of war, in which the custom of co-cremation was continued. Among aristocrats and in martial families there may have been individual cases, far and wide apart, of heroic self-sacrifice, such as by widowed queens whose honor, loyalty and courage at dramatic moments were admired but not generally emulated. The practice was never widespread, and never was it sanctioned unreservedly. At some point in time, probably towards the end of the first millennium CE, the topic began to enter debates about individual *dharma* (proper behavior for one's class, caste, and phase in life). In general, suicide was considered a grave sin, and so was homicide (forcing a woman to the pyre). At a relatively late stage there must have been a crucial turn among Brahmans, probably first in Kashmir and later in Bengal and Nepal. The reasons may have been varied: changes in property laws, changes in the minimum age of child brides, changes in the visions of the afterlife, possibly. Another factor may be that the position of high-class Hindu women had partially changed as a result of Islamic Mughal rule. In general, *sahagamana* as the noble example of a wife's loyalty began to be more favorably received, but as a practice it had never become rampant before European travelers began to report on it (Figueira 1994; Lewis 1994). Soon, it became expected from any foreign traveler to write an eyewitness account of such a case, but there is no clue to the exact number of cases before the beginning of the nineteenth century, when especially missionaries began to count the number of widow-burnings in their reports (Courtright 2011, pp. 170–71).

5. The Imperial–Colonial and Post-Independence Period

The oldest material evidence of *satī* as an actual practice are inscriptions: one in Nepal dated 464 CE[19] and one in India dated 510 CE. There are surviving *satī* commemorative stones from the eleventh century onwards (Michaels 2004, p. 149). European travelers to South Asia, as far back as Marco Polo (late thirteenth century), made mention of the practice of widow burning, and later it became an almost obligatory item in the evolving genre of travel writing, whether as an eyewitness account or from hearsay. Whether these accounts testified to an actual flourishing of the practice, or tell us more about the European frisson about a cruel exotic culture, is not for us to decide. Whereas *satī* has always been the exception rather than the rule in Hindu life, it is striking that in the orientalizing imagination, religiously motivated suicide became regarded as one of the ubiquitous excesses both of the religious sentiment and of its authorities, the Brahmans. At the same time, some visitors could not help but express admiration for the noble women who did so voluntarily, although priests were often blamed for advocating the practice as a honorable 'way out' of dishonor, especially in those regions where widows had limited or no inheritance rights.[20] In the Mughal period (1526–1857), the Muslim rulers had generally been averse to it: some (such as Akbar, in 1582) had merely prohibited the use of compulsion, others had actually banned the practice (see Figure 3).

In 1510, the famous Portuguese Alfonso Albequerque (governor of Portuguese India from 1509 to 1515) temporarily prohibited *satī* within the Portuguese territory of Goa, even though he had promised to respect local customs and to adopt a policy of noninterference in Hindu religious practices. This abolition was repealed in 1555 after Brahmanic intervention.[21] Whether the practice had become more widespread autonomously, or whether the European and Mughal condemnation began to act as an incentive for 'going underground' and flourishing out of reach of imperial–colonial power, there is some numerical evidence that there were considerable amounts of cases in some districts before *satī* was officially banned in the year 1829,[22] by Lord Bentinck, with support from Indian reform intellectuals such as Ram Mohan Roy. Preceding this, the colonial court in Calcutta had gradually built up a well-documented case against *satī*. From 1805, it had ordered *paṇḍits* to investigate those textual authorities that were most often referred to as prescribing *satī* as a religious obligation and an ancient custom. The advisory opinions that were produced by the court Brahmans were nuanced: *satī* could not be classified as an absolute religious obligation, but there existed certain authoritative statements, such as on which widows qualified and on the merits bestowed on the widow who accompanied her deceased husband in the hereafter. Parallel to the juridical inquiries and the compilation of statistical data, some well-established reform-minded Brahman intellectuals discussed, in various pamphlets, the lack of religious legitimacy of the practice from the perspective of the Dharmashastric tradition. Both Roy, as a public intellectual, and a group of evangelical missionaries such as William Carey and James Pegg, denounced the practice of *satī* and opened a reformist attack on the position of Hindu women. The discourse gradually shifted towards the greater civilizing mission of the British Empire as an agent of reform, and although there was some discussion on the position of Hindu wives and widows, women themselves were conspicuously absent from those debates and had no voice in the matter. Once the abolition of *satī* had been achieved, opposition to the policy prohibiting it

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19 See note 27. For a recent picture of a *satī* gate in Nepal, see Figure 4. For an older photograph of that same gate, see (Michaels 2008, p. 139).

20 This is not self-evident, however. It is correctly pointed out by some historians that the existence of inheritance rights for widows in some parts of India may have caused their in-laws to use more force on the widow to become a *satī*. This would ensure them that the family property would remain undivided. In this light, the suggestion inherent in the two Vedic texts quoted above achieves a new poignancy: if the widow was to remarry inside the family, preferably to her eldest brother-in-law, the family property would be likewise ensured. The custom of levirate may well have its basis in such material and/or legal conditions.

21 This was parallelled by similar measures by the Dutch and French in their respective colonies in India. The Danes permitted it until the nineteenth century.

22 Given the patchwork nature of British control over South Asian states, it was only in 1861 that a general ban was issued by Queen Victoria, whereas, for instance, it had been banned in the City of Calcutta already since 1803.

rather easily dissipated, but the entire process gave rise to a growing suspicion among the people that Hindu religious traditions were under attack. This state of mind fed into uneasiness about further 'Anglicization', such as the educational system, the missionaries, and the English language. It may be that in the independence movement, the nation had been imagined as a virtuous mother (Mother India) but it took solid postcolonial criticism as well as feminist and subaltern voices to more thoroughly deconstruct the '*satī* of the mind' (Spivak 1988). The same is valid for contemporary Hinduism in Nepal (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. 'A Hindu princess committing suttee against the wishes of the Emperor Akbar but with his reluctant consent' (gouache, painting 16/17th century, by Muhammad Rizā Nau'ī of Khasbushan (d. 1610). A public domain image, Wikimedia Commons/Wellcome Library London, image L0022809).

India gained independence and full political sovereignty in 1947. In its penal code, the ban on *satī* was maintained, but in India custom, usage, and statutory law are so inextricably mixed up in personal law that it was only in 1987 that there was a general reformulation in the form of the Sati Prevention Act, in which 'the supporting, encouraging, forcing, glorifying or attempting to commit sati' was explicitly declared illegal and punishable. This legal step was rather suddenly induced and actuated by a new case of *satī* that took India by storm and was widely picked up by national as well as international media. In general *satī* was not only seen as a crime but as a relic of a dark and primitive past. There was a widespread notion that it had become completely extinct. In a dramatic way, this was contradicted by the voluntary death of a young woman named Roop Kanwar (18 years old) in Deorala, a town about 70 km north of Rajasthan's capital Jaipur.[23] She had been married for less than a year when her husband (24 years old) had suddenly died in hospital. It was told that immediately when she had heard about her husband's death, she had dressed up as a bride and had announced that she would follow him as a *satī*.[24] On the 4th of September 1987 she joined him on the pyre merely six hours after the corpse had been brought home from the hospital.[25] It was only a matter of days before thousands of local people flocked to the place to receive a blessing. Naturally, all kinds of reporters, international journalists and researchers from women's organizations came flocking as well (Nandy 1994). There were massive counter-demonstrations for the right to widow-burning, mainly by women from the same state. The resulting court case languished for over twenty years: had her in-laws coerced her or adequately tried to dissuade her? Why had her own parents been absent? Had she been confused and overwhelmed? Had she made a mature decision all by herself? Was it her community, the Shekhawat Rājput caste in eastern Rajasthan, that had instilled such heroic romantic values in her? Was there an underground revival of the practice behind this?[26]

Figure 4. Paśupatināth cremation *ghāṭs*, Deopatan, Nepal, with 'Satīdvāra' (the historical *satīs'* gate) indicated in red (photograph courtesy of Purushotam Khatiwada, Kathmandu).

In several ways, women's organizations took the lead in interpreting this shocking recurrence of *satī*: the case was presented as shaming India's modernity and as an illustration of the tenacious hold that patriarchal institutions and caste values still had on young naïve minds—and, as was said explicitly, on female bodies (Oldenburg 1994b). Although some forms of Indian feminism were explicitly against

[23] Whereas there have been rumors about some other cases since independence, this is certainly the most high-profile *satī* incident.

[24] For some locally situated research, see (Van Den Bosch 1990, 1992, 1995). For focus on the widow, see (Buitelaar 1995).

[25] In this contemporary case it is fortunate that we have this detail. Without claiming that this time lapse of a mere six hours is representative for most cases, it illustrates the extremely short time the widow may have had for her deliberation, and for the parents or parents-in-law to support or dissuade her. Moreover, it remains completely invisible how despite political and judicial processes in the outside world, certain tendencies and contests might have formed within households and within individuals.

[26] Even as recently as the 5th of September, 2019, on the 32nd anniversary of the event, *The Times of India* reported on the 'court case' with the headline 'In Rajasthan Roop Kanwar still burns bright', and placed a photograph of her *samādhi sthal* (the monument marking the place where she was burnt).

modeling themselves after 'Western' feminism, not only the practice but also the very ontology behind *satī* were generally seen as blatantly harmful and opposed to women's well-being. As in the ages before, this singular case evoked contradictory trajectories of interpretation and evaluation: a horrid rite symbolizing abuse of women by relations, in-laws, priests, and caste communities, but just as well the romantic appeal of true love and conjugal loyalty. Others used the occasion to unfold critical theories about female agency. Particularly, Gayatri Spivak became a spokesperson of/for what she called 'sub-altern voices', asking herself and others: 'Can the subaltern speak?' (Spivak 1988). In this case, the subaltern is the disenfranchised woman whose subaltern voice had remained mostly unheard and whose arguments had remained marginal to the debate.[27] Closer historical investigation revealed, however, that women in the past, caught between bleak widowhood and the flames of the pyre, had had a voice, albeit a muted one, instrumentalized by evangelical missionaries for their own ends. It was found that amidst the multivocality of millennia of opiniated male players in the grim drama of burning widows, colonial records of the years between 1805 and 1830 testified that those women who had managed to escape coercion or had been rescued by British officers, respectively talked around by Indian reformists, gave as their prime motive for co-cremation: material suffering (Doniger 2010, p. 613). As subjective dignity of the women involved—and particularly those who had died in the flames—this may not amount to much, but it strengthened the urgency with which critical theories of the Frankfurter Schule were applied to both women's issues and postcolonial issues in the long shadows of 'inner colonization'.

6. Ritual Criticism

Why did Ronald Grimes (2002, pp. 299–302) choose *satī* as a topic of ritual criticism? Was it fair to put a more or less obsolete practice—that had been abolished and punishable by law for almost two centuries—up for ritual scrutiny and moral indignation?

It may be merely a detail, but Grimes did not present it as *satī*, *sahagamana*, *sahamaraṇa*, nor as the more scandalous *suttee*, but as co-cremation, a designation he apologized for: '[...] an act euphemistically called co-cremation.' (Grimes 2002, p. 299) Although scholarly sound, co-cremation is an ambiguous term, a container term. Co-cremation and co-burial, or even co-immersion, are terms with a claim to universal validity, whereas *satī* is stubbornly alien, strange, foreign, culture-specific. There seems to be a diachronic identity to the term co-cremation. It testifies to the human tendency to bring about a synthesis of time, place, and identity by grouping the particular, even the 'horrid', under a universal umbrella term that, at face value, looks innocent enough. The specifics are worked into the fabric of intellectual identification and acknowledgement of an overarching anthropological category (Kapferer 2004). Specific time thus begins to be represented as both global and universal, and so does location. Time specificity and space specificity become diffused, flatlined as it were, as on a hospital monitoring screen. Yet terms like co-cremation do help us forward in our conceptualizing of funerary practices. Just as there is a chronosynthesis, there is a semblance of spatiosynthesis when the neutral term co-cremation is applied, even to what the British had deemed pan-Indian 'horrid Hindu practices'. By using the term co-cremation for widow-burning, we seem to have safely distanced ourselves from it in both time and space.[28] By making it part of a universal, the sting is taken out of it. Grimes seems to have been right when he labeled the term a euphemism.

[27] Although our focus in this article has been on India, we could have mentioned neighboring country Nepal as a place where *satī* was banished as late as 1920. Nepal's Legal Code of 1854, the *Mulukī Ain*, moreover, contains a detailed prescription-description of the procedure. In the previously mentioned first inscription (Nepal, 464 CE), we found an interesting conversation between a would-be *satī* and her son, who tried to dissuade her from entering the pyre by arguing that he as her son has equal or even more right to her presence. In a way, these are rare 'subaltern' voices. See (Michaels 1994).

[28] Exactly this is what happened when both Hindu priests and Hindu blood-and-soil nativists began to feel defensive in the years right before abolition. They countered the British civilizational zeal by pointing out parallels on the level of co-cremation, co-burial, and co-immersion in other cultures, including Europe. Even more poignantly (though less to the point topically) they indicated the evil of slavery, in which most of the so-called civilized nations were still deeply involved.

With the term ritual criticism, we indicate the current position of critical reflection on ritual within the academic framework of ritual studies. Roughly, three modes can be distinguished: (1) the predominantly internal perspective of criticizing a particular ritual performance or the ritual act in itself; (2) the predominantly external perspective with which a particular ritual performance or a ritual tradition is evaluated and assessed; and (3) ritual criticism as a step towards theorizing about 'doing ritual' or 'doing ritual studies'. Although this distinction (Post 2013, pp. 173–4; 2015, p. 8) can be helpful, in a case study such as this, types one and two are intertwined, since the criticism is presented both from within (inside Hindu culture itself) and from without (colonial British, as well as the open platform of ritual studies today).[29] The way Grimes presented the two examples of clitoridectomy and widow-burning was mainly within a normative framework mode (type two). It is not clear, however, whose normative framework. Presenting widow-burning as a topic for ritual criticism makes this a normative framework about a normative past and a normative 'elsewhere'. Under these conditions—the past and the distant—there is always the risk of an 'inversion of reality': othering. The British had presented India as a country where horrid rites like *satī* prevailed, whereas indigenous nineteenth-century public intellectuals had even condemned both present and past versions. They thus admitted to their own culture's horrid rites, both in their nineteenth-century form and in the form of a vaguely referred, possibly even more horrid rite of the pre-Vedic past: the 'ancient custom' (AV 18.3.1) of living wives accompanying dead husbands as funerary gifts[30] into graves and onto pyres.

Grimes defined ritual criticism as 'the act of interpreting a ritual with a view to implicating its practice. [...] Tendering interpretations is not only about finding or formulating meanings; it is also about identifying or taking positions regarding practices.' (Grimes 2013, p. 72). In an earlier work, *Deeply into the Bone*, Grimes had introduced the case of Hindu co-cremation in a chapter called Passages (ch. 5): 'A telling example in which a rite of passage comes under critical scrutiny from both inside and outside a tradition is sati. It is not widely practiced now, **so I will speak of it in the past tense**.' (Grimes 2002, p. 299; emphasis ours.)[31] In a way, the case of co-cremation in India could be introduced by the same words he used on the case of female circumcision: '[...] occurs at an intercultural frontier where indigenous practitioners and outside observers engage in considerable debate.' (Grimes 2002, p. 295). Likewise, we could pose the same questions to our case: 'Do observers have the right to criticize indigenous ritual practices? Do they have a right **not** to criticize them?' (Grimes 2002, p. 298). Indeed, the *satī* practice has been contested both by many Hindus themselves and by outsiders, even those back in Europe who had heard the most hair-raising missionary accounts of it. The practice, however, had never been widespread, and never had it been sanctioned unreservedly. In a way, there has always been indigenous Hindu criticism on the practice, not so much about one ritual component or another, or about its evaluation or interpretation. Rather, the moral and soteriological grounds have always been a matter of contention, for everyone involved, both proponents and opponents.[32] Yet among the opinions and even outrage, one voice is sadly missing, that of the widow herself. Her perspective—becoming a *satī* or not, with which reasons, which emotions, and which expectations—is absent, as is often the case in the clitoridectomy debate—which Grimes explored as another case for ritual criticism—as well. In the real-life societal setting, the Hindu widow was often dramatically younger than her husband, and child widowhood had brought another

[29] The term 'ritual studies' emerged in the habitat of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in 1977. This does not, however, limit the phenomenon of systematic ritual criticism to this platform, nor to this timeframe. Examples can be found in various ancient cultures. For instance, scholars such as Catherine Bell (on ancient China) and Kathryn McClymond (on ancient India) are known to interweave classic culture-specific 'ritologies' with critical debates on the contemporary ritual studies platform.

[30] Although superficially the phenomenon may look the same, there is a crucial difference between wives as funerary gifts and wives as mediators of salvation.

[31] This crucial line tends to be overlooked. See for instance (Post 2013, p. 178), on 'co-cremation in Asia': '[...] **is** the ritual tradition [...]' instead of '**was**'.

[32] In an earlier article (Grimes 1988, p. 221) Grimes had distinguished emic (intrareligious), cross-cultural (inter-religious), and etic (mainly between scholarly and indigenous) contexts of ritual criticism. For seven principles of ritual criticism, see his pages 231–237.

sharp edge to the practice. It is telling that the Sati Regulation Act of 1829 has been followed closely by interrelated issues, such as the Widows' Remarriage Act (1856), the Female Infanticide Prevention Act (1870), and the Age of Consent Act (1891).

Many indigenous historical arguments for and against the practice, formulated by those privileged enough that their authoritative opinions had been transmitted in written form, are thus mainly circumstantial and contextual. As a result, the painful question remains whether a simple misreading in a Vedic text (*agne* (in the fire) for *agre* (at the front) had actually misguided countless generations of men and women about the scriptural authority of widow-burning. The same is valid for the failure to literally contextualize the Vedic statements. Had people—and especially women[33]—been able to read, would they have stopped reading after the first injunction about the widow lying down next to her deceased husband on the wood pyre? Or would they have continued reading and would they then have reasoned that the first injunction was merely a symbolical gesture, a ritual re-enactment of what might have been an actual practice in the hoary past? Would they have understood its 'purely performative' character[34] and have played their part willingly, luckily escaping to a renewed chance at life? How could it happen that the invitation issued to the widow to join her husband in the fire had become completely disconnected from the following stanzas, in which she was invited back to the world of the living, and possibly even to remarriage, wealth, and offspring? If she had known, would she then have taken the proffered hand of her brother-in-law? Or do such things like philological and theological hairsplitting have relevance for only a few, and are the actual lifeworlds in which centuries of Hindu men and women used to live by far more crucial than a few dubious text passages?

Still, these textual details and their implications are serious grounds for ritual criticism, and have been so in the academic study of Hinduism (Oldenburg 1994a; 1994b, p. 159). They show the Janus face of lived religion: popular emotion-charged religious practices can arise and continue more or less independently of scriptural injunctions that might have been interjected into the discussion at a much later stage by commentators who advocated the practice. Were they indeed late justifications, introduced when literate Brahman priests began to advocate and glorify the practice in a certain way? They may have incorporated the Vedic verses into the commentarial tradition as late as the sixteenth century, with a view to lend Brahmanic legitimacy to a practice that to all probabilities had been limited to communities that had long followed their own logic and argumentation.

But what really remains unanswered so far are other grounds for framing *satī* as a topic for ritual criticism, especially the cross-cultural framework: do outside observers have a right to criticize indigenous ritual practices, and even more pointedly: do they have a right not to criticize them? To these poignant moral questions we need to add: do outside observers have a right to criticize indigenous ritual practices of the **past**? Do they have a right/duty not to?

Sidestepping the moral and intercultural issues mentioned above, we can merely remark that what is presented as type-2 ritual criticism tends to be not about ritual itself, but rather about its moral environment. Moreover, the moral indignation we are expected to express in this case is misplaced and lagging behind the facts: it is predominantly a thing of the past, and others have already done all the arguing, documentation, and legislation of abolishing it. In the last fifty years, a considerable number of scholars have written detailed analyses (Sharma et al. 1988; Datta 1990; Hawley 1994; Mani 1998; Weinberger-Thomas 1999). In another tone of voice and with other tools, novelists and filmmakers have brought the practice to life in all its heart-wrenching drama (such as the Bengali film Sati by Sen 1989). But what is still lacking is its (critical) evaluation as a rite. I therefore present, in retrospect, merely a few remarks of a more ritual nature than is usual in discussions of *satī*.

(1) It is crucial to point out that in a patrilinear society, man and woman, through the wedding ritual, had become a ritual unit. This implies that a wife lost her own lineage (*gotra*) and started to live with

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33 Even leaving general analphabetism and illiteracy aside, it had long been strictly prohibited for women to read the *Vedas*.

34 See Richard Schechner on performance theories as related to ritual (chapter 3) and play-acting (chapter 4) in his *Performance Studies* (Schechner 2006).

her agnatic family, whose ritual structures she had to follow from that moment onwards.[35] As a result, when her husband died before her, a widow was doubly destitute, not only socioeconomically but also ritually. Ritually, a widow was an anomaly. A new widow stood at a dead end, in the most literal and ritual sense of the word. Her own identity had died when she married. As a consequence, a newly widowed woman was bereft in all dramatic senses of the ancient term. Being in this void, this limbo, she was forced to take a ritual step and cross a threshold, in whichever direction. This transition was to be marked either way: by becoming a *satī* or by accepting her inauspicious state as a widow and act accordingly. If she did not choose *satī*, all she could do was invest as much energy and dignity as was left in her into the numerous commemorative rituals that filled the ritual calendar from that moment onwards. Her only raison d'être was to become totally dedicated to her deceased husband's own well-being, and that of his ancestors, by scrupulously and meticulously performing ancestor rituals, including fasts, wakes, and pilgrimages. Both options—whichever of the two new life stages she would choose—had to be preceded by a solemn declaration of intent (*saṃkalpa*). If she declared to become a *satī*, she was dressed and decorated as a bride and led triumphantly to the pyre; whereas if she declared to accept her state as a widow she had to relinquish her marital paraphernalia, such as jewelry and the auspicious red powder in the parting of her hair. Her hair was shaven off, her bangles were broken, and from now on she would wear only coarse white cotton. She would live celibately and frugally at the family's periphery, despised or at best ignored, and would take no part at all in whatever auspicious occasion (including life rites) of this household. It would require research of its own to come to a proper evaluation of the previously mentioned subalternative for widowhood: marrying her eldest brother-in-law. Somehow, this option of remarriage seems to have petered out in recent centuries, or at least it failed to draw much attention in studies on *satī*. It may also indicate a gap between cultural ideals—the customary Hindu law to provide the widow a safe and secure place within the joint family—and actual social realities. We know from other sources that remarriage was widely practiced, except among those who aspired upper-class status. It must have been after 1000 CE that remarriage gradually began to give way to the two other options, at least among some communities. Taking ritual criticism seriously[36] in a specifically and exclusively ritual sense might thus produce a slightly changed perspective on *satī* as one of those 'horrid Hindu rites'. Weighing both starkly contrasted widow rituals against one another would at least create some idea of what went on in such a widow's mind when she was forced to make her choice in a matter of just a few hours.

(2) A second aspect of ritual criticism, again in a purely ritual sense, is her ritual reward, the soteriological merit to be gained from either of these options. Cynically, one could say that *satī* would merely bring a short moment of glory—the festive procession, in bridal attire, to the pyre—followed by the unimaginable fear of the flames and the excruciating torture of being burned alive. But traditions were generous and quite explicit in promising what came later: endless marital bliss in the beyond and either an auspicious rebirth or the attainment of heaven for the couple. If we would be equally cynical about a widow's inauspicious existence at the periphery of her family-in-law, reconciliatory tradition would counter this picture of dreary survival as only of short duration, provided the widow was determined in her ritual service to her deceased husband and his ancestors (cf. Embree 1994). This came with equally promising compensations in the beyond: a prosperous and safe path to the gods for both, gratefulness and honor accorded by the ancestors, and finally an auspicious rebirth or the attainment of heaven for both of them. In the end, if women would make a well-informed calculation, the ritual reward of devoted ascetic widowhood would amount to more or

[35] This is why it is often said that wedding rites for Hindu women double as initiation rites: whereas boys undergo *upanayana* rites around puberty, girls are initiated into a proper ritual identity only by marriage, namely into the ritual identity of her husband and in-laws.

[36] It is striking that Grimes, who made a career of writing about rituals, ignored (2002, p. 301) this aspect of a traditional Hindu widow's existence: she may be deprived in various material and social ways, but her ritual value is unique and priceless, as she is the only one to safeguard her husband in the afterlife through constant ritual action.

less the same as *satī* would. In other words, when weighing the ritual rewards of one option against the ritual rewards of the other option, it would seem that overall there was not much difference.[37]

Undoubtedly, a much more exhaustive ritual criticism could be given, even if we would indeed focus on the ritual alone. It must suffice in this article that we have tried not to sensationalize the ritual practice and instead consider it a ritual in its own right, deserving well-balanced description and analysis. But there is another pitfall: the scholarly language of understanding could easily take the edge off it, reducing the 'horrid rite' to a mere custom, thus trivializing it. By ascribing mature deliberation to the woman finding herself at such crossroads we may forget about the terrific power a ritual may hold for those who have internalized a certain ideology, especially the oppressive ideologies about women, wives, and widows. For the larger part of *satī*'s history, the woman had to choose between becoming a widow or a *satī*. It was not the death of her husband that had made her a widow, but her choice between two rituals would make her either a widow (containing everything the life and status of a widow implied) or a *satī*. For her, this was not simply a choice between life and death, but a choice between two religious paths, either of which would define her as a good woman, and would define both rituals as demonstrating her womanly power for the salvation of her husband. Whatever choice she would make, this soteriological power changed her, momentarily, from a victim to a victor.[38] By demonstrating this as a crucial ritual choice, we might again contribute something to type-1 ritual criticism, but not without admitting that in many cases this would overrate the choice women actually had in such moments. For most Hindu women, choice itself must have been a fiction.

7. Some Tentative Conclusions

One of the slogans of post-independence feminism in India was: 'Widows[39] are not for burning.'[40] Long after *satī* had been abolished, it remained a 'burning' issue, although the focus had gradually shifted to the position of Indian women in general, and more particularly the perception of widowhood in society (Chen 1998, 2011).

Type-1 and type-2 ritual criticism have quite a history here. Whereas the British had tended to sensationalize the practice of widow-burning, the Indian response may have been to trivialize the institution (Sharma et al. 1988, p. 10). In a parallel opposition and rivalry, British historians still tend to monopolize the credit for having abolished it, whereas contemporary Indian historians mainly point at their own nineteenth-century Bengali intellectuals, thus appropriating and nationalizing the abolishment. Moreover, Indian post-independence feminism took up the challenge to psychologize the issue: now that *satī* is abolished and widows can no longer burn themselves, they still suffer 'cold' *satī*, therefore their minds need to be decolonized as well as dewidowed. Such processes show us the variety of perspectives. It has never been a general practice and there is a long indigenous tradition of internal dissent and debate.

One of the forms of criticism that have been expressed in legal texts had to do with the overall prohibition of ritual suicide[41] and ritual homicide. More elaborate commentarial traditions merely mentioned it as an alternative to widowhood, but gradually commentators began to take positions.

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37 Various commentators have put more weight on the unimaginable merit of her choice for *satī*, and others more weight on her slow, difficult, but indispensable path of ritual dedication to her husband's salvation, as a widow. At some point, the curious argument was made that, considering a woman's fickle and sensuous disposition, the path of celibate ascetic widowhood would be more difficult, and thus unreliable, than the 'more easy, safe and secure path' of *satī*. This, again, requires quite a stretching of monocultural minds. See also Leslie (1989, p. 189).

38 This double attribute was elaborated by Leslie (1992).

39 In fact, ritually speaking, a wife only became a widow once she had fully undergone the ritual transition from the state of a married woman to being a widow. Should she choose *satī*, she would enter the fire auspiciously and victoriously as a wife, not a widow. This also explains why in most *satī* memorials the woman still wears her bangles.

40 The issue of burning, in those years, was not only inflamed by a renewed case of *satī* (see Roop Kanwar, in Section 5), but also by dowry burnings, mostly known as dowry murders: various tragic cases when young women were intentionally set afire in the kitchen in order to settle dowry issues, although such acts were made to look like cooking accidents.

41 There are nuances regarding religious forms of suicide. See, for instance, (Michaels 2004), Chapter 4.

In legal texts from the fifteenth centuries onwards, we found both supporters and opponents. An intricate debate about the limiting conditions under which *satī* would be permissible ensued. So did a theological–soteriological discourse: on the one hand about the ritual merit ascribed to ascetic widowhood and on the other hand, the ritual merit ascribed to *satī*. While such soteriological merits hung in an uneasy balance, the everyday realities of rights to inherit (or not), the age of brides, and the level of socioeconomic constraints for women often determined conjugal life, including the prevalence of remarriage, widowhood, or *satī*-hood.

Whereas the topic has long elicited internal as well as external moral judgements and even outrage, explicit ritual criticism, in the sense of evaluating *satī* as a ritual, on its own terms, and in its own right, is rare. In that setting, four further critical ritual considerations need to be made:

First, imagine a wife's choice for one of the two rituals as not merely determined by the pressures and limitations of patrilinear family life, but as one determining her husband's salvation, and indirectly her own. Second, imagine the newly widowed woman at a dead end, in the most literal and ritual sense of the word. Understanding the ritual void she was in—a dramatic form of in-betweenness—the newly widowed woman had to solemnly declare her decision. In Hinduism, a ritual decision reinforced by fire and water is irreversible. This illustrates once more the literal hold ritual can have on people. Third, whereas one of the key messages of the *Bhagavadgītā* might be that one should act without attachment to the results of one's actions, Hindu ritualism requires an elaborate and intricate bookkeeping of ritual merits. How can a newly widowed woman make a well-balanced computation on which she bases her choice? Both her life and her death are in service of her husband's eternal well-being anyway. Fourth, considering the brief time span allowed between death and cremation, often no more than a mere few hours, who could expect the newly widowed woman to be led by mature deliberation? Crucial ritual choices were to be made within a matter of hours, how could she be expected to make the required well-informed choice? From the perspective of the woman[42], the terms indecent haste and socioeconomic pressure do seem to fit here, even if we take into account the 'normality' of the extremely short time generally allowed between the moment of death and the lighting of the pyre.[43]

8. Discussion: Rethinking Chronotopicities

In the light of the historical colonial intercultural frontier, Grimes' phrasing of the predicament was spot on: 'to criticize or not to criticize?', indicating, in this case, the predicament between siding with the British chauvinist horror and the relativist reaction of not wanting to mess with someone else's religious practices. Yet, at present, both approaches (criticize or refrain from criticizing) are driven by a need to come to a modicum of understanding of *satī*''s dramatically different 'otherness'.

Articulating proper ritual criticism would be dependent on a well-stocked interculturally and cross-culturally variegated toolbox; ritual studies so far haven't provided us with one. Rethinking the critical discourse of the long extinct practice of *satī* led us to admit defeat. To a certain degree we have summarized its history, its places, and its arguments. In oversized boots we made a tour around the practice in times and locations. But our imagination fails when it comes to the voices and attitudes and physical experiences of burning widows themselves. In the absence of their own testimonies—embodied and embedded in their dramatically different lifeworlds—we hand back the challenge to the person who brought this topic up for ritual criticism: Ronald Grimes.

Yet, our exercise has not been altogether fruitless. In a modest way we have contributed to type-3 ritual criticism. By pointing out the pitfalls of an a-historical presentation (as if the practice hadn't

42 We refer back to note 2 here. Although most of our argument is about a certain lack of time–space sensitivity in both Grimes's and Post's presentation, Indian philosophy prescribes a third factor that should always be taken into consideration as well: the subjective person in her/his situation. We have made clear throughout this article that women's voices are conspicuously missing. In an Indian philosophical and moral perspective, this would imply that any representation of the *satī* practice would be incomplete, even if factors of time and place would have been given due attention.

43 See also note 9.

been banned since some 200 years), we may have made readers more sensitively aware of its time limits, and by marginalizing the practice to particular situations at the fringes of the realm (far and wide apart both in time and space), we have set straight some of the practice's spatial limits. In terms of theorizing both ritual studies and ritual criticism, this article is a plea for chronotopicity.

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Article

Liturgy and Landscape—Re-Activating Christian Funeral Rites through Adaptive Reuse of a Rural Church and Its Surroundings as a Columbarium and Urn Cemetery

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Abstract: We present the design research for the adaptive reuse of the St. Odulphus church as a columbarium in the village of Booienhoven (BE). Surrounded by agriculture, the site is listed as a historic rural landscape. The small neoclassical church is no longer in use for traditional Catholic services and is abandoned. Positioned on an isolated "island", it has the appropriate setting to become a place to remember and part from the dead. Instigated by the municipality, and taking into account the growing demand for cremation, we present topological research on three different liturgical and spatial levels: 1/the use of the church interior as a columbarium and for (funeral) celebration, 2/the transformation of the "island", stressing the idea of "passage" and 3/the layering of the open landscape reactivating the well-spring and its spiritual origins. Based on the reform of the funeral rite after Vatican II, we propose a layered liturgy that can better suit the wide variety of funeral services in Flanders today, while at the same time respecting its Catholic roots. Rather than considering the reuse of the church a spiritual loss, we believe that it can offer the opportunity to reinforce and open up the traditional, symbolic and ritual meaning of the Christian liturgy to the larger community. As such, this case is an excellent example of how, in exploring new architectural and liturgical questions, religious sites can be transformed into contemporary places for spirituality.

Keywords: adaptive reuse; church architecture; ritual; liturgy; funeral

1. Rituals and Spaces—Introduction

In this article, we will describe the recent changes of funeral rites in relation to the adaptive reuse project of the St. Odulphus church in Booienhoven (Zoutleeuw), Flanders (see Figures 1 and 2). We will explore the potential relationship between the spatial properties of the design and the funeral rites that are to be (re-)introduced in the context of the adaptive reuse of the site. Nowadays, the burial of the deceased is taking on new and almost experimental forms, with the increase of cremation as a subtle sign of secularization. As a recently accepted practice (1963) in the Roman Catholic Church, it also raises questions on the spiritual function and meaning of a Christian funeral service in contemporary Western society. This is perhaps even more relevant in Flanders, since its secularization process has an ambiguous nature. The traditionally very Roman Catholic area is characterized by a strong adherence to "cultural Christianity"—people attaching value to certain elements of the Christian tradition, without identifying themselves as belonging to the institute of the Catholic Church (Billiet 2017).

In the light of the need for new rituals concerning death and mourning, we take the opportunity to rethink and expand the Christian liturgy of burial to include a wide variety of funeral services. Using the exercise to design a central urn cemetery in Zoutleeuw as an example, we consider the creation of new sacred spaces and rituals that still connect to Christian tradition. We ask ourselves: *what form can the new rituals receive and how do they relate to the existing ones? How can the renewed funeral celebration be (re-)integrated in the adaptive reuse of the church and site and vice versa? In what way are ritual and space connected and mutually inspiring in this particular case?*

Inspired by the liturgical reform before and after Vatican II, we propose a "layered liturgy", reflecting a wider and contemporary spiritual experience of burial rituals while at the same time respecting its Catholic roots. The approach developed here can be described as a "topological" reflection on the intimate and recurring relationship between rituals and spaces.

Figure 1. View of the St. Odulphus site with the ensemble of the church, the former rectory and the guild hall in the rural environment of Hageland Belgium.

Figure 2. Left: view of the current interior of the St. Odulphus church; right: a sketched impression of the transformation into a columbarium church (hand drawing by Saidja Heynickx).

2. Changing Funeral Rites

2.1. The Christian Funeral after Vatican II

After Vatican II (Second Vatican Council 1962–1965), the entire ritual repertoire of the Roman Catholic Church has been profoundly revised, in an attempt to close the gap between Church and society and to restore the liturgical life of the Church. In the aftermath of the Council, also the funeral rite (*ordo exsequiarum*, 1969, see (Johnson 1993)) underwent some drastic revisions in comparison to the former, Tridentine rite, which was more or less unchanged since 1614. The character of the rite changed profoundly, taking much more the perspective of death as an Easter-event, whereas in the Tridentine rite the funeral liturgy was more focused on the fear of judgment and subsequent punishment for ones sins (Rutherford 1990; Quartier 2007). On the level of specific rituals, this transformation lead for example to the abolishment of traditional songs like the *Dies irae* and the *Libera me*. In accordance with already existing local practices, the "new" funeral rite of 1969 prescribes three different models (Johnson 1993, pp. 34–51). The first model has three ritual stages or "stations": the house of the deceased for a short prayer, a first farewell and condolences, the church building for the funeral liturgy in combination with the funeral mass, and the graveyard for some last rituals and the final farewell. The second model has two ritual places: the chapel on the graveyards grounds, where the basics of the funeral liturgy are executed, but without funeral mass, and the grave itself. The third model is a short model for a domestic rite, often used in countries and regions with tropical climates. These models—and their differences—illustrate well how Christian ritual is very much bound to specific places. From its origins, Christian liturgy has been, and still is "station liturgy", as it is mentioned in every manual on the history of Christian ritual.

In Flanders, the first model was more or less the standard during the last few centuries (Lamberts 2007). However, with the growing role of the undertaker in the funeral service and rituals, the first "station"—the home of the deceased—slowly disappeared from the ritual sequence or was moved to the mortuary. With the increasing de-Christianization, the second model became more and more popular in Flanders: a funeral liturgy without Eucharistic celebration in the church building or graveyard chapel and last rituals at the grave, often not even presided by a priest. This evolution goes hand in hand with the growing practice of cremation.

2.2. The Practice of Cremation

Contrary to various religious traditions that attach a spiritual value to the practice, the Roman Catholic Church considers cremation as a complex subject. One of the core texts of Christian faith, the Apostles Creed, holds as its eleventh of twelve articles that Christians believe in "the resurrection of the body". Thus, for many centuries burning the body was considered sacrilegious. Burying the dead was very important for the biblical Jewish religion and became one of the twelve traditional works of mercy for pious Christians. In later ages and with the development of Christian anthropology, personhood became very much connected to the body. In its core, Roman Catholic faith attaches an intrinsic and even divine value to the body, declaring the human being as one, made of both body and soul.[1] In 1963, the first official opening to the practice of cremation was made by church authorities. In the instruction entitled "*Piam et Constantem*" it was declared that cremation was not against the Christian religion and thus was allowed for Christians, although burying the body remained the preferable option. This declaration still reflects the official position of the Roman Catholic Church in view of cremation today. In 1997, it was granted for the regional conferences of bishops to make provisions, meaning to develop a liturgy, to permit the presence of the cremated body at the funeral liturgy.[2] Before, the preferred and most common practice was to have the funeral liturgy first and the cremation afterwards, in most cases without a ritual at the grave, leaving out the last station of the funeral rite. In 2016, the Vatican again issued an instruction on the topic of cremation, *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* (CDF 2016). This document repeats the recommendation of burying the body "following the most ancient Christian tradition" (nr. 3) and at the same time allowing cremation, preferably after the funeral liturgy: "the Church, after the celebration of the funeral rite, accompanies

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1 Compare for example the Vatican II document Gaudium et Spes nr. 14, the official edition can be found on http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

2 See this statement of the American Bishops' Conference: http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/bereavement-and-funerals/cremation-and-funerals.cfm.

the choice of cremation, providing the relevant liturgical and pastoral directives" (nr. 4). The document mainly stresses the importance of the correct conservation of the ashes. The instruction expresses the importance of resting in "a sacred place", both in view of tradition and in view of remembrance and community (nr. 5). Apart from exceptional cases dependent on cultural conditions, it forbids the conservation of ashes in a domestic residence (nr. 6) and the scattering of the ashes "in the air, on land, at sea or in some other way, nor may they be preserved in mementos, pieces of jewelry or other objects" (nr. 7).

In regard of the Flemish (Belgian) situation, figures show how the total number of cremations rises every year.[3] In 2006, less than 50% of the Belgian deceased were cremated. In 2019, the number has risen to 62%.[4] Almost 45% of the Belgians who die, still opt for a Roman Catholic Funeral.[5] Although no figures are available on the percentage of cremations among these cases, it is safe to say that a substantial part of them have chosen the practice of cremation. In view of this, the Belgian bishops issued directions and guidelines for a funeral rite in the case of cremation. The most recent statements on this topic were made in 2008 and 2012, explaining the current policy and giving directions (ICLZ 2008), and a complete ritual ordo (ICLZ 2012). Two practices are tackled in these documents: funeral liturgy without the celebration of the Eucharist (Goyvaerts 2020) and funeral liturgy in case of cremation before the funeral ritual. In 2013, the Belgian bishops added a statement in which they ended the practices of church ministers being mandated to preside the funeral rite in the crematoria, distancing themselves as such from an eclectic character of many funeral rituals, and refocusing on the church building as the sacred space for liturgy.[6] The underlying reasons are the recent commercial evolutions in the funeral business and the increasing lack of ties with Christian traditional liturgy. The bishops declare: "from a liturgical and ecclesiastical point of view, a ceremony in the crematorium cannot function as an alternative to the church funeral liturgy as offered in the parish churches" (Vlaamse Bisschoppen 2013, p. 2, trans. by authors).

2.3. The Columbarium Church as a Place for Ritual

The Roman Catholic ritual is still relatively popular in Flanders when it comes down to funerals, as the above-mentioned figures have shown. Beyond the funeral liturgy, church policy also attaches a lot of importance to the "place" where the ritual is performed. In view of this, both taking into account the ritual symbolism of the Roman Catholic liturgy and the complex situation of religious belonging in Flanders, we believe the columbarium church has potential as a renewed place for rituals. Rather than reducing the church interior to a mere indoor graveyard or storage for urn cases, we consider its historical qualities as a (sacred) space for conservation and memorial *and* as a ritual space, which can function both for Christian and more secular rituals.

The presence of graves in the interior of the church, the wish to be buried in the house of God confirming the sacred quality of the place, has been part of Christian tradition in the past. Nowadays, columbarium churches have already become general practice in Germany as so-called "*Grabeskirchen*" or "*Gedächtniskirchen*" (transl. grave or remembrance churches), (e.g., Figure 3). Although varying in quality and not always reflecting the dual role as mentioned, they aim to re-activate the church as a gathering place for family and friends and to remember the deceased with various events. As an alternative function with a spiritual charge, columbarium churches can provide an economic model for the conservation of the building. However, and perhaps similar to the historical examples to some

3 See http://www.crematie.be/cijfers.

4 Also compare: https://statbel.fgov.be/nl/themas/bevolking/sterfte-en-levensverwachting/sterfte.

5 According to the annual report of the Belgian Roman Catholic Church, 2019 counted 48.407 church funerals. https://www.kerknet.be/sites/default/files/Jaarraport%20Bisschoppenconferentie%20NED%202019.pdf.

6 Before, some priests and deacons had a special appointment and were available to perform the funeral rite in the auditoria and crematoria, but these official positions are all abolished. According to this statement a short moment of ritual prayer—comparable to the rite preformed at the grave—performed by a Catholic minister is still possible, but not the entire funeral rite. (Vlaamse Bisschoppen 2013).

extent, it runs the risk of “privatizing” the ritual space and the funeral ritual by charging higher prices, making the church space effectively only accessible to a privileged segment of the population.[7]

Figure 3. Grabeskirche St. Bartholomäus, Köln-Ehrenfeld (DE) 2014, design by Hans-Peter Kissler: the transformation of the interior is characterized by a central ceremonial place surrounded by columbarium walls with urn cases (photograph by Christian Schneider, © Grabeskirche Sankt Bartholomäus Köln).

3. Reusing the Site of St. Odulphus

The St. Odulphus church is located in the village of Booienhoven, near the old town of Zoutleeuw (BE). It is part of an architectural ensemble surrounded by a moat, including a rectory and a guild house, built in neoclassical style in 1846 on the remains of previous settlements. The site is listed in 1994 as a historical rural landscape. Surrounded by agricultural fields with an open character, the church tower functions as a landmark in the touristic area of Hageland and Haspengouw. The history of the site goes back to the 12th century, its name derived from an ancient wellspring and a chapel nearby. It used to be part of a populated village settlement until in 1705 it was destroyed due to the siege of Zoutleeuw. Together with the relocation of the main road nearby, this explains the isolated and remote character of the site today. The combination of this condition with the increasing secularization after WWII has caused the reduced use of the church. No longer functioning for traditional Catholic services, the church is currently abandoned and under consideration for reuse.

The building has recently been part of the programme called *Projectbureau Herbestemming Kerken* (transl. Project Office for the Reuse of Churches), an organisation initiating feasibility studies for the adaptive reuse of various parish churches, under the guidance of the Flemish Government Architect. The *Projectbureau* was created in 2016 in reaction to the increasing obsolescence of parish churches in Flanders as addressed by the Flemish authorities in the 2011 concept note *Een toekomst voor de Vlaamse parochiekerk* (transl. A future for the Flemish parish church, (Bourgeois 2011)). In 2012, 8% of the Flemish parish churches were no longer in service, 60% only hosted limited services and only half of them are open during services (Aerts et al. 2014). Because of this ongoing evolution, many cities and municipalities face the question of adaptive reuse of church buildings. Currently 65 of 115 feasibility studies are finalised and the programme is foreseen to end in 2022 (Sels 2020). The aim of it is to give insight into possible future scenarios through “research by design” by different architects.[8] The assignment for the St. Odulphus church was to study the potential of the interior

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[7] In the context of this article, we focus on the Flemish context and the case of the St. Odulphus site. A full and methodological comparison with German columbarium churches is not addressed here. For an in depth study of recent German columbarium churches we refer to (Leonhard and Thomas 2012) and (Fendler et al. 2014).

[8] The project of the St. Odulphus church is one of the churches that has been investigated in this context by team TRACE, a consortium of UR architects, Architecten Broekx-Schiepers, Architect Saidja Heynickx and the research group *Trace–Adaptive*

to be transformed in a columbarium (Figure 4), a function that seems appropriate for the remote and calm setting. Given the scenic quality of the ensemble, its "island" character and the adjacent farmland and meadows, the design team decided together with the different stakeholders, to expand the study to the surrounding landscape. The ability to provide a central urn cemetery for Zoutleeuw with a sufficient capacity and the potential for a phased and gradual implementation allows for a soft transformation of the landscape taking into account and incorporating the history and heritage value of the site. (For an approach of this project in terms of funeral architecture and landscape see (Plevoets et al. 2019, pp. 173–84).

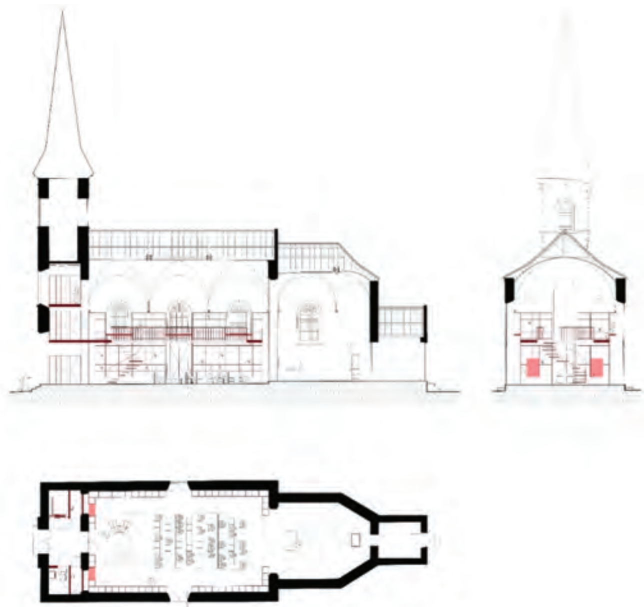


Figure 4. Columbarium church of St. Odulphus: floorplan ground floor with longitudinal and transverse section.

4. Site for a Layered Liturgy

Above, we described three different models of the Christian funeral. For the adaptive reuse of St. Odulphus, it was primarily the second model that inspired us, containing two stations: the chapel on the graveyard grounds and the grave itself. This is a model without funeral Eucharist, which in Belgium is not desired by the majority of people and even not standard practice anymore according to recent local church policy (Goyvaerts 2020). This model combined with the liturgical directions, symbols and possibilities for a funeral rite in the presence of the cremated body can suitably be applied to the St. Odulphus site in Booienhoven. In adapting the neoclassical church building and involving its surroundings, we believe some of the symbols and rituals inherent to the Christian funeral can obtain a topological quality in harmony with and extending to some of the contemporary ideas and evolutions with regard to funeral services. The adaptive reuse of the church building has the potential to reinforce its spiritual identity through the reinterpretation of different traditional practices used in the funeral rite. We strive for an open and layered quality of the liturgy, inviting rather than alienating

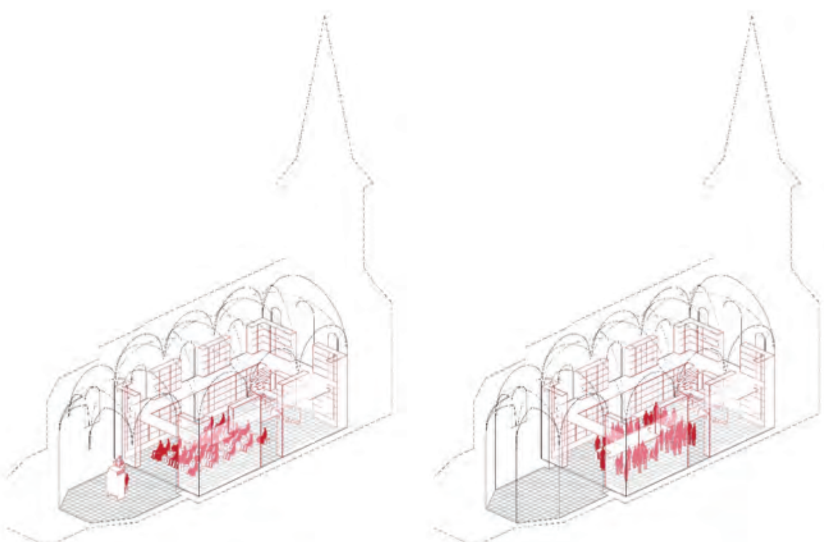
Reuse and Heritage at the Faculty of Architecture and Arts, University of Hasselt (BE) between 2016 and 2020. One of the authors of this paper, Nikolaas Van de Keere is part of UR architects and the research group Trace and was responsible for the project (Tv Trace et al. 2017).

relatives and visitors in the event of a funeral. Below, we present topological research translating the layered liturgy in the spatial design on three different levels.

4.1. A Place for Celebration

The St. Odulphus church has a relatively small and modest interior consisting of a simple nave and choir. We seized on its almost domestic quality for the transformation in a columbarium. Rather than filling up the space and replacing the chairs by urn cases (e.g., Grabeskirche Liebfrauen in Dortmund, Germany), the proposal concentrates the urn cases on the edges of the space against the inside of the façade walls, over two floors with a walkway on the first floor, reachable through a spiral staircase in the front part of the nave. The design makes the deliberate choice to maintain the nave as an open space, to allow for a small gathering or celebration and to keep a degree of multi-functionality. Using oak panels for the construction of the urn cases enhances the intimate and solemn atmosphere, making the new interior reminiscent of old libraries and their contemplative character.

The space can be used in different ways. Figure 5a shows a traditional set-up, allowing for a range of activities that could deviate from the funeral service but are equally appropriate: memorial gatherings, small concerts or presentations, art projects connected to life and death, etcetera. The set-up in Figure 5b is defined by the central presence of a table, a strong Christian symbol confirming the intimate setting and the contemporary practice of a smaller ritual with family and friends. It is inspired by some architectural experiments by the Liturgical Movement preceding Vatican II (for example Figure 6, compare also (Debuyst 1997) and (Vande Keere et al. 2020), resembling a domestic ritual, as part of Christian tradition and referring to the origins of its liturgy: ancient celebrations, with meals, prayer and gathering at the grave of beloved martyrs.[9]



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 5. Columbarium church of St. Odulphus, axonometric view of the interior of the nave and apse and the its use: (**a**) Traditional set-up, allowing for different activities: memorial gatherings, small concerts, etc.; (**b**) Set-up defined by the central presence of a table, confirming the intimate setting and symbolizing (Christian) gathering.

[9] Compare also to the development of the concept of the "house church", typical in Flanders and the region (Bekaert 1967).

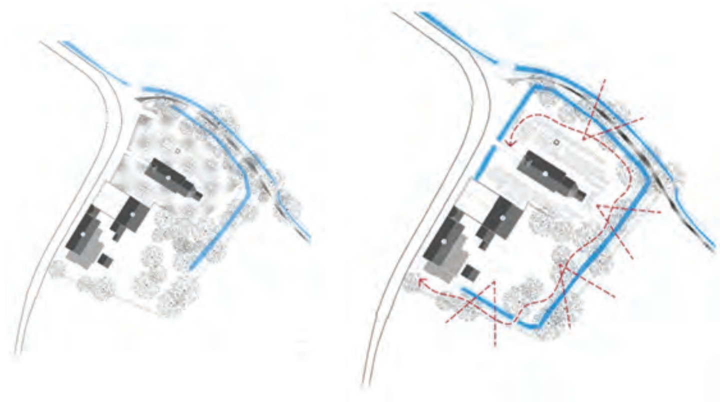
Figure 6. Student chapel, Abbey of Melk (AT) 1966, design by Ottokar Uhl: intimate gathering for the Eucharist around a large table as part of a spatial choreography for the liturgy (photograph by Gert Schlegel, the authors of the article have made any possible attempt to locate and contact the owner of the copyright of this figure).

As in early Christian gathering spaces, the focal point of the celebration is situated in the midst of the community, central in the nave rather than in the choir or apse. This centrality is emphasised and confirmed by the layer of wooden urn cases surrounding the table and defining the edges of the new interior. As such, it also reinforces the meaning of the gathering beyond the singular event of a funeral and symbolizes the presence of a larger assembly or community beyond death. The concept of enveloping continues in a soft way outside of the church, surpassing its interior in the rural landscape around.

4.2. An Island of Passage

As in many religions, the idea of the Christian funeral is that of the "passage" or transition, in which Jesus Christ preceded man and through whom access to new and everlasting life with God was opened. Vatican II marked the transition from a more static funeral rite with an emphasis on prayer for mercy, penance, liberation from sins and salvation towards a "new" rite with rituals and prayers focusing on the guidance of the deceased in the passage from death to new life on the one hand, and being close to and consoling the relatives on the other.

The adaptions to the small "island" aim to spatialize the concept of passage in several ways (Figure 7). Re-introducing the small moat and hedge separates the ensemble of the church, rectory and guild hall from the rural environment, confirming the idea of a secluded and sacred place in an informal way. Bridges or crossings formalize the "passage" towards and from the island. Relatives accompany the deceased and take part of the transition: from a life with, to a life without the physical presence of the departed. The experience of separation is to be strengthened by "freeing up" the island grounds through the creation of an accessible garden (by removing the lower vegetation and cultivating the higher) and concentrating the new graveyard interventions outside of the island (the old graveyard around the church remains but is no longer actively in use). This connects with Christian images of the biblical garden, adding to the site a character of peace and eternity. In addition, the open garden creates the space for outdoor gatherings and memorial services, for instance on the occasion of the feast of All-Souls, still very popular in Flanders and as such also appropriated beyond its religious meaning and transferred to more secular or cultural environments.



(a) (b)

Figure 7. "Island" plan with 1. St. Odulphus church, 2. former rectory and 3. guild hall: (**a**) Existing situation with part of the historical moat surrounding the site; (**b**) Proposed situation with a reintroduction of the moat and the removal of lower vegetation to create an open view to the rural environment.

The same spiritual charge can also be experienced at the Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof in Langemark, Belgium (Figure 8). Designed by Robert Tischler and built between 1930 and 1932, the cemetery has similar features. Besides the subtle use of Christian iconography, the site remains visually open and blends into the surrounding agricultural landscape, relying on the same interventions to distinguish it. The spatial contrast between the graveyard grid with horizontal tombstones and the high stem trees renders the appropriate atmosphere for memory and loss.

Figure 8. Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof in Langemark Belgium: an open and accessible graveyard with a spiritual character defined by a grid of horizontal tombstones and the vertical presence of full grown trees.

4.3. A Spiritual Landscape

The presence of the well spring of St. Odulphus hints at a history before the construction of the church, or even the settlement of the village afterwards destroyed. Typical for the Flemish rural area, a small devotional chapel south-east of the island marks the larger site. In an informal way, and together with some benches and trees, the chapel seals the character of a simple and common spirituality radiating from the landscape. Located at the source of the well, it translates the symbolism of water as a representation of the origin of the site. Referring to baptism, the waters of creation, and to the Red Sea that the people of Israel cross on their way to the promised land, the element of water plays an important role in the Christian funeral rite. In the context of the biblical flood-story and the water shedding out of Christ's wounds on the cross, a combination of the dreadful and even deadly powers of water with its life-giving qualities come to the fore. However, the element of water and its many symbolic meanings is also universal and bears different meanings from an anthropological point of view, open to other religions and cultures.

The dual symbolism of water, having both the possibility of giving life and destroying it, can be translated in the double use of the surrounding fields, combining its natural or agricultural properties with the gentle layout for urn burial in a sustainable way. Edging the island, the fields allow for a continuation of the mentioned passage, e.g., a procession from the church building to the particular grave, carrying the ashes over the water, accompanied by a blessing, a prayer or another form of goodbye and last tribute. The figures illustrate some landscape transformations in a schematic way. Rather than a *tabula rasa*, the proposals introduce transformations that take the existing (natural) properties and their broad symbolic potential (be it ecological–environmental or spiritual) as a basis for a new and open interpretation. Figure 9a shows the "cloister"-like arrangement of graves following the existing trees edging the field. Figure 9b transforms the terrain into an urn forest, providing the space for natural burial while planting various tree types in an irregular way[10]. The existing low-stem orchard in Figure 9c can be adapted to the less dense but ecologically sounder high-stem orchard. Beyond a common and traditional form of agriculture in the region, the orchard is an archetypical and age old example of cultivation. The cyclic and seasonal expression of trees blossoming, bearing fruit, being harvested and loosing leaves carries a strong connotation to life and death. As such, it can also be associated with the popular and contemporary custom of the so-called "birth forest" (Figure 10). Introduced by many municipalities in Flanders, it allows families to celebrate the birth of a new-born baby with the planting of a tree, thus in addition to the burial site closing the circle of life.

[10] This is a rather recent evolution in view of burials and only legally possible in Belgium since 2016. The request for natural burials is increasing and for the moment (2020) there are only five places in Belgium where this is possible.

(**a**) (**b**) (**c**)

Figure 9. Situation plan of the St. Odulphus site and the surrounding fields: (**a**) Urn "cloister": the graves are positioned parallel with the edges of the field and surrounded by a line of trees; (**b**) Urn forest: natural burial among irregular plantation of trees; (**c**) Urn orchard: the low stem orchard is replaced by a less dense high stem orchard with the graves positioned in circles around them.

Figure 10. Birth forest Gentbrugse Meersen Ghent Belgium: celebration of the birth of a new-born babies with the planting of young trees (photograph by Patrick Henry, © Stad Gent).

5. Genius Loci or the Spirit of Place—Conclusions

Rather than considering the reuse of the St. Odulphus church a spiritual loss, we believe that it can offer the opportunity to reinforce and open up the traditional symbolic and ritual meaning of the Christian liturgy to the larger community. The inherent flexibility of the Christian funeral rite did not only inspire the reuse design, but the rituals performed here will be reinforced and become inspired themselves by the space. As such, this case fits very well within the contemporary pluriform Flemish religious context. Connecting ritual and space in this way, the symbolism of the Christian funeral ritual can at the same time be strengthened and experienced by all users on different levels and without imposing it. By organically adding rather than reducing layers of meaning, the design tries to adhere to the memory of the site and remain faithful to its religious origins.

In this paper, we presented a re-localization of the religious experience of this place, from the church towards an involvement of the wider environment of the landscape. In times of declining and disappearing institutional religion, abandoned churches like the St. Odulphus can gain a renewed religious meaning to the community today, through the repeated and double perspective of space and ritual. Re-activating the spiritual character of the place recalls the notion of *genius loci* or spirit of place. Known in Roman antiquity and introduced in architecture and landscape design since the 18th century, it has been defined in broad phenomenological terms by architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz in 1979 as a "meaningful place for man to dwell".[11] As such, it is the true calling of architecture to express this spiritual identity of a certain *locus* in ever new and changing cultures. The Belgian Monk Frédéric Debuyst refers to "interiority" as an essential property for a Christian *genius loci* (Debuyst 1997), more recently followed by Bert Daelemans S.J. using the neologism "theotopy" in an attempt to translate theology into architecture (Daelemans 2015). Both apply the concept to church buildings as sacred places that resonate with the intimate connection between man and space. With this proposal of adaptive reuse for the St. Odulphus church and site as a columbarium and urn cemetery, we hope to express the *genius loci* of this particular place, to preserve and even reinforce its particular identity in a time where too many of them are abandoned and no longer used.

> "Although what I call Genius Loci can never be personified, we may yet feel him nearer and more potent, in some individual monument or feature of the landscape. He is immanent very often, and subduing our hearts most deeply, at a given turn of a road; or a path cut in terraces in a hillside, with view of great distant mountains; or, again, in a church like Classe, near Ravenna; most of all, perhaps, in the meeting-place of streams, or the mouth of a river, both of which draw our feet and thoughts time after time, we know not why or wherefore. The genius of places lurks there; or, more strictly, *he is it*." (Lee 1907, p. 6)

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religions

Article

Co-Creating Ritual Spaces and Communities: An Analysis of Municipal Cemetery Tongerseweg, Maastricht, 1812–2020

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Abstract: Cemeteries have been viewed in opposed ways as ritual spaces that either mirror society or present an idealized model of society. In this article, we propose an analysis of cemeteries as ritual spaces, focused on the case study of municipal cemetery Tongerseweg in Maastricht, among the most important monumental cemeteries still in active use in The Netherlands today. Drawing on historical as well as interview material, spatial and ritual studies, the authors argue for a new "Arena Model" to understand cemeteries as dynamic ritual spaces. Cemeteries do not only form an ensemble of ritual spaces that are reliant on pre-existing communities, they also evoke, produce and maintain communities. Codeterminants are the physical layout and a wide range of ritual markers that variously underscore, mitigate or even contradict the communities created by the spatial layout. Important actors pertain to municipal politics and administration as well as the users, their respective allies and service providers. The article further analyses the wide range of competing values that help to shape a cycle of cocreating plural ritual spaces as well as communities.

Keywords: ritual dynamics; space; boundaries; cemetery; religious groups; minority groups; arena; pluralization; cocreation

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> I am at Cemetery Tongerseweg, Maastricht. It is early July, and I have difficulties locating the grave of a member of the Dutch resistance against the Nazi occupation. "Can you find what you are looking for?" A man, dark hair, youngish in spite of him being about 40 years, approaches me: "I might be able to help you. I know the place, in fact I show people around sometimes.". We fall into a conversation. I mention a section in the cemetery's far left corner, where numbers of Socialists, free thinkers and members of some non-Christian religions have been buried since the 1930s. "This is the only part of the cemetery where I don't go," he makes shivering movements, "me being a good Catholic lad [ik als goede katholieke jongen]." (C.J., 10 July 2019)

1. Introduction: Theme and Approach

The chance encounter related in the opening vignette has formed the *basso continuo* of our work on Cemetery Tongerseweg in Maastricht. A highly engaged visitor to the cemetery—during our conversation, the man also relates that he occasionally fulfils volunteer tasks in the cemetery such as guiding around other visitors, and he sports a small container with a rosary which he regularly uses for prayers at the grave of his grandparents—feels that the cemetery consists of distinct spaces that seem to belong to identifiable groups. Even if the cemetery section to which our interlocutor refers may have become over the years the resting place of members of many more minority groups and may have lost its sharp edge of anticlericalism vis-à-vis a majoritarian Roman Catholicism, there still seem to linger the long shadows of memory, tradition and so forth, that define the atmosphere, the character of a cemetery section and make the section the rightful ritual space for some and out of bounds for others.

This raises questions for prevalent conceptualizations of the cemetery as a ritual space: Could it be the case that scholars have been overly focused on the cemetery as a unitary ritual space at the expense of internal divisions? And, could it be the case that scholars have not taken sufficient note of the historical dimension of the cemetery as a ritual space?

The spatial structure of a highly differentiated cemetery such as Maastricht Tongerseweg is something in need of explanation. How do internal divisions relate to divisions between groups and communities that use the cemetery? How deeply entrenched are those divisions, and what is the evidence for the (re)negotiation of identities? Finally, and perhaps most important of all, how does all of this play out in a historical perspective? In order to understand how practices, memories and traditions shape a complex cemetery such as Maastricht, we need to refine the concept of ritual space. It is certainly correct that space that is sequestered in certain ways becomes what is generally referred to as "the cemetery" as a ritual space. However, a ritual space thus understood falls into two interconnected but clearly distinguishable categories: on the one hand, there is a ritual space "as actualized"—the space where we conduct, participate in or perceive a specific ritual, be it in the context of a funeral, a visiting ritual and so forth. On the other hand, however, a ritual space thus understood uses and actualizes what can be referred to as ritual space "in potentiality"—a spatial structure that defines certain actions as mandatory, optional, transgressive and so forth. Ritual space in the latter sense is the result of historical processes, the sedimentation of past practices, memories and traditions; it is at least in part the result of distinctive ritual acts in the past. At the same time, it also provides the potentiality for distinctive ritual acts that we can observe in the here and now. It defines the atmosphere, the character of distinctive parts of a cemetery, such that distinctive ritual acts that are entirely fitting in one part of the cemetery may be contentious or offensive in others. For instance, a cemetery that contains parklike sections might be a fitting décor for sitting on a bench or in the grass, for sharing food and champagne to celebrate the life of a deceased, whereas it is hard to imagine such activities as acceptable in an Islamic part of the same cemetery.

When Grimes (2014, p. 256) explains that "a cemetery remains a ritual space even when no burial or ash-scattering is going on", he gestures towards an understanding of the cemetery as a ritual space that we presuppose here. People do not simply step into a predetermined setting but contribute to the "spacing" of a cemetery, that is, the relational positioning of objects. The concept of "spacing" was developed by sociologist Martina Löw (2001, pp. 158–59) and can be summed up as the active placement of objects in space and the positioning of symbolic markers in relation to each other in perception, imagination or remembrance—a performance described as "synthesizing" (*Synthetisierungsleistung*) (Adelmann and Wetzel 2013, p. 181). This dynamic cocreation of space is a staple feature of the "spatial turn", which has taken a particular interest in bordering processes. Again, the emphasis is on the processual and action-based creation of delimitations. In that context, an understudied text by Georg Simmel has been unearthed and only recently translated into English, which defines the boundary not as "a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but [as] a sociological fact that forms itself spatially" (Simmel [1908] 1997, p. 143, Simmel [1908] 2006, p. 23). It already encapsulated ideas later developed by Henri Lefebvre and others:

> The idealist principle that space is our conception, or more precisely, that it comes into being through our synthetic activity with which we give form to sensory material, is specified here in such a way that the formation of space which we call a boundary is a sociological function. Of course, once it has become a spatial and sensory object that we inscribe into nature independently of its sociological and practical sense, then this produces strong repercussions on the consciousness of the relationship of the parties. Although this line only marks the diversity in the two relationships, that of the elements of a sphere among each other and that among those elements and the elements of another sphere, it becomes a living energy that forces the former together and will not allow them to escape their unity and pushes between them both like a physical force that emits outward repulsions in all directions.

This "living energy" is also visible enough in cemeteries, whose perimeter is clearly established, and which may have different sections, separated by hedges, walls or pathways (Rugg 2000, pp. 261–63).

We would like to stress here that these "repulsions" do not simply reflect social boundaries and their changes over time but develop a spatial dynamic of their own, which must be discussed in terms of the dynamic cocreation of space by stakeholders, trying to realize (partly incompatible) legal, hygienic, political, aesthetic, religious and other values.

So, what we are concerned with in this article is ritual space in the aforementioned sense: wherever we speak, for the sake of brevity, of "ritual space", we refer to ritual space in the sense of its potentiality-giving function.

Our research showcases an integrated approach that draws on the insights of symbolic anthropology and history to tackle the above questions. The methods we have employed range from in situ observations and interviews to the historical "mapping" of cemetery sections, archival and literature research, and the analysis of visual materials.[1]

2. State of the Art and Literature

It hardly needs stating that our approach constructively engages with a host of literature in the fields of religious studies, ritual studies and death studies. In all three fields, the concept of space is either foundational or has become important in recent decades. The study of ritual, in particular, has had space and place at heart. Van Gennep [1909] (1960) notes that all rites of passage are accompanied by a territorial passage (e.g., carrying the bride over the threshold or a procession with the newly dead to the cemetery), whereas Smith (1987) even entitled his major study of ritual *To take place*. As we have indicated, in spite of all the interest in ritual space and place, the concept of ritual space needs further refinement. A good illustration of this is, for instance, Grimes (2014, pp. 256–62) long list of (alleged) "misconceptualizations" of ritual space in binary oppositions or Alles' (2017) rejection of too rigid understandings of borders and boundaries that define ritual space. This has become even more pressing in view of the pluralization of societies in Northwestern Europe (e.g., Baumann 1992). Post and Molendijk (2007, p. 279) point at "the rise of increasingly multireligious urban ritual spaces"; an example *par excellence* of these ritual spaces is public cemeteries. In this article, we look at the "pluralistic communities of the dead" (Laqueur 2015, p. 294) in Maastricht's municipal cemetery Tongerseweg from its establishment in 1812 until today. What have been the dynamics of this ritual space in a period of over two centuries?

In the fields of religious studies and death studies, the "spatial turn" (Knott 2010) has become something of an orthodoxy. Academic scholars of death too have taken note of the concept of deathscapes (Kong 1999; Maddrell and Sidaway 2010) and understand cemeteries as sequestered places (Hüppi 1968; Rugg 2000; Sörries 2009). Much of the current literature refers to Foucault's 1967

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[1] Regarding the historical material, we maintain, against some skeptical currents, the possibility of reconstructing the meanings of, and authorial intentions behind, historical sources, but we cannot embark on this discussion in the present context (see, e.g., Bevir 1999, ch. 2 for a robust defense).

talk (published much later as Foucault 1986) “Des espaces autres”, in which he invents the category of “heterotopia”. Heterotopias are “real places . . . which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1986, p. 24).

Foucault reflects in the short text twice explicitly on cemeteries as instances of heterotopias. In the present context, we cannot review or engage the rich literature that comments on Foucault’s sometimes cryptic remarks (but see, e.g., Dehaene and Cauter 2008; Spanu 2020). Suffice it to say that we see our effort here as a constructive engagement with Foucault’s theory: our attempt to combine symbolic anthropological and historical research strategies dovetails with Foucault’s attempt to see the category of the spatial as the sedimentation of the historical. Our effort here tries to mine the potential of Foucault’s approach even where he (in our view) underutilizes the potential of the new category: most importantly, Foucault still talks of the cemetery as a unitary space, “where each family possesses its dark resting place” (Foucault 1986, p. 25). Such depictions of the cemetery as a depot of (bourgeois) family history may reflect iconic French cemeteries such as Père Lachaise. Against this background, it is, we tend to think, doubly interesting to analyze with the case study of Tongerseweg Maastricht, a cemetery that followed at its inception French regulations, and has over the course of its 200-year history reached a point where it has to grapple with cultural and legal changes in Dutch society that have ended cemeteries’ monopoly as mandatory resting places, with all the reverberations of that change.

Foucault himself allows for heterotopias to juxtapose “several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault 1986, p. 25), but does not relate this in any way to cemeteries (his examples are the theatre, the cinema and the garden) and curiously he does not, for all his usual interest in power constellations, present cemeteries or, for that matter, other heterotopias as historically contingent ritual spaces that are coproduced by different actors.

For all the heuristic value of Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, our approach highlights that the cemetery is less of a “counter site” but very much a continuation of the struggles, identity formations, appeals and positionings that characterize our society. Moreover, our approach highlights the internal divisions in the cemetery and the complex relationship with communities and groups.

Cemeteries are, in the words of Tarrés et al. (2018, p. 12), “spaces where communities can express their identities and their construction of otherness.” The modern cemetery is a social and public arena in which identities can be claimed in a more or less ostensive way, subsumed, suppressed, denied or contested (see also Francis et al. 2005). The “new model of the cemetery” emerged at the end of the eighteenth and even more markedly in the beginning of the nineteenth century (Ariès 1985, p. 216; cf. Etlin 1984; Worpole 2003). Under the influence of the Enlightenment, mainly for hygienic reasons, the graveyards were to be located outside of the towns. The new cemeteries had a predetermined layout of grave plots. Some were even parklike with a geometrical ordering of space, dividing it up into distinctive grave fields (Kolnberger 2018; Heemels 2010, pp. 127–28). The future cemeteries envisioned in the eighteenth century took terribly long to materialize (Cappers 2012, p. 241). In the years just before the French Revolution, it followed from the plans that “the topography of the cemetery reproduces society as a whole,” according to Ariès (Ariès [1977] 1981, p. 503). In his view, the “primary purpose of the cemetery is to present a microcosm of society” (Ariès [1977] 1981, p. 503).[2]

This idea of the modern cemetery as a “mirror image” of society has been taken up in the literature on cemeteries (e.g., Kamphuis 1999, passim; Sörries 2009, p. 177). Heemels (2006) examined this with regard to the main cemetery of Roermond, another town in the province of Limburg (Netherlands), for the period between 1870 and 1940. He found that in the predominantly Catholic town, the social stratification was clearly reflected in the locations of burials around 1880, but less so around 1930,

[2] Other phrases used by Ariès are that “the cemetery is the image of public society” (Ariès [1977] 1981, p. 503) and that “[t]he cemetery is a schematic image of the society” (Ariès [1977] 1981, p. 553).

partly because this was affected by the earlier purchase of family graves (Heemels 2006, pp. 154–58). Maastricht, with twice the number of inhabitants compared to Roermond, knew and knows greater diversity. As Francis et al. (2005, p. 195) note, "for members of minority and immigrant ethnic groups, cemeteries can play a significant role in creating a sense of community beyond the strictly familial.". We are interested in the question of how the cemetery inscribes the identities of various communities in spatial terms.

At the same time, we argue that the spatial order of a cemetery as a ritual space should not be considered as a mere reflection of society. Clifford Geertz (1973, pp. 93–5) distinction between a model *of* reality, in contrast to a model *for* reality is still helpful here. In other words, we need to distinguish what is from normative ideals, from what actors believe ought to be. How space in the cemetery is divided up in bounded areas can also speak to aspirations or to "an idealized conception of the social order" (Rugg 2013, p. 5) and feed back to the social relations of the living.

We want to make headway with an analysis of the complexities of such a process of "cocreation" of ritual space that gives full weight to the recognition of the cemetery being home to plural communities, whose diversity is reflected or enhanced, but also downplayed, mitigated or denied in the complex interactions that create the cemetery as a plural ritual space.

Those complexities have not been fully understood, even though helpful, partial observations have been noted in the literature. For instance, Sutherland (1978, p. 47) highlighted the interactive nature of the nexus between social organization and physical environment:

> When we try to understand how societies use space, how they divide it up both conceptually and physically, we are looking at a combination of their form of social organization and their perception of the physical environment. Both of these elements, the social as well as the physical, will form a single interacting whole in which no one element can be said to determine the other.

Social identities or categories are marked by boundaries in physical space. They have to be understood in relative terms. The boundaries distinguishing one from the other are betwixt and between. They separate and connect at the same time. Because the boundaries need to stand out, being neither the one nor the other and both at once, and, therefore, are ambiguous, they happen to be addressed with ritual (Leach [1976] 1978, pp. 41–4). Identities are always relational: "the identity *is* in important senses the boundary" (Jenkins 2008, p. 142). Cemeteries do not passively "track" societal developments; they are constructs that have been and are continuously shaped, actively, on the basis of social, political and economic ideas and ideals at different levels of government and on the basis of the aspirations and ideals of their users. As a result of explicit or implicit contestation, the cemetery can be conceived of as an arena (Turner 1974, pp. 129–36). Cemeteries should be considered "temporal topographies" in which space and time coalesce (Nielsen 2017). "As liminal, betwixt-and-between sites where geography and chronology are reshaped and history is made spatial, cemeteries are places of social, religious and ethnic continuity and belonging" (Francis et al. 2005, p. 195). In order to tease out how cemeteries as ritual spaces produce communal identities, special attention should be given to processes of territorial segmentation.

The cemetery is often seen as the epitome of modernity. The churchyard, in contrast, has become associated with tradition. Rugg (2013, p. 9ff), however, argues that the binary opposition rests on stereotypes. She speaks of "false dichotomies" and relates that a churchyard can also be profitable and express social distinction, whereas a cemetery is not necessarily secular but can, in part or whole, be consecrated (ibidem). Although Rugg does not mention them, the stereotypical contrast fits well with Tönnies' notions of civil society (*Gesellschaft*) and community (*Gemeinschaft*), respectively (see Tönnies [1887] 2001). Cemetery Tongerseweg, as we will see, was also for the largest part consecrated.[3]

The present article demonstrates the need for and usefulness of a fresh look at the nexus of ritual space and cemeteries with a case study, the monumental Cemetery Tongerseweg in Maastricht, The Netherlands. Tongerseweg is a particularly rich case study due to it being a municipal, public cemetery in a culture defined by Roman Catholicism: the cemetery has its roots in the burial reforms ushered in under French rule during the Napoleonic era, is still in active use after two hundred years and currently undergoes a new wave of redevelopment. After a short overview of the history of the cemetery (3), we will analyze Cemetery Tongerseweg in four episodes (nineteenth century (4), early twentieth century (5), late twentieth century (6), future planning (7)) as a pluralistic ritual space that is continuously (re)constituted and (re)negotiated by administrators, users and their allies. We continue (8) with a discussion of the relationship between ritual spaces and communities in which we propose a new "Arena Model" of this dynamic relationship. We end with a brief reflection on the applicability of the Arena Model beyond the case of Maastricht (9).

3. Cemetery Tongerseweg, Maastricht

Cemetery Tongerseweg was planned and realized in the early nineteenth century under French rule, in the name of the hygiene and societal reform. The decision to build a general cemetery to the west of the crowded medieval town center of Maastricht was made in 1805. The cemetery was to replace several cemeteries run by religious communities (Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Jewish) in the old center and was to cater for the dead of all religions and social echelons (Minis 1994, 2012; Noten 1998). The French legal situation at the time was defined by a law from 1804, leaving municipalities the choice between separate cemeteries for the different religions or indeed a single communal one, with provisions for the different faiths. In that case, walls, hedges or canals should separate the different sections, which each should be given separate entrances.[4] In Maastricht, this was seen as an opportunity to fuse the different cemeteries into a single one, following the French example (cf. Ariès [1977] 1981; Van Helsdingen 1987; for further details, see Cappers 2012, pp. 240, 253). In 1809, the site at the road towards Tongeren (in Belgium) was selected, then located in the village of Oud-Vroenhoven (Bruijnesteijn van Coppenraet and Denessen 2002, p. 21). The main, Catholic part of the cemetery was consecrated on the 27th of January 1812 by Hendrik Partouns, vicar of the Roman Catholic Saint-Nicholas Church (Minis 2012).

With growing needs, the cemetery was extended three times in the north-eastern direction, towards the city center of Maastricht (in 1857, 1910 and 1956; see Figure 1) and is today part of Maastricht's western perimeter. Each extension came with significant cemetery developments which related to changing religious, political, legal and economic circumstances. For instance, after the first extension, the Catholic dead could be buried in grave plots of three distinctive classes: the most expensive were alongside the pathways, whereas the cheapest plots were out of view and practically out of reach (Heemels 2010, p. 130). Furthermore, a Catholic chapel was added to the cemetery in 1885, founded by the Clarenboets family and representing the four Catholic parishes of Maastricht of that time (Van Raak 1995, p. 95). With the second extension, new grave fields were opened for Socialists and other "dissenters". The third extension drastically altered the plan of the cemetery; a new main entrance was created at its northern perimeter, next to parking lots along the street (Figure 1, C).

3 Cappers (2012, p. 247) explains that due to the Napoleonic Concordat of 1801, his agreement with the pope, the Roman Catholic Church regained its status as a State Church. This was also relevant for Maastricht, which was incorporated into the French department Meuse-Inférieure between 1795 and 1814.

4 *Décret impérial sur les sépultures* du 23 prairial an XII (12 June 1804), article 15: "Dans les communes où l'on professe plusieurs cultes, chaque culte doit avoir un lieu d'inhumation particulier, et dans le cas où il n'y aurait qu'un seul cimetière, on le partagera par des murs, des haies ou fossés, en autant de parties qu'il y a de cultes différents, avec une entrée particulière pour chacune, et en proportionnant cet espace au nombre habitants de chaque culte" (Fortuijn 1840, p. 309).

At present, over 125,000 people are buried in the over twelve hectares of consecrated and unconsecrated ground. As the numbers of traditional burials are decreasing, and the amount of people who opt for cremation is increasing, the story of the cemetery's development does not end here. A new business plan (Gemeente Maastricht 2018) prepares the cemetery for the future by making possible a fourth extension towards the Northwest. In the main section of this article, we will delve into these historical and future developments in more detail.

Figure 1. Schematic map of the development of Cemetery Tongerseweg (T.K.).

4. Nineteenth Century

By the mid-19th century, there was a clear separation of the Jewish section of the cemetery by means of a massive brick wall and a separate entrance, and a less solid—but nonetheless highly visible—separation of the Lutheran and Reformed Protestant sections vis-à-vis each other, and jointly from the main, Roman Catholic part of the cemetery (Figure 2, C; and the brick wall in Figure 3a). Protestants were part of the civic elite in Maastricht and the Province of Limburg, so the positioning of their graves near the entrance could signal social distinction. However, at the same time, the Protestant community was also religiously separated from the majoritarian Roman Catholic community. In order to underscore the distinctness of communities, a row of hedges was planted directly behind the Protestant cemetery sections (Figure 2, B1 and B2; see also Figures 3b and 4).

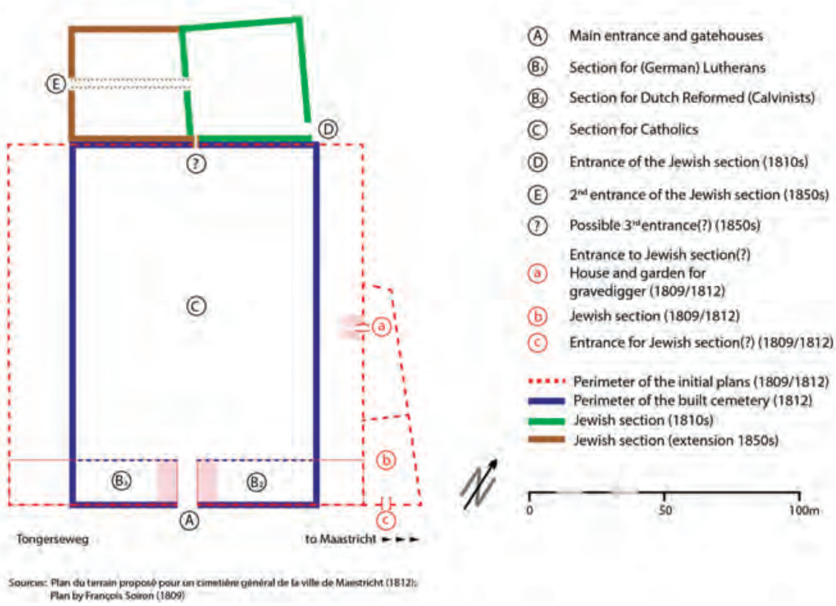
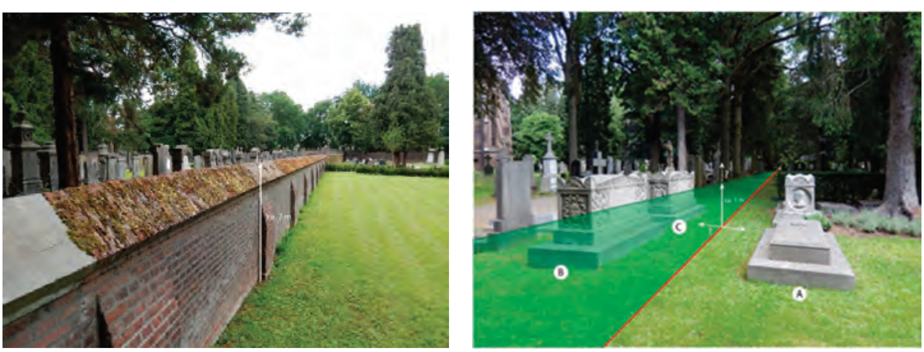


Figure 2. Schematic map of Cemetery Tongerseweg (situation 1850s) (T.K.).

The separation of religious communities, however, cut across another type of community, the family. The cemetery still contains evidence that allows us to see users of the cemetery affirming family bonds as more important than religious community. A case in point is a group of three monumental sarcophagi (see Figure 3b).



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 3. (**a**,**b**) Detail of wall separating Jewish section (photograph: S.K.) and the MacPherson and Van Meeuwen sarcophagi (photograph: E.V.).

The grave of Pieter Daniël Eugenius MacPherson (grave A in Figure 3b) is the earliest sarcophagus in the ensemble. Born in Armentières in 1792, he had been a member of the Council of State and governor of the Duchy of Limburg, of which Maastricht was the capital city. He died in Maastricht in 1846. His grave was created in a classicist style that was fashionable in the period, replete with classicist symbols of life and death (palm motifs, winged hour-glass, inverted torches), whilst avoiding overtly denominational Christian symbols. The hedge separating the sections would have extended directly behind MacPherson's grave. The hedge would have been at least a meter in height (Figure 3b), which would have affected the visibility, and thus explains the arrangement of, the inscriptions. Inscriptions memorializing the high office MacPherson fulfilled in public life face towards the entrance, whereas information about his birth and death are displayed at the back side, towards the hedge.

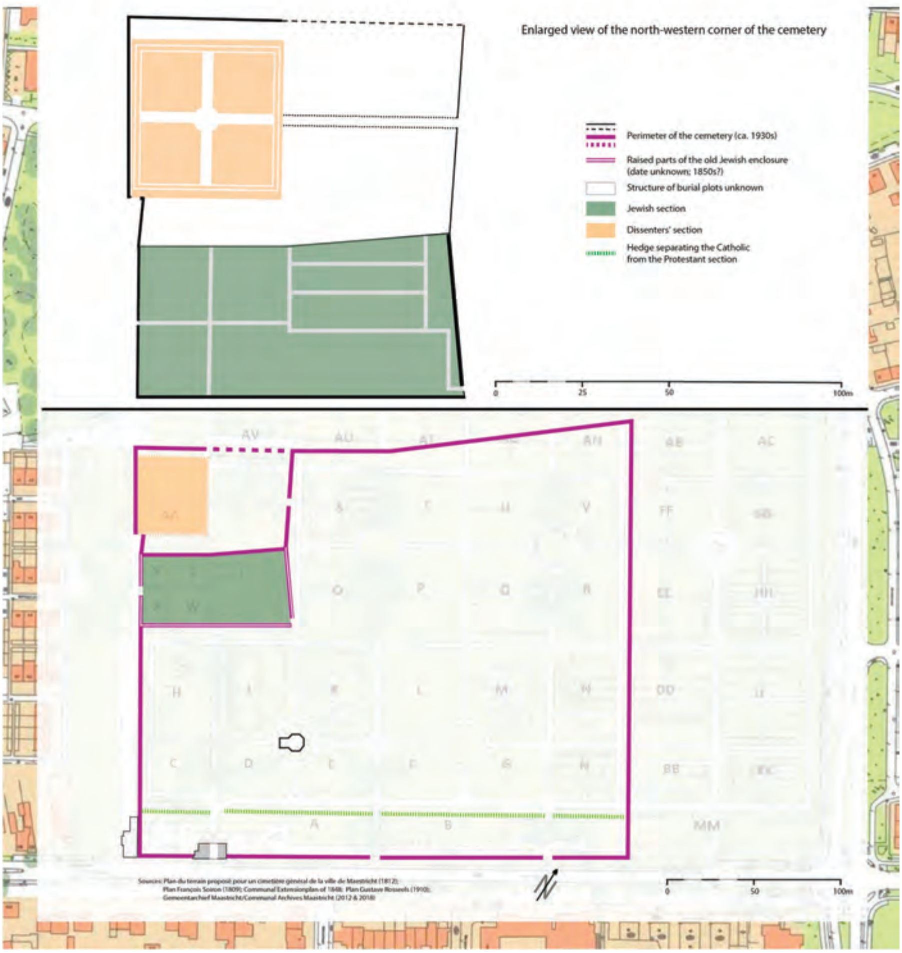


Figure 4. Schematic map indicating the section for dissenters (T.K.).

On the other side of the chasm where the hedge was located, we find two sarcophagi that are remarkably similar to MacPherson's and were clearly intended to match and echo his on the other side of the hedge. They are the sarcophagi of MacPherson's wife, Jonkvrouwe Rosa Maria Johanna van Meeuwen (1901–1889) (B), and his brother in law, Jonkheer meester Petrus Andreas van Meeuwen (1772–1848) (C), both members of the Roman Catholic Van Meeuwen dynasty of North Brabant. Their sarcophagi exhibit a comparably restrained classicist iconography at the expense of Christian symbolism. Again, the inscriptions are located in such a way that the epitaphs outlining the public roles of the deceased were best visible to the visitors of the Roman Catholic section, facing away from the hedge. The religious background of the deceased explains the positioning of their sarcophagi in the Roman Catholic section. But it is also clear from the design and spatial layout that with their sarcophagi, every attempt is made to reach out, as it were, across the hedge and emphasize family, rank and class as communities that bridge the divisions of religious communities.

5. Early twentieth Century

Over time, spatial segregators can take on, and produce, new meanings: With the building of a Roman Catholic chapel at the center of the cemetery's main part (Figure 1, C), the hedge separated the Protestants from the visual and ritual center of the cemetery. Also, the hedgerow was continued with every successive eastward extension of the cemetery (Figure 4), only to be cut down partly in the 1960s. The shifting south-easternmost corner of the cemetery became a burial place for socially and/or religiously excluded minorities, such as convicts or Socialists. As soon as Socialists became a decisive political force in Maastricht in the early twentieth century, they pressed for a dedicated cemetery section. In 1932, a specific section was opened for "dissenters" (*andersdenkenden*, not to be confused with Protestant Dissenters) in the cemetery's north-western corner. This new field was situated behind the walled Jewish part of the cemetery (see Figure 4).

Whilst the dedicated grave field provided a ritual space for dedicated Socialist rites, such as 1st of May celebrations (and is in fact used in this way to this day), users have emphasized communities beyond the Socialist one. A case in point is the grave of Johannes Hubertus Paris (1873–1939), an important figure in Maastricht's Unionist and Socialist movement, and his wife Anna Catharina Debats (1876–1954). Paris was one of the founding members of the first union of workers in the ceramics industry (1892) and a leader of the local Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP). He seems to have been a relatively moderate figure, who tried to curb anticlerical tendencies in his movement (Cillekens [1988] 2018). The headstone features prominently a bronze relief of the deceased's portrait surrounded by a wreath. The headstone cut out of limestone summarizes in bronze lettering Paris' public service and evokes the Socialist community: "He worked for his city and for the people" (*Hij werkte voor zijn stad en voor het volk*). As with other Socialist graves, symbolic immortality in respect of the (Socialist) community is underscored by a further inscription noting that the monument was erected with voluntary gifts. At the bottom of the headstone, a bronze relief depicting a sun rising behind a hilltop, illuminating the path of two workers in front of the skyline of Maastricht above the city's five-armed star inscribes Paris' life in the context of local politics and workers' emancipation. However, in unison with the deceased's irenic character, the Socialist identity is not played out against religion; the headstone's form is clearly inspired by a Christian cross; the Maastricht skyline in the bronze relief concentrates on its iconic churches, and on the slab bronze lettering quotes a verse from the New Testament: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40 NIV, Dutch original: *Wat gy den minste der mijnen hebt gedaan/hebt gy my gedaan*). The passage is taken out of the eschatological parables towards the end of the Gospel according to Matthew, connecting righteousness to support of the most vulnerable. In the context of Cemetery Tongerseweg, the inscription renegotiates community: it mollifies the rigidity of ideological boundaries and gestures at a more practice-centered as well as ecumenic understanding of Christianity (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Grave of Socialist leader J.H. Paris (photograph: C.J.).

6. End of the Twentieth Century and Onwards

With the cultural and political changes in the second half of the twentieth century—a marked easing of tensions between Socialism and Roman Catholicism after Vatican II—the dissenters' cemetery section took on a new function: it became the resting ground for people with a variety of non-Christian religious and diverse ethnic backgrounds, such as Chinese-Vietnamese (Hoakieu) boat refugees who came to The Netherlands during the 1970s. When the first Muslims died and wanted to be buried in Maastricht in the 1980s, the cemetery management decided to reserve a space in the dissenters' field for them as well. Tucked away in-between the Jewish section wall and the dissenters' section (see Figure 6), the Islamic graves were dug in such a way to abide by the ritual requirement of being buried facing Mecca.

Whilst the small number of deaths in the Muslim community would not have made a dedicated cemetery section necessary in the short term—the first major wave of young Muslim migrants came to The Netherlands as late as the 1960s to work *inter alia* in Maastricht's manufacturing industries—the mid-1990s saw the realization of a dedicated Islamic cemetery section (see Figure 6). The change had not only been made necessary by the growing Islamic population in the town but also by a new law—the Burial and Cremation Act 1991 (*Wet op de lijkbezorging 1991*), which stipulated that upon request, religious communities must be given a proportionate area of a municipal cemetery dedicated to them (Wet op de lijkbezorging, 1991, article 38). This largely reiterated the Burial Act of 1869, but the revision of 1991 sought to eliminate remaining obstacles for the various religious groups. In line with Islamic ritual prescriptions, Muslims were now granted "the legal possibility of burial without a coffin and within 36 hours", a provision that led to an increase in Islamic burial plots (Kadrouch-Outmany 2014, p. 89).

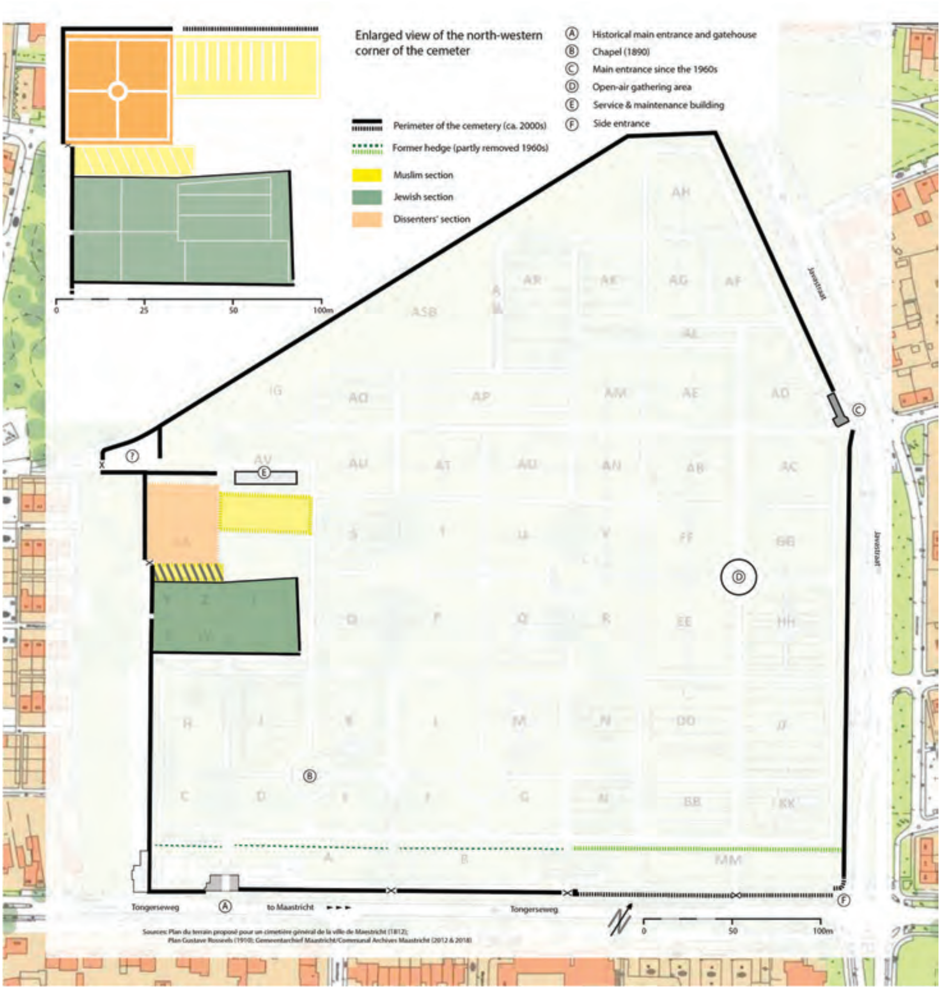


Figure 6. Schematic map indicating the Islamic sections (T.K.).

It is notable how some grave markers in this Islamic section evoke dual or multiple communities. A case in point is an Islamic grave of a Turkish woman who died in 2015 at the age of 27 (see Figure 7). The grave is situated in the Islamic section of the Tongerseweg cemetery, already indicating the religious background of the deceased. Her religious identity is also clearly visible in the two prayer beads that are draped around the headstone, and the inscriptions *Rahman ve Rahim olan Allah'in adıyla* and *Rahuna Fatiha*. The first inscription means "In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful". It is the famous *basmalah* that is recited before each *surah* in the Qur'an. It is also used in everyday life in many parts of the Arabic world as a precursor for actions, to invite God's blessings upon the action (Fani and Hayes 2017). The second inscription is a petition for the visitor of the grave to recite the first chapter of the Qur'an (the *surah al-fatiha*) to the soul of the deceased. Doing this is deemed good for both the visitor and the deceased, as *fatiha* means victory (Özdemir and Frank 2000, p. 102).

But, not only the Islamic background of the deceased woman is communicated by the headstone. At the same time, she and her mourners are introduced as members of both the Turkish and Dutch language communities. The above-mentioned inscription *rahuna Fatiha* is a phrase commonly spotted on Turkish graves and thus emphasizes the deceased's position within the Turkish community. The inscription on the left side of the gravestone seems to be a personal message, written by a family member. Expressed in it is the wish that her soul will rest in heaven and the promise that she will always live in the hearts of those left behind. Underneath, a small text in Dutch refers to the deceased as "our beloved daughter, sister, aunt and sweet mama". While the gravestone thus emphasizes the specific Islamic and Turkish backgrounds of the woman and her relatives, at the same time it speaks to a larger, primarily Dutch audience, thereby evoking membership of and addressing different communities at the same time.

Figure 7. A recent Islamic grave situated in the Islamic section (photograph: M.W.).

7. Planning for the Future

At present, Cemetery Tongerseweg is again undergoing changes, as outlined in the current business plan for the cemetery (drawn up by the municipal administration under the responsibility of an elected political leadership (Gemeente Maastricht 2018)) and in interviews held with the cemetery's management. The intended changes are a result of three current developments in the Dutch context. First, the number of interments has been decreasing for a number of years, leading to a decline in the need for traditional graves. Second, as society becomes more diverse, there is a need to create space for different burial wishes. Third, the financial regulations around cemeteries in The Netherlands have been affected by the long-standing trend of New Public Management. As many other cemeteries in the country, Cemetery Tongerseweg is expected by the municipal administration to be as much as possible independent of subsidies. This has resulted in precarious economic circumstances for Cemetery Tongerseweg and has increased the need of defining new communities that wish to be interred in and thus continue to finance the cemetery. The current business plan stipulates the need for investments that result in less maintenance-intensive infrastructure and "an enhanced palette of products". The income from Islamic and Armenian graves are considered so important that they receive a dedicated mention in the business plan's financial paragraph (Gemeente Maastricht 2018, p. 19). All in all, the business plan foresees a financially independent cemetery after the transition period in which the investment has been taking place.

At the same time, it is important to highlight the communicative and negotiating role of the cemetery management in implementing the regulation drawn up by the municipal administration. What we refer to here, summarily, as "cemetery management" is a surprisingly multilayered, hierarchical structure. At the level of the municipality, there is one dedicated employee whose main task is cemetery Tongerseweg; in addition, there is a secretary who deals with the day-to-day administration; furthermore, a caretaker whose main responsibility is the arrangement of burials, ash dispersals etc. Finally, there is a workforce of at least four gardeners to take care of the grave digging, greenery etc. For instance, in our interviews, the caretaker of cemetery Tongerseweg stressed his role vis-à-vis Islamic funeral attendees. He detailed how he tries to nudge those funeral attendees to merely begin covering the coffin with earth and let the rest be done by far more efficient machines, with the ultimate goal of reducing costs.

One of the measures outlined in the business plan is to create a "multifunctional mourning and remembrance park," aimed at attracting and serving a broad clientele. The cemetery is being expanded to the northwest side (see Figure 8). Here, the cemetery will reserve a space for the installation of a remembrance forest. This forest will expand over the decades, with people planting trees in remembrance of their deceased loved ones. The already existing Sections 2 and 3 are being repurposed. Since 2015, no new graves are rented out in Section 3, and it is expected that all existing graves can be cleared by 2040, so that the section can be changed into a field for scattering ashes, fields for urn graves and potentially a columbarium. In the meantime, existing grave fields that are becoming available will be transformed into meadows with benches and tables. New entrances are planned, and possibilities are explored of constructing a multifunctional pavilion for gatherings other than funeral ceremonies, in a clear bid to extend the functions of the cemetery to include recreation. Also, a new Islamic grave field will be constructed. The current Islamic field is nearly full, and with the prediction that the Islamic community in Maastricht will increase in the future, more grave spaces for this particular group are planned. Another grave field is currently being repurposed for members of the Armenian Apostolic community living in Maastricht and the wider Limburg province. Plans have been made to plant low hedges around the field, and to erect a *khachkar* (Armenian cross) in the field.

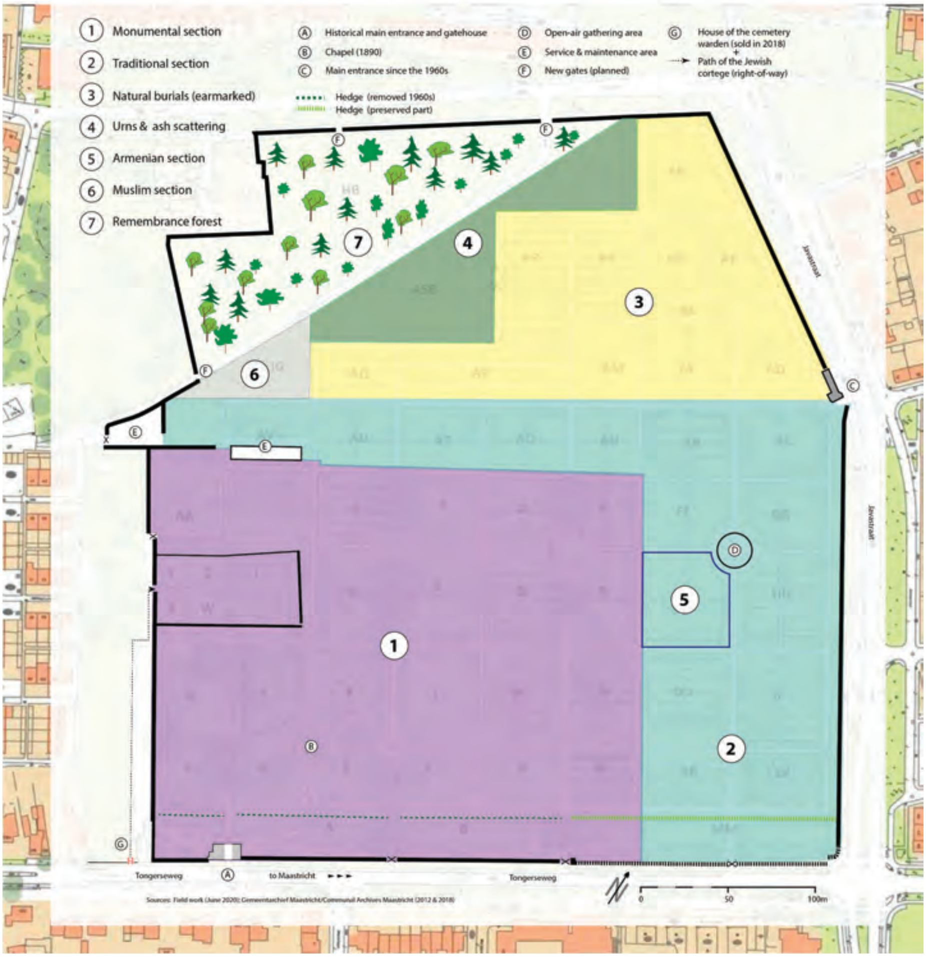


Figure 8. Future plan of Cemetery Tongerseweg, dividing the cemetery into multiple parts. (1) is the "traditional" part, where monumental graves can be spotted; this part will remain as it is today. Part (2) will be slightly altered to include grave sections for different communities, in particular the new Armenian grave field (5). Part (3) will be redesigned and is earmarked for urns. Part (4) will offer provisions for ash disposal. Part (6) accommodates new Islamic burials. Part (7) is an important extension, intended for a memorial forest. (T.K.).

At present, the Armenian community in Maastricht is relatively young. The actual number of deaths in the Armenian community does not yet justify a dedicated grave section. In recent years, only three deaths have taken place. Of these, only one member of the Armenian community has been buried at Cemetery Tongerseweg. This situation compares to the Muslim community in the 1980s, which was also too small for a separate section. In that case, changes in the legal system resulted in a separate section. In the case of the Armenian community, it is economic considerations that have pushed the cemetery management towards planning a dedicated ritual space for them.

Also, the single Armenian headstone that has been placed recently follows the pattern of the Islamic grave described above (cf. Figures 7 and 9a,b). The Armenian grave also marks multiple identifications. It does not stand out from other Dutch graves at the cemetery, as it is similar in shape, size and material used. The deceased's name and dates of birth and death are written in Latin script. At the same time, the large picture, *khachkar* and Armenian letters on the grave indicate the Armenian background of the deceased. In front of the tombstone, temporary grave decorations (a signboard saying "Armenia" and a small wooden *khachkar*; see Figure 9b) similarly emphasize his Armenian identity. As a simple, yet distinctive grave, it remains to be seen whether or how this first grave will prove to be a model for future Armenian graves.

With all these new measures, the Cemetery Tongerseweg not only aims to market itself as the one-stop provider of diverse funeral wishes, it also aims at creating funerary demand. The Islamic and Armenian sections as well as the attempts to reshape the cemetery to include more "natural" burial areas all have to be understood in this light as attempts to emphasize the existence of and/or to create new communities to keep the cemetery viable and relevant.

(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 9. (**a**,**b**) Details of the first Armenian grave on the plot allocated to the Armenian Apostolic Community in Maastricht (photographs: M.W.).

8. Discussion

Cemeteries frequently are public spaces, sometimes walled or fenced-off and closed at night, but otherwise open to all. This does not preclude them from being ritual spaces, as outlined in the Introduction, with specific expectations of behavior during funerals, collective commemoration ceremonies and individual grave visits (Bachelor 2004; Francis et al. 2000, 2005; Kjærsgaard and Venbrux 2016; Schmied 2002). Of course, not every behavior at cemeteries is ritualized; cemeteries are also popular with tourists and flaneurs, who are nonetheless also expected to behave "properly" and can also be(come) "pilgrims" to certain graves (Kmec 2020; Rugg 2000, p. 264; Venbrux 2010)

We would like to suggest that the inner divisions of Cemetery Tongerseweg over time develop in accordance with Evans-Pritchard (1940) concept of "segmentary opposition". The dynamics implied in segmentary opposition make it a very suitable theoretical tool for a diachronic analysis of the cemetery as a ritual space. In the original context, as Evans-Pritchard points out, "The relation between tribes and between segments of a tribe which gives them political unity and distinction is one of opposition" (Evans-Pritchard 1940, pp. 282–83). A segment can thus be in opposition to another segment, but both segments in turn can join in opposition to a third one. The Calvinists and the Lutherans had each a section; they formed two segments in opposition to each other. This distinction, however, disappeared when they stood as Protestants in opposition to the Roman Catholics. Next, they became a unity as Christians (the hedge separating them was removed) vis-à-vis the Muslims (spatially separated from them) who began to enter the cemetery around that point in time. The weakening of the ranks of the Catholics in the cemetery might in part be resolved by Armenian Christians, with a new section or segment, moving in.

As the Armenian example shows, this may be a win-win situation. There is, nonetheless, the possibility of a "re-pillarization" of Dutch society unintentionally effected by the actions of cemetery planners and managers. Rather than integration (Krabben 2004), in actual fact, segregation appears to be taking place. What is more, the native Dutch opting for the cemetery decreases, whereas migrants are expected to follow a unilinear trajectory of pillarization as a means of emancipation.

As this article has shown, a cemetery is not only shaped by municipal councils, planners and managers, but it is also inventively customized and cocreated by its users. Our examples show different ways of articulating the position of one's family (or deceased family member) as "different": to overcome distinction by emphasis on high office and family unity across confessional divides (Figure 3) or to transcend distinction by emphasis on common values (Figure 5) and hybrid identities of migrant and host country culture (Figures 7 and 9a,b).

The role of service-providers should not be underestimated either, as the design of individual gravestones is to a large extent predetermined by the funeral industry, but that discussion is beyond our scope here (Schmitt et al. 2018). This cocreation of space is not only reflecting past and present changing social relations but also has a prospective dimension: the cemetery is an arena, in which people seek to achieve social recognition, visibility and respectability. It constitutes a means to display groupness (Brubaker 2001) but also social bonds across groups. In an increasingly plural society, cemeteries continue to provide "order" and may thereby contribute to a "re-pillarization" or segregation.

We propose to view Cemetery Tongerseweg not as one single space but as a multitude of overlapping (ritual) spaces, just as society is not uniform but a multitude of intermeshed imagined and interpretive communities. The early nineteenth French "egalitarian" ideology did not, contrary to popular assumptions, seek to dissolve all communities in one large citizenship but rather encouraged emancipation and identity claims—while simultaneously aiming at building an overarching rational society. We find similar dialectics at work today, where diversity and integration are promoted concurrently. What is happening in Cemetery Tongerseweg is that it creates, builds, evokes and represents as well as relativizes and backgrounds communities; the cemetery is thus an arena of and for society.

Cemetery Tongerseweg is thus a hybrid space, on the one hand, a rigorously rational, economically minded administrative infrastructure, and on the other hand, emotionally charged at an individual as well as collective level. To use (Tönnies [1887] 2001) ideal-types, the cemetery is clearly not just mirroring (rational) society but is also addressing (affective, normative) communities.

A model needs to be built to illustrate that and how ritual spaces and communities shape each other. The cemetery is the arena in which this is taking place; planners and users with their respective allies are cocreators of the ritual spaces in a cemetery. All of this goes beyond the opposition between the passive mirror analogy and the depiction of the cemetery as an idealized compensatory world that can be found in literature.

Building a model that gets the balance right is by no means easy. The required model needs to have explanatory value through idealization as well as enough detail to capture the complexities of cocreation. The following "Arena Model" of cemeteries as dynamic ritual spaces strikes in our view the desired balance and captures our discussion (Figure 10):

Understanding ritual space is a complicated matter because the actors and factors engaged in processes of cocreating a ritual space are diverse and complex; moreover, we should view cemeteries as an ensemble, a plurality of ritual spaces. As Figure 10 shows, the causality (if that is not the wrong word entirely) goes both ways, or rather runs in a circle: cemeteries as an ensemble of ritual spaces are reliant on pre-existing communities, but they also evoke, produce and maintain communities. And, to complicate things further, not only does the physical layout codetermine the ritual space at the disposal of its users, but the users respond and cocreate ritual space in placing a wide range of ritual markers (e.g., gravestones and semipermanent or transitory ritual props that can enhance, but also mitigate or even contradict, the communities created by the spatial layout).

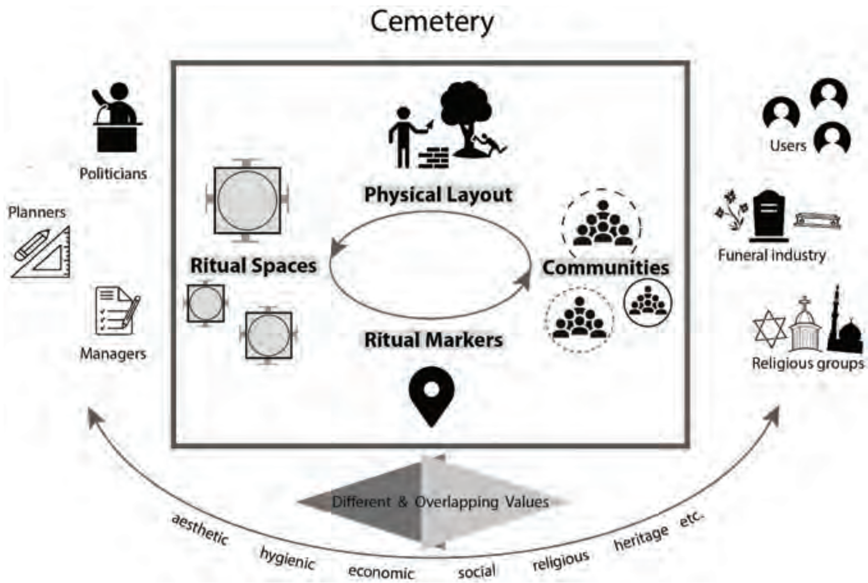


Figure 10. The Arena Model of cemeteries as dynamic ritual spaces (model: C.J., infographic: T.K.).

All of this shows how different stakeholders and their allies cocreate ritual spaces in the cemetery by means of permanent, semi- or nonpermanent performative acts that range all the way from expansive gestures such as erecting walls or laying out paths to the smaller, less permanent performative acts such as the placement of a prayer bead.

9. Conclusions

At the end, it is time to look back: with an integrated approach that combines strategies from the tradition of symbolic anthropology and history, we have traced the development of a specific cemetery, Tongerseweg in Maastricht (The Netherlands), over the course of two hundred years, and we have suggested a model that can capture the complexities of cocreating the cemetery as an internally diverse ritual arena (in the sense of ritual space-in-potentiality).

In line with our approach, the method relies on thick description; if we were to locate our research on a spectrum between idiographic and nomothetic approaches, it would definitely stay close to the idiographic end. In what sense, then, can our results be said to have a more general applicability and where are the limitations? Obviously, our research project has focused on a highly complex, culturally diverse society. Also, the existence of different professional and nonprofessional roles bearing on Cemetery Tongerseweg has been taken as a given. Clearly, not all societies are so complex and culturally diverse, and not all societies have so clearly differentiated professional and nonprofessional roles. In short, the same issues may not arise in less diverse and less differentiated societies, and they may not arise where cemeteries are not constructed to aggregate different groups in society as Cemetery Tongerseweg was, in an effort to build a municipal cemetery in a largely Roman Catholic society following French regulations and expectations at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Having said that, the applicability of the arena model does extend beyond the specific case of this cemetery, for contingent historical reasons. Since the late eighteenth-century, Enlightenment inspired rulers and administrations all over Europe proposed a new spatial concept of burial grounds. Driven by hygienic concerns and scientific modes of management and rational organization, these reform movements sought to replace monoconfessional church-owned graveyards with modern cemeteries of a supraconfessional impetus. In France, Prussia, Austria, Russia and many other states, the symmetrical outlook of burial sites became a visible marker of progress and modernization. This benchmark of best practice was not implemented everywhere, of course. However, in expanding urban areas, it became the standard with some regional variations. The Maastricht case shows an adaptation of this pattern.

Where does the applicability of our model end? This is hard to tell in the abstract. As we have shown, the model derives from the specific case of Tongerseweg Maastricht. It certainly applies to other cemeteries in Europe. Further research would be needed to tell whether or not the Arena Model of ritual space is applicable further afield, and which changes would be necessary for it to be heuristically and analytically useful in different circumstances.[5]

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Article

Practices of Ritualization in a Dutch Hospice Setting

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Abstract: In this article, we explore rituals and ritualized care practices in a hospice in the Netherlands. The research is guided by two research questions. First, we want to know what kind of rituals and ritualized care practices are taking place in the hospice. Second, we aim to understand these practices from a cultural perspective, i.e., to what cultural values do these practices refer? We distinguish five types of ritual: (1) care practices in the morning; (2) meals; (3) care practices in the evening; (4) care practices in the dying phase; (5) a farewell ritual after a patient has died. Ritualization takes place in various degrees and forms, depending on changes in the state of liminality. Analysis of ritualized care practices shows that everyday care practices are enriched with non-instrumental elements that have a strong symbolic meaning, referring to the cultural value of the 'good death'.

Keywords: rituals; hospice; spirituality; cultural analysis; good death

1. Introduction

Rituals take place throughout our lives, but they become more visible during pivotal moments (Van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969). Being confronted with illness and death is a defining moment in life (Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Van Uden and Pieper 2012). Emotions and questions rise to the surface which cannot all be dealt with in a rational way. Rituals can help to provide a sense of meaning in situations we do not fully understand (Van Beek 2007).

Palliative care settings provide rich ground for rituals. When nothing can be done in terms of curing illness, rituals can provide an important source of meaning. The spectrum of rituals in palliative care settings is broad. It goes from more or less formalized rituals, such as a wake at the bedside of a dying person and religious rituals such as the anointment of the sick, to daily care practices with a ritual dimension, such as placing photos on the bedside table to make the dying person's social network visible. Practices with a ritual dimension, or ritualized acts, are practices that go beyond the mere instrumental or functional aim of the act. Those acts combine an instrumental and a symbolic dimension, referring to meaning(s) outside the act itself. 'Something' is added, which is useless from a medical perspective but meaningful to the persons involved (the healthcare professional and/or the patient). In the context of palliative care, there are numerous examples of ritualized acts that provide a sense of meaning to patients, families and healthcare professionals. Van der Geest (2005, p. 140) describes how the act of fluffing up a patient's pillow by a nurse is not just an instrumental act of making the patient more comfortable. This small and simple act also shows that the nurse is concerned with the patient, which in return might fill the patient with a positive feeling. The symbolic dimension of care is present in this seemingly small act. It exemplifies a caring relationship and shows that the patient is valuable to the nurse (Van der Weegen et al. 2019).

In this article, we will explore rituals and ritualized care practices in a hospice in the Netherlands. The research is guided by two research questions. First, we want to know what kind of rituals and ritualized care practices are taking place in the hospice. Second, we aim at understanding these practices from a cultural perspective, i.e., to what cultural values do these practices refer? To answer the second research question, we will make use of the concept of death mentalities, as coined by the French historian Philippe Ariès (Ariès 1974; Jacobsen 2016), in which practices are linked to views of life and death.

2. Conceptual Framework: Spirituality, Ritual and the Hospice as a Liminal Space

2.1. Spirituality

Approaching care practices in a hospice from a ritual perspective fits the holistic approach of palliative care itself. From its beginnings, palliative care applies a holistic approach of care, meaning that a patient is approached from physical, psychological, social and spiritual perspectives. This becomes clear in, among other things, the definition of palliative care by the World Health Organization (WHO):

> "[. . .] an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual."[1]

It is mainly the spiritual dimension of palliative care that leads us to pay attention to rituals and ritualized care practices. With this approach we follow, among others, ritual studies scholar Ronald Grimes, who explicitly links spirituality to ritual. In relation to the second research question of this article, we use a definition of spirituality which is, on the one hand, closely linked to the context of the research (palliative care and hospice care), and on the other hand, open and broad to include both religious and non-religious views on dying and death. For these reasons, we use the European consensus definition that was developed in the context of palliative care. According to this definition, spirituality is:

> "[. . .] the dynamic dimension of human life that relates to the way persons (individual and community) experience, express and/or seek meaning, purpose and transcendence, and the way they connect to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, to the significant and/or the sacred." (Nolan et al. 2011, p. 88)

This broad definition addresses both the individual and relational aspects of spirituality. In this study, we take on a relational approach of spirituality by looking at spirituality as a dimension that occurs in contacts between healthcare professionals and patients. Within this care relationship, meaning-making practices take place both implicitly and explicitly. This means we can find the spiritual dimension in everyday care practices.

2.2. Ritual and Ritualization

The focus on the spiritual dimension of everyday care practices led us to the field of ritual studies. So far, we have used the concepts of ritual and ritualization without defining them. In everyday language, the term ritual can have a negative connotation when it is used to describe repetitive and useless acts. We approach ritual as a cultural phenomenon and focus on the structures, meanings and functions of rituals (Post 2015). The following definition, developed by Paul Post, inspired by, among others, Tambiah and Grimes, corresponds to this approach:

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1 https://www.who.int/cancer/palliative/definition/en/ (accessed 2 July 2020).

> "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." (Post 2015, p. 7)

Characteristics that can be derived from this definition are repetition, enactment, symbolism, formalization and stylization. The second part of the definition focusses on possible functions of rituals, such as the expressive, social and ethical functions that rituals can have. Next to that, Post's definition shows that rituals are performative, as Stanley Tambiah already stated in his seminal 1979 article (Tambiah 1979).

Despite the use of a definition that states some of the key characteristics and functions of a ritual, it is not straightforward to identify an act as a ritual. Grimes (1990) states that when an act becomes dense with ritual characteristics, one can speak of ritualization or even a ritual. Whether an act is acknowledged as a ritual, is not a matter of definition but a cultural issue. Focusing on everyday practices in the field of palliative care, only a small number of activities can be formally labelled a ritual. However, there are many care practices which have ritual characteristics or functions. This field teaches us that even seemingly trivial and routine practices can become a source of meaning and spirituality, depending on the context and ways they are performed. This happens through processes of ritualization, which can be defined as consciously or unconsciously adding a ritual dimension to routine practices. On the surface, these practices might seem ordinary, but underneath, there are deeper symbolic meanings that go beyond the practice itself (Grimes 2014). We are often not aware of this. We act the way we act because it seems natural or appropriate in a situation (Bell 1997). Ritualization happens more often in situations in which we experience insecurity, a lack of control and discomfort. As such, the hospice is full of ritualized practices. Consequently, the focus within this article is placed on the processes of ritualization that take place in everyday care practices.

2.3. The Hospice as a Liminal Space

The dying process can be described as a rite of passage, a type of ritual that accompanies major life transitions. According to the rite of passage theory (Van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969), life transitions take place in a structured way and contain culture-specific values of the group, community or society that performs and witnesses the rite. During the rite of passage, separation takes place from former roles and identities and a person enters a state of liminality, a concept that we derive from Victor Turner who coined this quite complex concept as follows: "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial." (Turner 1969, p. 95). This 'in-betweenness' is what happens when a person enters the palliative terminal phase of life, which is expressed and marked by all kinds of ritual acts. A liminal state is a state in which former roles and identities are (partially) abandoned and the new state is not in place yet. This liminal state allows for creativity and for situations to occur that otherwise would not be possible or appropriate (Thomassen 2016; Horváth et al. 2015). The relationships that are formed between the people involved, in this case the patients, family members and hospice staff, provide a base for transformation (Grimes 2014). In the context of the hospice, the physical transition to the hospice facility further intensifies the state of liminality. From their familiar environment, people now enter an unfamiliar physical place that is different and providing a break from the ordinary.

3. Methods

3.1. Design

Exploring the ritual dimension of care practices in a hospice facility, we applied a qualitative descriptive approach. Because ritualization is a natural part of human actions and interaction, including care practice, healthcare professionals are often not aware of it. To explore this tacit aspect of care practice, participant observation was chosen as one of the methods for data collection (see also Borgstrom 2018). In addition, in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to further clarify observations.

3.2. Context

Palliative care in the Netherlands is considered a generalist service; every nurse or doctor is expected to be able to provide palliative care. There are dedicated hospice services in the Netherlands consisting of in-patient professional driven hospices, in-patient volunteer driven hospices, a small amount of palliative care units within other healthcare institutions and hospice teams working in the community.

This study took place in an in-patient professional-driven hospice facility, referred to in the Netherlands as a 'high care hospice'. To obtain access to this hospice was quite easy, for one of the involved researchers (M.T.) is affiliated with the hospice as spiritual caregiver. This hospice facility has its own staff of healthcare professionals consisting of nurses, elderly care physicians and a spiritual counsellor. In addition, there is a team of volunteers supporting the hospice staff. The hospice consists of 16 private apartments. The hospice is located in a small city in the Netherlands, in the middle of a residential area next to the city center. The building is less than ten years old and was specifically designed as a hospice. The hospice is subtly placed in its surroundings and the simple façade is positioned some distance away from the street. The rest of the building is tucked away behind surrounding buildings that belong to a care facility. Visitors have to ring the doorbell and announce who they are before getting access. Even though the building is located in the middle of a city and community, it does not feel part of it. From the street, the building is hardly recognizable as a hospice and only in specific circumstances do people have access. From the inside of the hospice, there is hardly any contact with public life going on outside its walls. Pretty much all the spaces have large floor-to-ceiling windows but they look out over landscaped courtyards or the large garden, not on the surrounding streets.

Patients and family members entering the hospice are taken into the specific atmosphere of the hospice. An atmosphere that is dedicated to the experience of a good dying process. The different spaces at the hospice offer possibilities for privacy, togetherness, relaxation and contemplation. The spaces are decorated with warm materials and colors, symbolically referring to the peace, tranquility and even the strength of nature, and although patients and their families were taken into the specific atmosphere and structures of the hospice, staff recognized that each patient goes through the dying process in his or her own way.

3.3. Participants

All hospice staff, 14 nurses, 2 elderly care physicians and 1 spiritual counsellor, participated in the observational part of the study. Because the study focused on healthcare professionals, the hospice volunteers were not part of the study population. Four nurses served as key informants during observations. The number of patients participating in the study differed during the course of observations. Patients were eligible to participate if they were able and willing to provide verbal or written informed consent. About half the population of hospice patients was unable to meet this criterion. In total, ten patients and their relatives participated in the observational part of the study. In addition to the observations, five nurses, one physician, two patients and one relative participated in semi-structured interviews.

3.4. Data Collection

During October and November of 2017, researcher K.v.d.W. (who is both an anthropologist and a nurse) visited the hospice 18 times, during both day and evening shifts. A total of 120 h of observation were conducted. The degree of participation varied depending on the situation. Detailed field notes were written to cover the observations. The focus of the observations was interactions between healthcare professionals (nurses and physicians) and patients and their relatives. The researcher looked for explicit rituals and more-or-less implicit ritualized care practices taking place during the day. The researcher used the elements and qualities of ritual as described by Grimes (2014) as a model to describe and analyze practices from different angles and to identify specific meaning-making practices. Between observations, the researcher used techniques of informal interviewing to further discuss certain topics or situations with participants.

Five nurses, one physician, two patients and one relative participated in additional semi-structured interviews, conducted by researcher K.v.d.W. Each interview lasted, on average, 45 min and was audio recorded. Topic lists were developed by the research group (K.v.d.W., M.T., M.H. and A.v.d.H.)[2] and based on themes from literature on death mentalities and themes from observations. The main topics were: the connection between spirituality (as defined above) and ritualization, experiences with meaning-making practices in everyday care situations and views on life and death.

3.5. Data Analysis

Detailed anonymized field notes of observations were analyzed deductively, by researchers K.v.d.W. and M.H., using a theoretical and hermeneutical framework for studying ritual, based on models from Ronald Grimes (2014) and Catherine Bell (Bell 1997). The framework consists of elements, qualities and functions that can make up a ritual. Different types of practices taking place during interactions between doctors/nurses and patients/relatives were analyzed by identifying if and how ritual elements, characteristics and functions were present in the situation. See Table 1 for the framework for analysis.

Table 1. Framework for analysis.

Actions	Which actions take place in this situation and why are they deemed appropriate?
Qualities	Which ritual qualities can be applied to this situation? *(e.g., enactment, stylization, repetitive, standardized, meaning, multi-layered, symbolic and deliberate)*
Actors	Who ritualizes in this situation and to whom is it directed?
Functions	What is the function of ritualization in this situation? *(e.g., discharge function, ethical function, prophylactic function, expressive function, social function and recreational function)*
Place, objects, time	What are the roles of place, objects and time in this situation?
Category	Is there a ritual category applicable to this situation? *(e.g., rites of passage, calendar rites, rites of exchange and communion, rites of affliction and healing and feasts and festivals)*

Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the anonymized interview transcripts by researcher K.v.d.W. Open coding was the first step in the process of analysis. The initial codes were then clustered into groups. Themes were then ascribed to the different clusters of codes. The principle of constant comparison was used during the process of analysis. The process of analysis was monitored by researchers M.T., M.H. and A.v.d.H. by periodically discussing and reflecting on the evolving codes and themes.

4. Findings

4.1. Ritualization of Care Practices

Observations showed that ritualization took place during all types of care practices at the hospice. The repertoire of ritualized care practices in the hospice consists of (1) care practices in the morning,

2 The research group consisted of four members. K.v.d.W. has a background in anthropology and is nurse, M.T. is spiritual caregiver in the hospice that functioned as site of research, M.H. is a ritual studies scholar and A.v.d.H. is professor in medical decision-making and care at the end of life.

such as washing, dressing and providing medicines; (2) meals; (3) care practices in the evening, such as undressing, putting on pajamas and putting to bed; (4) care practices in the dying phase, such as washing and putting on clean clothes; (5) a farewell ritual after a patient has died. This last ritual differs from the other ones because, instead of focusing on the patient, it focuses on both the bereaved and the care professionals who took care of the patient. The farewell ritual concludes the period of the stay in the hospice.

Analysis of the various ritualized care practices in the hospice context shows that ritualization takes place on a continuum. This means that ritualization takes place in various degrees and forms depending on changes in the dying process. We saw lower degrees of ritualization when the situation of the patient was relatively stable. This was the case with patients staying at the hospice for a longer period of time because their health situation stayed the same or deteriorated very slowly. In these situations, ritualization was directed at coping with the liminal situation of being in the hospice. This often happened by creating small moments of significance during bathing moments, meals (see Brumberg-Kraus 2020), bed time and during the night.

High degrees of ritualization were found on the other side of the continuum, when the situation of the patient was unstable because transition to death came near. This was the case with patients who entered the dying phase. In these situations, ritualization was directed to preparing for and assisting in a good transition to death. In the following, we will describe, analyze and evaluate two ritualized care practices, on both ends of the continuum.

4.2. Small Moments of Significance

Mrs. Van Beek had been staying at the hospice for quite a number of weeks. She was an active woman until recently. Mrs. Van Beek is now immobile and spends her days in a wheelchair and in bed, sleeping most of the time. Her eyesight is bad so activities to occupy herself are difficult. Despite regular visits from family and friends, she often expresses that she feels lonely and that every day feels the same. During day-to-day practices at the hospice, nurses take this into account. They engage in contact with Mrs. Van Beek as often as possible, mostly through the senses of touch, smell and taste. Nurses pay specific attention to the bed bath Mrs. Van Beek gets in the mornings. She enjoys the proximity of the nurses in this situation and being pampered. The bed bath was given according to the existing nursing protocols and guidelines. The nurse, however, added her own elements to this situation. She brought in heated towels to cover Mrs. Van Beek during the process of washing and getting dressed. The nurse indicated that she found it important to give her patients a little bit of a wellness moment. Another essential element of the bed bath was to attentively massage Mrs. Van Beek using her personal marigold oil. The sensation and smell brought about positive associations and feelings, and every time, Mrs. Van Beek would remark on this. The nurse always ended the bathing moment by applying Mrs. Van Beek's favorite perfume, and again, she would comment how much she loved the smell.

The case of Mrs. Van Beek exemplifies how patients at the hospice can experience the state of liminality. She entered the hospice knowing that she was going to die but her health situation has remained the same for weeks now. Because she is too weak to do anything, her days are pretty much the same. In this relatively stable state of liminality, degrees of ritualization are low.

The routine bathing moment stands out from the ordinary through the stylized and deliberate use of warmth, massage and smell. The acts are symbolic because they served to connect to Mrs. Van Beek and to acknowledge her value as a person. This was both meaningful to the nurse and to Mrs. Van Beek. The marigold oil and perfume were symbolic objects because they represented positive associations with home and the life she used to live, which are meaningful to Mrs. Van Beek.

In this situation, ritualization had a recreational function by providing a small moment of significance that stands out in a day in which there was little to look forward to. These small moments of joy are her anchors during the day that provide structure and meaning. In that way, these practices could also be prophylactic, and in a small way, they might help Mrs. Van Beek cope with her situation.

To the nurse, ritualization also had an expressive function as a way of expressing the value that she attributes to Mrs. Van Beek as a person.

As insignificant as these small, ritualized activities might appear, they create structure, meaning and value in the days of the patients and are a source of human connectedness, compassion and acknowledgment.

4.3. Nearing Death: Intensification of Ritualization

Mr. Bakker was only a few days at the hospice when his condition deteriorated rapidly and palliative sedation was started. His family was very involved and stayed with him most of the day. During the night, they went home to get some rest. At the start of the morning shift, one of the nurses went to care for Mr. Bakker. She explained that she always tried to attend to patients in the dying phase first, before the family would come, so she would not have to disturb them later. Mr. Bakker was in the final phases of life but the nurse felt it was important to give him a quick bed bath to freshen up. She did not want to add any stress or discomfort to the situation so she only washed the body parts she could reach without having to manipulate the body too much. The nurse noticed that his shirt was wet from sweating and doubted whether she should change it. After thinking about it, she decided to change the shirt. Mr. Bakker opened his eyes and made noises breathing in the process of changing the shirt, signaling discomfort, so the nurse tried to work as subtly as she could. Eventually, the nurse turned him on his side and positioned him comfortably using pillows. On the pillow, the nurse placed a towel to collect the occasional mucus escaping from the mouth. After caring for Mr. Bakker, the nurse paid close attention to tidying up the room. She placed the bed in the middle of the room and a chair next to the bed. The bedside table, decorated with pictures of family, was now located on the opposite side of the bed so she relocated it facing towards Mr. Bakker. On the dresser the nurse saw a bracelet Mr. Bakker used to wear and a rosary; she placed both in front of the pictures on the bedside table. When asked why she did that, she could not really explain. She stated that she always does those things because it makes her feel good to do so. She also stressed that she would not place items in the bed with the patient unless she is sure a patient has a strong connection to the items.

This situation is an example in which the state of liminality is changing because the transition to death is near. The experienced intensity and importance of the situation is expressed and marked by high degrees of ritualization and multiple layers of interpretation. In this situation, the nurse enacts the hospice ideal of a good death. In a stylized way, she washes away traces of bodily distress, making sure the client appears to the family as clean and calm. She deliberately places the bedside table with the pictures, bracelet and rosary near the patient. These objects are symbols of what is important to the patient, and by placing them, the nurse acknowledges that. By paying attention to the placement of objects in the room, she also expresses her acknowledgment of Mr. Bakker as a unique person, not just a patient who can be anybody. To a certain degree, the situation is also repetitive and standardized. Although the nurse tailors her care to the needs of this individual person, she also acts in a way that is common for healthcare professionals in the dying phase. They do not simply act this way because it is routine but because it is considered meaningful to both themselves and to the patient and his family. The practice of giving the patient a superficial bed bath in the dying phase is not purely instrumental but mostly symbolic. It is about respecting the integrity of the body, the value that is attributed to the person and the life he lived and the value that is attributed to the dying process.

Ritualization in this situation has a prophylactic function—it helps both the nurse and the family to cope with the situation. It is a way for the nurse to deal with the imminent loss of the patient. She also attempts to help the family cope by making the patient appear as dignified as possible, clean and seemingly calm. Ritualization is also expressive in this situation. Through her actions, the nurse communicates that she values Mr. Bakker as a person and values his process towards a good death.

5. Discussion: Ritualizing Everyday Care Practices

The two examples show that everyday care practices are enriched with non-instrumental elements that have a strong symbolic value. The way a practice is performed, both following the protocol and adding personal elements, adds to the spiritual dimension of palliative care. On the one hand, this is just 'good and professional care', while on the other, it turns this specific care practice into a 'sacred' moment in time. We use the word 'sacred' here in accordance with Gordon Lynch's cultural-sociological approach of the sacred, referring to the moral or guiding values on which people build their lives (Lynch 2012). What is sacred to us is set apart because it transcends the physical reality of everyday life. The moral or guiding values that we hold sacred seem natural and fixed, so we are often not aware of them. However, they are products of culture and history that are constantly being negotiated and recreated. The main sacred, moral value that is both produced and expressed in the ritualized care practices is the value of the 'good death'. The concept of 'good death' is closely linked to the hospice movement as initiated by Cicely Saunders as of 1967 (Milicevic 2002). Within the healthcare community and, more specifically, in hospice and palliative care, there has been discussion of the concept of a good death (Gawande 2015; Raisio et al. 2015). According to an Institute of Medicine report (USA), a good death is one that is "free from avoidable distress and suffering for patient, family, and caregivers, in general accord with the patient's and family's wishes, and reasonably consistent with clinical, cultural, and ethical standards." (Field and Cassel 1997, p. 24). However, as Raisio et al. state, "a good death can be considered a 'wicked issue'—that is, a highly divisive and complex matter on which no consensus is evident." (Raisio et al. 2015, p. 159).

The concept of the good death can be linked to the history of cultural attitudes towards death, as coined by Philippe Ariès (Ariès 1974, 1983). Ariès made a distinction between pre-modern and modern conceptions of the good death, but actually, this is too simple. Both conceptions are part of modern day reality and coexist next to each other. The 'pre-modern' conception of a good death focused on the religious dimension: being at peace with God at the moment of death. This way of thinking about the dying process is still an issue, even though it is not phrased in religious terms. In literature, we see that 'being at peace' with the impending death, with family, friends and oneself is the norm according to many palliative care professionals and patients (Coward and Stajduhar 2012, p. 141; Bramadat et al. 2013, p. 107).

The 'modern' conception of a good death came out of advances in medical science. As the dying process became increasingly medicalized, the imperative became to avoid suffering and pain and to postpone death. Ariès coined this attitude as the taboo on death or the denial of death (see also Becker 1973). At the same time, a new attitude towards death emerged of which the hospice movement is part. The keyword in this new attitude is 'control'. In the hospice movement, this has been translated in controlling the suffering and helping people to die in dignity and without pain. This conceptualization of a good death, however, is complex and contested. A good death does not refer to a fixed moment in time but should be seen as a complex set of relations and preparations (McNamara et al. 1994). It does involve a range of attributes, such as being comfortable, a sense of closure, recognition of the value of the dying person, honoring of beliefs and values and optimizing relationships (Kehl 2006). These characteristics or attributes of the good death are made visible in the ritualized care practices as described and analyzed above. Palliative care professionals are trying to hide the 'ugliness' of death, at least from the dying person's family perspective, and to make the dying process as comfortable as possible.

6. Conclusions

In this study, we explored rituals and ritualized care practices in a hospice in the Netherlands. The exploration of these practices led to two types of categorization: the first one is more or less practical, referring to the moments of the day and the character of the acts; the second one is linked to the health condition of the patient and the impending death.

We have brought the exploration of rituals and ritualizing within the broader framework of the spiritual dimension of palliative care, using a general and broad definition of spirituality referring to notions of meaning, purpose and transcendence, and the way people connect to the moment, to self, to others, to nature and to the significant and/or the sacred. In ritualized care practices, meaning and purpose are linked to the concept of the good death. Hospice staff recognize the major life transition their patients and families are going through when they enter the hospice. Although the care professionals do not mention the concept of the good death, the analysis from a ritual and cultural perspective has shown that this value guides the everyday care practices and the professionals' approach of the patients.

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Article

Ritual Void or Ritual Muddle? Deconsecration Rites of Roman Catholic Church Buildings

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Abstract: The decrease in people who regularly celebrate liturgy in western Europe has led to the question of what to do with so-called obsolete church buildings. This question not only refers to whether or not a church building will be converted, reused or demolished, but also to the question of whether or not such a building needs to be deconsecrated, and if so, what does deconsecration of a church building actually entail? In this contribution, I will consider the role deconsecration rites play in the Roman Catholic church when a church building is taken out of liturgical use. In Roman Catholic liturgy, there are no prescribed, official deconsecration rites that are mandatory for a church building that is to be taken out of liturgical use. The actual deconsecration of a church building is, according to canon law, established by a decree that is issued by the responsible diocesan bishop. In the case of a church being taken out of liturgical use, however, there seems to be a shift from having a ritual void with regard to deconsecration rites, and also a focus on the "legitimate" way (in the sense of canon law) to deconsecrate a church building (object orientation), towards, in recent decades, paying more attention to a growing pastoral need (subject orientation) for deconsecration rites. These new ritual initiatives can be regarded as forms of pastoral care intended to help parishioners cope with the loss of their church building. I will show that different interpretations of canon law articles complicate straightforward answers to the question of which arguments are legitimate to deconsecrate a church. Furthermore, I will address the "ritual muddle", the mixture of the actual deconsecration act in the sense of canon law and deconsecration rites that, from the perspective of canon law, do not effect church deconsecration. I will also address the differentiation between desecration and deconsecration, address historical forms of deconsecration rites and pay attention to the making and unmaking of sacred space. Finally, I will focus on contemporary deconsecration rites against the background of the complex reality in which such rites are situated.

Keywords: deconsecration; desecration; consecration; profanation; church buildings; sacred space; church reuse; altar; Roman Catholic Church; canon law

1. Introduction

Against the background of a decline in number of people who partake in regular liturgical celebrations, as well as a decline in church finances, the question of what to do with the surplus of church buildings has become a pressing matter for several decades in western Europe (De Wildt and Plum 2019). The Dutch ritual studies scholar Paul Post speaks in this context of the fact that church buildings are becoming more and more of "a problem" and that there is a shift of interest from redesigning church interiors to the current problems of church vacancy and reuse (Post 2010, pp. 41–44). Post regards cases of:

> "(…) redundancy, demolition, and disappearance of church buildings as the ultimate sign of disappearing ritual and, immediately in its wake, the sign of disappearing religion as well." (Post 2019, p. 46)

These "disappearing" church buildings do, however, in most cases not disappear without some sort of last ritual, before indeed leaving a ritual void.

In this contribution, I will focus on the deconsecration of Roman Catholic church buildings in the context of canon law (CIC/1983), with reference to the making and unmaking of sacred space, before I focus on contemporary deconsecration rites. When a Roman Catholic church is taken out of liturgical use, whether or not it is to be reused, or in fewer cases, demolished, usually the church building is desacralized by a formal act of deconsecration or profanation. This specific aspect of "changing" the status of a sacred space into that of a profane or secular space can be read against the background of the recent transformations of sacred space that take place in western Europe (De Wildt et al. 2019).

The topic of church conversion or church reuse has been given much attention in recent decades (see for instance the extensive bibliography on the topic of church conversions of the Swiss Religious Heritage Day–Schweizer Kirchenbautag of the University of Bern: Literatur zu Kirchenumnutzungen n.d.). The literature on church reuse, however, focuses predominantly on the many best practice examples of and on how such reuse processes can be managed from the perspectives of architecture, monument conservation and real estate management. The theme of church deconsecration in literature, although sometimes implicitly mentioned, seems either overlooked, assumed clear or perhaps it is not addressed at all because it is regarded outdated. In this day and age, in which there seems to be a growing awareness that the simple dichotomy sacred—profane is not an apt representation of the far more intricate reality of sacred space, it may seem as if a discussion on church deconsecration in the sense of canon law is superfluous because it represents a worldview most of us have said farewell to. In my contacts with people in the field, however, predominantly in West Germany, who are confronted with the prospect of their church being reused and who are responsible for the process of taking a church out of liturgical use, many of the questions they ask are about deconsecration. In these conversations, a need to know how to actually deconsecrate a church, in the sense of canon law, is still expressed. From these conversations, I learned that there is a lack of knowledge on what church deconsecration in the Roman Catholic church actually entails. Some of the people in the field, often even experts, I spoke with, assumed for instance that deconsecration is the act of transferring the host from the tabernacle to a new church, whereas others were under the assumption that the last celebration of Mass effects the actual deconsecration of the church. Most of them wished for a clear-cut answer, they especially expressed a desire to know the church's institutional stance concerning church deconsecration with regard to canon law. Therefore, in this contribution, outdated as its subject may seem at first glance, I will address this topic in a manner that will highlight the complexities of church deconsecration. These complexities can partly be attributed to the shift in our understanding of what deconsecration rites are and what they are meant to accomplish. As I will show later on, there has been a shift in these rites from a perspective that focused on the "legitimate" way of deconsecrating a church to a perspective that concerns itself with the design of such rites for the wellbeing of the parishioners who are departing their church. These two aims have gotten mixed up, thus creating a ritual muddle in which it does not seem clear anymore what the actual function and status of such rites are, is it a way to undo the sacredness of a church building, or is it a ceremony that enables parishioners to cope with their feelings of loss and hurt? In most cases these two aims have gotten mixed up in one ritual, and therefore the ritual has become meaningless in the sense of canon law, since it is not a requirement for deconsecrating a church, and in a pastoral-liturgical sense as well because the focus on deconsecrating instead of focusing on dealing with the feelings of loss and transitioning makes it unclear what it is that is actually being ritualized here.

During my research on this topic, it soon became clear that there is no extensive literature on this topic, especially in contrast to the amount of literature there is on church reuse. There are some English-speaking contributions of canon lawyers, which I will present here, but the most extensive literature on this topic is in the German language. Here, the two German scholars of liturgical studies, Clemens Leonhard and Winfried Haunerland, proved to be the two main scholars that take on the problem of church deconsecration and deconsecration rites, not only from a historical perspective, but also from the perspective of the contemporary debates on church reuse. From my analysis of the English-speaking and German-speaking literature, I came to the conclusion that there are significant contradictions in the interpretation of the canon law articles that deal with church deconsecration. Moreover, the assessment of the German-speaking contributions showed that church deconsecration in the sense of canon law needs to be differentiated from deconsecration rites, rites that in fact have no part in bringing about the deconsecration of a church in the sense of canon law.

Canon law only recognizes three instances in which a church building is returned to a profane status: by its actual demolition, by the ongoing profane use of the building and by the disclosure of the deconsecration decree issued by the diocesan bishop (Haunerland 2016, p. 68).

There is, however, no official approved Roman Catholic rite for parish closure (Weldon 2004, p. xx). No formal rite is required for the deconsecration of a church building and there are no official deconsecration rites in the liturgical books issued by the Vatican, the issuing of a profanation decree by the responsible diocesan bishop suffices (Haunerland 2016, p. 68; Zimmerhof 2012, pp. 10, 19, 47–48; Leonhard 2012, p. 131). Still, there is a rise in the design of rituals for church buildings that are to be taken out of liturgical use. This ritual need is relatively new despite the fact that the closure of churches is not a new phenomenon (Simons 1998, p. 96).

2. "Grave Reasons" for Relegating a Church Building to Profane Use

Although church reuse is not a new phenomenon (De Wildt and Plum 2019, pp. 11–12), it has gained renewed interest in recent decades in those parts of the world that deal with a substantial decline in churchgoing, predominantly in western Europe. Nowadays a growing number of church buildings are considered obsolete, this is mostly attributed to declining numbers of people who partake in liturgical celebrations, to a shortage in priests and as a result of parish mergers. The *Letter from the Congregation for the Clergy* (Cardinal Piacenza and Iruzubieta 2013, p. 212) specifically states that:

> "(...) it is necessary to distinguish clearly between three separate and distinct canonical processes: (1) the modification of parishes, (2) the relegation to profane use and/or the permanent closure of churches, and (3) the alienation of current or former sacred edifices. Each process has its own procedures, and each must be followed carefully and correctly."

Here, the relation between parish modifications and church profanation and/or closure is clearly made by stressing the point that these processes should be clearly distinguished, whereas in reality, in a lot of cases, the question of the restructuring of parishes is actually closely related to the question of what to do with obsolete churches (Paprocki 1995). The parish modification, this letter states, must always be a matter of separate consideration and the decree must be motivated "(...) with a cause that is specific, i.e., ad rem, to the individual parish or church under consideration." Both procedures, parish modifications and church closure, require separate decrees (Cardinal Piacenza and Iruzubieta 2013, p. 212). Noteworthy is the fact that according to the Vatican canon lawyer Nikolaus Schöch, a reduction in numbers of people who celebrate the liturgy, priest shortage or the church being obsolete as a result of parish mergers are considered to be insufficient reasons for the relegation of a church to secular use (Schöch 2007, p. 494). The North-American canon lawyer, John M. Huels, however, refers to exactly two of these grounds—a decline in people who celebrate liturgy and a reduction in numbers of priests—as possible grave reasons that can be used as an argument to relegate a church to profane use (Huels 2000, p. 1432). Yet another canon lawyer, Thomas Schüller from Germany, states that economic problems, changed pastoral structures and the fact that churches are no longer needed constitute grave reasons (Schüller 2012, p. 273). The *Procedural Guidelines for the Modification of Parishes, the Closure or Relegation of Churches to Profane but not Sordid Use, and the Alienation of the Same* (hereafter: procedural guidelines) states on the basis of jurisprudence:

> "that the following reasons in themselves do not constitute grave cause:
>
> i. a general plan of the diocese to reduce the number of churches;

ii. the church is no longer needed;
iii. the parish has been suppressed;
iv. the number of parishioners has decreased;
v. v closure will not harm the good of souls;
vi. a desire to promote the unity of the parish;
vii. some potential future cause that has not actually happened yet" (Cardinal Piacenza and Iruzubieta 2013, p. 217).

As shown here, we encounter all kinds of different interpretations, which are all based on the same canon law articles, of what may be considered grave reasons for a church to be relegated to profane use. At the conference "Doesn't God Dwell Here Anymore? Decommissioning Places of Worship and Integrated Management of Ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage", held in Rome at the Pontifical Gregorian University in November 2018, the Pontifical Council for Culture and the delegates of the episcopal conferences of Europe, Canada, the United States and Australia approved guidelines for ecclesial communities (Guidelines 2019) (hereafter: Vatican guidelines). In this document, the juridical complaints that may arise when a church is relegated to profane use on the base of jurisprudence are addressed. One of these problems is the reduction of

> "a church to profane use without any of the necessary grave causes (today this is almost always identified with the impossibility of safely maintaining a building" (Guidelines 2019, p. 277).

Here, the "grave cause" is equated with the impossibility of maintaining a building safely and no other examples of what may constitute "grave cause" are referred to.

As we see, in the case of the Roman Catholic church the question of how to deconsecrate a church is usually answered with reference to canon law. In order to answer the question how to undo the sacredness of a church building, we first have to redirect our attention to the question: how does a church building actually become sacred according to canon law?

3. The "Sacredness" of Church Buildings

The Swiss canon lawyer René Pahud de Mortanges outlines the fact that the rules according to canon law with reference to church buildings are derived from a theological understanding of church buildings. From a functional stance, it is a place that enables the liturgical assembly, but from the point of view of canon law it is considered a sacred space. Said sacredness is derived from the Roman Catholic understanding of the Eucharist, which symbolizes the lasting presence of God and which expresses itself in the performance of Mass and the presence of the host in the tabernacle (Pahud de Mortanges 2007, p. 187; Leonhard 2012, p. 127).

From the perspective of canon law:

> "Sacred places are those which are designated for divine worship or for the burial of the faithful by a dedication or a blessing which the liturgical books prescribe for this purpose." (can. 1205).

Specifically, with regard to church buildings, the Code of Canon Law (1983) stipulates the following:

> "By the term church is understood a sacred building designated for divine worship to which the faithful have the right of entry for the exercise, especially the public exercise, of divine worship." (can. 1214).

The following articles specifically refer to the rites that are implemented to "make the church sacred":

> "After construction has been completed properly, a new church is to be dedicated or at least blessed as soon as possible; the laws of the sacred liturgy are to be observed." (can. 1217 §1).

> "Churches, especially cathedrals and parish churches, are to be dedicated by the solemn rite." (can. 1217 §1).

A church building, according to canon law, becomes a sacred place by the rite of dedication with chrism, which is a "solemn rite", or by the rite of blessing, which is a "less solemn rite". In both cases, this ritual act is recorded in parish and diocesan records. The term "dedication" is normally used with regard to both rites to refer to the change of status of a church building from a secular building into a sacred space (Schöch 2007, p. 485). The more solemn rite is used to dedicate more important churches such as cathedrals and parish churches. Less important spaces such as chapels may only be dedicated by the less solemn rite. Buildings that are only occasionally used for liturgical means do not require any ritualized form of dedication (Schöch 2007, p. 486). Churches are dedicated or blessed following the Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar (1978), which in fact consists of several rites such as the dedication and blessing of a church (Huels 2000, p. 1425). Without a dedication or blessing, a church is not considered sacred and Mass may not be celebrated there, the exception being only in case of need (Huels 2000, p. 1430). On where the Eucharist may be celebrated, canon law states the following:

> "The eucharistic celebration is to be carried out in a sacred place unless in a particular case necessity requires otherwise; in such a case the celebration must be done in a decent place." (can. 932 §1) and

> "The eucharistic sacrifice must be carried out on a dedicated or blessed altar; outside a sacred place a suitable table can be used, always with a cloth and a corporal." (can. 932 §2).

Since can. 932 states that Mass may be celebrated in all decent places, the only conclusion that can be drawn here is that, interestingly enough, the only place where Mass may not be celebrated is a deconsecrated church building.

4. The "Sacredness" of the Altar

As Schöch (2007, p. 502) explicitly points out, it is important to note that in can. 1238 §1 it is stipulated that an altar can lose its dedication or blessing according to the norm of can. 1212—in the case of a major destruction, the church being given over permanently to profane use in its factual use or by decree—but that, according to §2 of the same article:

> "Altars, whether fixed or movable, do not lose their dedication or blessing if the church or other sacred place is relegated to profane uses." (can. 1238 §2).

Altars are dedicated in a separate rite (can. 1237 §1) and need to be deconsecrated separately if a church is to be reused. If, in the case of a partial reuse, one still would want to have the option to celebrate Mass, Schüller considers that one could refrain from the deconsecration of the altar to leave this option available. It is possible to deconsecrate parts of the church and still continue to celebrate Mass in the consecrated parts of the church (Schüller 2012, pp. 272, 276). In such cases in which a church is deconsecrated, the still dedicated or blessed altar may be moved to and used in another church without being dedicated or blessed anew. In the case of desecration, can. 1211 takes effect (Huels 2000, pp. 1439–1440). In the procedural guidelines it is stated that:

> "Even more so, altars do not lose their dedication or blessing when the church does, and can never be turned over to profane use for any reason (cf. cann. 1212 and 1238)." (Cardinal Piacenza and Iruzubieta 2013, p. 216).

According to the procedural guidelines:

> "Prior to alienation, all sacred objects, relics, sacred furnishings, stained-glass windows, bells, confessionals, altars, etc. are to be removed for use in other sacred edifices or to be stored in ecclesiastical custody. Because altars can never be turned over to profane use, if they cannot be removed, they must be destroyed (cf. cann. 1212 and 1238)." (Cardinal Piacenza and Iruzubieta 2013, p. 219).

The Vatican Guidelines state the following concerning the canonical practice of destroying altars:

> "Concerning altars, the canonical practice of destroying the table in some cases can find itself in clear opposition to civil norms concerning the conservation of cultural heritage." (Guidelines 2019, p. 277).

Two sentences prior, however, it is stated that it is:

> "necessary to consider some issues usually connected to the process of reduction of a church to a profane use (...) the need to avoid situations that can give offence to the religious sentiment of a Christian people" (Guidelines 2019).

It is not hard to imagine that the willful destruction of the altar could offend the religious sentiment of the faithful ...

5. The "Unmaking" of Sacred Space: Desecration and Deconsecration

The "unmaking of sacred space" (Della Dora 2016) presupposes that sacred space was "made" at some point in time and therefore can be "unmade". As the cultural geographer Veronica Della Dora points out, transformation processes in western Europe, such as the conversion of church buildings, are changing the current landscape. These processes, as Della Dora states, can shed light on:

> "(...) the contestations between different grounded theologies and on the fluidity of the boundaries between sacred and secular, or rather, on the complex coexistences between the two." (Della Dora 2016, p. 45).

She discerns between desacralization—sacred places returning or transforming into secular uses—and desecration: sacrilege, willful destruction, defilement, in short:

> "(...) a violent breach of the rules of behavior towards sacred things (...)" (Della Dora 2016, p. 45).

Della Dora regards these contemporary transformed sites of worship as expressions of social and cultural transformations, as well as:

> "transformed relationships to sacred space, and of shifting perceptions of the sacred itself." (Della Dora 2016, p. 46).

With the use of Eliades' sacred and profane distinction, she shows that in this line of thought there has been much emphasis on the "making" of sacred space. However, since the 1990s the academic understanding of sacred space shifted more towards regarding such spaces as places that are socially constructed instead of being products of theophanic events (Della Dora 2016, pp. 50ff). Della Dora shows furthermore that desacralization, or the unmaking of sacred space, is not a purely modern, western phenomenon, but a phenomenon that has a long history and is not confined to any specific area in the world (Della Dora 2016, pp. 54ff). In her focus on converted churches in contemporary western Europe, she states that these new processes of desacralization strongly differ from past ones because of:

> "(...) the privatization, museification and commodification of the sites, alongside an increasing tendency to adapt them to secular use, or to a mix of religious and non-religious functions (...)" (Della Dora 2016, pp. 60–61).

Bearing this in mind, the desacralization of sacred space is not an undisputed phenomenon. Whereas it may seem, at first glance, unambiguous to deconsecrate a church in the sense of canon law, the question remains if a church is indeed a profane space after the act of deconsecration. If one were to apply the line of abductive reasoning by means of the well-known duck test: "If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck" to a church building that has been deconsecrated according to canon law, one would probably still regard such a profaned building a church or at least a sacred space in most senses of the word. The Vatican guidelines make the following observation:

> "Sacred buildings are a visible sign of the presence of God in a society that is today more and more secularized and simultaneously multireligious. They often have a role in giving quality to an urban or rural environment, as well as in giving structure to that environment in architectural terms. Their evangelizing *readability* remains even if they lose their liturgical functionality." (Guidelines 2019, p. 281).

Moreover, even canon law concerning the reuse of church buildings is not as clear-cut as one would presume because, in addition to it being interpreted differently and even contrary among canon lawyers, the fact that even when a church is relegated to profane use, this new use may never be sordid according to can. 1222 §1, seems to imply that it is recognized that even after deconsecration a church building still cannot be considered a secular building as any other.

Winfried Haunerland also rightly points to the remarkable fact that any form of reuse or complete deconsecration actually contradicts the dedication rite, since the texts of the dedication rite imply that a church building is dedicated for all times (Haunerland 2011, p. 246). Clemens Leonhard also mentions the paradox of extinguishing inextinguishable sacredness, which in his assessment is something that can only be addressed, but not actually dissolved in a deconsecration celebration (Leonhard 2012, p. 147).

In the context of un-dedicating a sacred space according to the Code of Canon Law (1983), we can discern three dimensions: first, such a space loses its dedication because it suffers major destruction. Second, it loses its dedication if such a space is factually given over to profane use. Third, it loses its dedication if the space is relegated to profane use by the issuing of a decree of the bishop (Weldon 2004, p. 52). The articles can. 1211 and can. 1212 refer to such instances in which rites need to be performed to reinstate the sacredness of the place when its sacredness has been violated:

> "Sacred places are violated by gravely injurious actions done in them with scandal to the faithful, actions which, in the judgment of the local ordinary, are so grave and contrary to the holiness of the place that it is not permitted to carry on worship in them until the damage is repaired by a penitential rite according to the norm of the liturgical books." (can. 1211).

> "Sacred places lose their dedication or blessing if they have been destroyed in large part, or have been turned over permanently to profane use by decree of the competent ordinary or in fact." (can. 1212).

It is important to discern between the violation or desecration of a church building because of unworthily treatment, and a case in which a church building will be taken out of liturgical use, which is on the part of the church an intentional act. Both these extremes need to be differentiated from the intentional symbolical demolition of parts of the church building. This last aspect will be addressed later on.

> "If a church cannot be used in any way for divine worship and there is no possibility of repairing it, the diocesan bishop can relegate it to profane but not sordid use." (can. 1222, §1).

> "Where other grave causes suggest that a church no longer be used for divine worship, the diocesan bishop, after having heard the presbyteral council, can relegate it to profane but not sordid use, with the consent of those who legitimately claim rights for themselves in the church and provided that the good of souls suffers no detriment thereby." (can. 1222, §2).

Mostly the words "desacralization", or "deconsecration" are used to designate profanation in the context of can. 1222 and the words "violation" or "desecration" are used in the context of can. 1211. In the case of the desecration of a church, a penitential rite of reparation should be performed as soon as possible, ideally by the diocesan bishop. In the meantime, no other rite may be performed in the church. Preaching and devotional exercises should prepare the faithful for the rite of reparation (Huels 2000, p. 1427). In the case of a destruction of the building, to which can. 1212 refers, the church would lose its dedication. In the case of a major restauration in which a new altar is constructed, a new dedication or blessing of the altar is also required (Huels 2000, p. 1427).

6. The Deconsecration of Sacred Space: Procedures and Reality

In Canon 1212, it is stipulated that the diocesan bishop is the one who has the authority to decide whether a building intended for liturgy may be used in other ways (Weldon 2004, p. 55). Only the diocesan bishop has the authority to decide if a church is relegated to profane use, even if the church building is owned by a juridic person other than the parish or diocese (Huels 2000, p. 1432). Other "grave causes", as addressed in can. 1222 §2, allow for the bishop to relegate a church to profane use, but still some requirements should be met, information needs to be gathered in order to determine the reason for the relegation, the bishop has to consult the presbyteral council, he needs to get the consent of those who have legitimate claims to the church (see also can. 50) such as other owners of the church property, also the founders and their heirs (in a field study I conducted a group of churchgoers who objected the sale and demolition of their church wanted to make use of the argument that the founding deed of the church stipulated that its founder had his eternal resting place there (De Wildt 2019, p. 55)) (Schöch 2007, pp. 497–500). Whereas Schöch also includes financial donors who made substantial donations for the church building in the category of those who may have legitimate claims (Schöch 2007, p. 498), Huels specifically excludes this category (Huels 2000, p. 1433). Furthermore, the bishop has to determine that the good of the souls is not harmed by this act. Finally, in accordance with local and cultural circumstances the new use may not be sordid (Huels 2000, pp. 1432–1433; Schöch 2007, pp. 497–500). The meaning of the "good of the souls" and the non-"sordid use" are held vague, according to Schüller. The argument that the good of the souls could be harmed—one might argue this, if there is for instance a massive protest on the side of the parish members against church closure—is counteracted if the bishop is able to explain that the affected faithful still can depend on pastoral care after the church is closed. Any appeal against the decision of the bishop hardly stands a chance, according to Schüller (Schüller 2012, pp. 273–74).

> The term "sordid" refers to such uses that are contrary to Christian morality (Schöch 2007, p. 486). The procedural guidelines state that:
>
> "Under no circumstances can the edifice be alienated for use inconsistent with its inherent dignity as a former church. Contractual agreements are to be put in place to safeguard this point in civil law as well as canonically." (Cardinal Piacenza and Iruzubieta 2013, p. 218).

A problem may, however, arise if the church is resold again to a second owner and there is no way of safeguarding that the church will not be used in a "sordid" manner. Moreover, what actually constitutes a "sordid use" is nowhere explicated and this poses a problem for the stakeholders who do not only have to determine what forms of reuse are possible from the perspective of architecture, from a financial point of view and from the point of view of monument preservation, but who also have to take into consideration that such a use may not be "sordid". The German Bishops Conference issued a document in 2003 on church reuse in which it offers guidelines and a whole spectrum of possible forms of reuse ranging from a small transformation in which the church remains the owner of the building and few adjustments are made to the sale, or partial demolition, or ultimately complete demolition of the building. In this document the preference is formulated that a church is preferably sold to a public authority for public and cultural uses rather than to a commercial partner, although the document explicitly states that a commercial use may not be ruled out as an option. The document states further that the dignity of the space limits secular uses ("Die Würde des Raumes setzt der profanen Nutzung Grenzen."), but it is stipulated nowhere what these actual limits are (Umnutzung von Kirchen 2003, pp. 16–22). Although this document does not provide clarity as to what forms of use may be considered sordid, it provides some insight in a form of use that is prohibited: the liturgical use of a former church by non-Christian religious communities. The document names as examples Buddhism, Islam and sects (Umnutzung von Kirchen 2003, pp. 18–22). The Vatican guidelines also mention the term "sordid" and here it is referred to as:

> "planning for an improper use ("sordid" cf. canon 1222) of a church after its reduction to profane status" (Guidelines 2019, p. 277).

I have described the way in which churches are deconsecrated in the sense of canon law, but when we focus on the actual practice of church deconsecration, it seems that the situation is even less straightforward. The German scholar of liturgical studies Albert Gerhards shows that in specific cases churches may very well be deconsecrated in the sense of canon law, such as has been the case with the church St. Nikolaus in Aachen, but that after deconsecration, Mass is still regularly celebrated in the choir of the church. The same applies to the "Grabeskirche" St. Josef, a church that is situated in Aachen as well, where Mass is still celebrated regularly in the choir after it has been deconsecrated. An opposite example is the church building "Kreuzung an St. Helena" in Bonn, a church that has been repurposed as a cultural meeting center, but that has never been deconsecrated (Gerhards 2020).

7. Deconsecration Rites: Past

The North-American pastoral theologian Michael Weldon makes the following critical observation concerning the profanation decree:

> "This mandate (...) terminates a building's blessing by the simple declaration of the local Bishop. This reflects good ecclesial order but perhaps an unbalanced ritual mathematics—an inflated sense of the performance power of an official declaration. With all the ritual prescribed for the dedication of a building, a ritual density during its lifecycle, the accomplishment of its closure with a simple episcopal declaration lacks a ritual sense. Major levels of ritual make a parish; so little is required to unmake it." (Weldon 2004, pp. 52–53).

Weldon, based on his experiences as a pastor involved in the reorganization of parishes and the subsequent church closures, analyzed such conflict-laden processes and designed rites to help people cope with the trauma church closure may cause. In the context of church desecration Weldon makes reference to the penitential rite of reparation and describes pre-Vatican II medieval rites, which:

> "(...) prescribed elaborate ceremonies if a building was profaned. These included 'lustrations'—blessings with baptismal water, later 'Gregorian' water (water, salt, ashes, and wine), a circling of the building's exterior with lament psalmody, the washing of the place of defilement with blest water and the singing of the Litany of the Saints." (Weldon 2004, p. 132).

Winfried Haunerland states that there has never been an *Ordo*; a binding order of liturgical acts within Roman Catholic liturgy, in the *Pontificale Romanum* or the *Rituale Romanum* for church deconsecration and that all known sources are of a local diocesan nature (Haunerland 2016, p. 83). He also points to the fact that although the Roman liturgical books before Vatican II did not contain any rules or regulations concerning deconsecration rites, there were West German liturgical books from the first half of the 20th century that did describe rites for the demolition of consecrated altars and consecrated churches (Haunerland 2016, p. 69). These rites mainly focused on the deconsecration of the altar. The priest, on explicit instruction of the bishop, should, together with other priests, kneel down in front of the altar, and pray silently the Lord's Prayer and Ave Maria, thereafter Antiphon, Versicle and Oration of the Saint were to be recited out loud. The altar stone or altar mensa should then be removed without damaging it and washed off by the priest. Haunerland assumes that this washing is a ritual withdrawal of the initial anointment, since this "washing off" is also described in the 1913 published journal *Ephemerides Liturgicae* with reference to the twelve anointed crosses (Haunerland

2016, pp. 70–71). The relics are to be removed with extreme care from the altar(s). Although the altar deconsecration is the central act, when it comes to chapel or church deconsecration as a whole, there are further references on how to deal with this ritually, a few days before the physical destruction of the church, relics should be transferred to another, by the bishop designated, church. This transfer in some cases is conducted by the clergy as well as the faithful in a procession. Statues and images of saints should be transferred as well. These transferals should be conducted before the altar is deconsecrated (Haunerland 2016, pp. 71–72).

A detailed historical overview of profanation rites is provided by the theologian Christine Zimmerhof in her contribution on liturgy of church profanation (Zimmerhof 2012). Zimmerhof describes rites of reconsecration ("Wiedereinweihung") after a church has been desecrated in the time until the decretals of Gregory IX in 1234 AD. A church could lose its dedication by events such as the demolition of the church or of the altar, the removal of the altar, the shedding of blood, murder, or the sinful outpour of human semen (Zimmerhof 2012, pp. 12–16). With the issuing of the decretals, a source of canon law, the reasons for reconsecrating a church were reduced, only through the demolition of the main part or the complete structure of a church building, could the building lose its consecration. Other violations could be repaired by purification rites. Until the time of the Council of Trent, the secular use of a church building was something undesired by the church and all measures were taken to upkeep all churches and church reuse, as we have come to know it nowadays, was unthinkable. The preferred solution when a church could not be preserved was that it would be demolished and many churches were indeed demolished with reference to the Council of Trent. Trent did not stipulate how a church deconsecration should be ritually conducted, the only stipulation was that an immovable crucifix should be erected at the place where the church once stood (Zimmerhof 2012, pp. 16–19). After Trent, several diocesan initiatives emerged such as the rules that had to be observed in case of church and altar profanation as described in the *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*, and more specifically therein the description of the deconsecration rite *De ratione adhibenda in Ecclesiis, Altaribusque profanandis* of bishop Charles Borromeo in 1576. In this document, the actual profanation rite, which took several days, is described and this rite consists of the transfer of relics and statues to another church, the assembly of the clergy of the old church, as well as the clergy of the new church and the faithful, the demolition and removal of altars, the exhumation of bones, the procession to the new church, and the erection of a crucifix at the place where the church was situated as a permanent remembrance. Zimmerhof argues that pastoral-liturgical elements did play a role in this rite since the faithful move to the new church in a procession and also aid in exhuming the dead. It is noteworthy, according to Zimmerhof, that there is no mention of the celebration of the last Mass or the removal of the host from the tabernacle, whereas the transfer of the relics and statues are given a lot of attention. The demolition of the altar seems to be the decisive act that deconsecrates the church. The issuing of a profanation decree is not mentioned in the document (Zimmerhof 2012, pp. 19–22). The remarkable fact that the Eucharist is not mentioned anywhere in the older liturgical books in relation to church deconsecration could, according to Haunerland, be explained by the fact that in these historical cases, most church buildings may have already not been in use for a long time (Haunerland 2016, p. 78). Zimmerhof furthermore describes the rite of altar deconsecration in the 1591 published *Ornatus ecclesiasticus* of Jacob Müller, which is partly based on the document of Borromeo, which is more detailed. In this document, it is described that the altar should be prepared as if a Mass were to be celebrated there. The religious official conducts several rites in word (prayers, creed) and act (kneeling down, extinguishing candles, removing statues, washing the altar, removing the relics from the altar, demolishing part of the stipes of the altar with a hammer) (Zimmerhof 2012, pp. 25–28). Zimmerhof also describes the way in which two other historical documents deal with altar exsecration, such as a 14th century Mainz pontifical (Zimmerhof 2012, pp. 28–29), and the deconsecration regulation of the Münster diocesan synod of 1655 (Zimmerhof 2012, pp. 29–30). The deconsecration regulation of the Paderborn diocesan synod of 1688 also deals with altar exsecration, but with church or chapel deconsecration as well. Relics and statues and images of saints must be transferred to another, by the bishop designated, church in the presence of the faithful and the clergy of the church it is to be transferred too. After the exsecration rite, the altars should be destroyed and a crucifix should be erected where the church once stood (Zimmerhof 2012, pp. 30–34). Other local West German deconsecration rites document slight variations of the Paderborn synod of 1688 (Zimmerhof 2012, pp. 34–36). The final historical example Zimmerhof presents is the above mentioned in 1913 published deconsecration rite in the journal *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, which also refers to the *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis* and which corresponds for the most part with the rite that has been described there. It differs from that rite in the sense that the bishop as initiator and overseer of the rite is not mentioned here and neither are the faithful or the clergy of the new church. In the 1913 rite, the altar exsecration is, for the first time, not the only act that effects the deconsecration of the church, but also the removal and washing of the twelve crosses on the walls should establish this (Zimmerhof 2012, pp. 36–37).

8. Deconsecration Rites: Present

Dedication rites, according to Weldon, are rooted in ritual traditions of Eucharistic celebrations, funerals, exorcism and initiation, and so too are the more recent, newly designed un-dedication rites he experienced (Weldon 2004, p. 111). Nowadays these rites focus more on the meaning of the rite for the wellbeing of the parishioners than on the proper and legitimate ritual way of deconsecrating a church building (Weldon 2004, pp. 126–27).

The Canadian scholar of liturgical studies, Lizette Larson-Miller, gives a vivid account of the merger of four Roman Catholic parishes into one new parish and the move of these parishioners into a new built cathedral: The Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland, California (Larson-Miller 2010). Although her study does not explicitly deal with church deconsecration, it does provide insight in the complexities of parish mergers and the transition to a new church, especially in this case, in which four different parishes who are merged into one all have very different backgrounds, cultures, and theological and political emphases. For instance, the renaming of the community led to fears of losing their own identity (Larson-Miller 2010, p. 219) and the hanging of a crucifix from one of the former churches in the new church, an act that had not been permitted, became a representation of the fear of loss of "their parish, their liberal and progressive Catholic standing, their carefully maintained simplicity of space, their hard work at balance between communities and their baptismally-based call to be leaders of their own worshipping community" (Larson-Miller 2010, p. 221) for some parishioners. The replacement of the baptismal font and the adding of statues, as well as a lack of communication, were all reasons for people to get upset (Larson-Miller 2010, p. 221). Lawson-Miller describes a meeting, initiated by the ordained community leaders, which was:

> "(...) a response to the out-pouring of confusion and hurt (...), and to attempt to move forward." (Larson-Miller 2010, p. 225).

In her analysis, Lawson-Miller shows that the parishioners from the four parishes, who were still struggling to become one parish, were overwhelmed and not in a position to focus on the new cathedral in the timeframe that was wished for (Larson-Miller 2010, p. 227).

Haunerland emphasizes the fact that the anthropological turn has had consequences as well for the deconsecration rite: not just the legitimate and "objective" enactment of the rite is the point of focus anymore, but more so the spiritual benefit of the faithful. This also means, according to Haunerland, with reference to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14 and 69, that the *participatio actuosa* of the affected parish members is a prerequisite for any deconsecration rite (Haunerland 2016, pp. 74–75). Whereas in older rites, the acting of the clergy, according to Haunerland, was the main focus, even in those rites the involvement of the parish members as the ones who also transferred images and relics from the former church to the new church was an element that was clearly mentioned (Haunerland 2011, p. 249).

Closure rites nowadays, according to Weldon, consist of the following elements: a procession to the new church with the host and other symbols such as the paschal candle, the removal of relics, the crucifix and other objects, stripping and washing of the altar, walls and ambo, remembering the deceased, a closing blessing near the baptismal font, and the closing and sealing of the doors (Weldon 2004, pp. 128–31). According to Leonhard, the demolition of or damage to a church building has been an immense indication, throughout the centuries, for the annulment or reduction in the sacredness of a place, and therefore an important part of deconsecration rites consists of the stylized and minimalized demolition of the building. For this reason, according to Leonhard, candles and candlesticks are occasionally tilted, or in the past, a part of the altar was purposely damaged (Leonhard 2012, p. 134). Leonhard critiques the fact that such "comparatively meaningless" rites, such as tilting candlesticks or the issuing of a bishops' decree, which involve human acting, could undo the auratic sacredness, by which he means a sacredness that can be discovered ("vorgefunden") in the world, and that is not manmade. Moreover, Leonhard points to the fact that a deconsecration rite presumes that the auratic sacredness can be undone by means of demolition. He regards the stipulation in historical texts that prescribe the erection of a crucifix at the site of the demolished church as an indication for the uncertainty surrounding whether or not the deconsecration ("Entheiligung") of a place even can or should be accomplished (Leonhard 2012, pp. 127–34). According to Leonhard, any attempt to eradicate the sacredness of a space is prone to fail since what is to be eradicated is perceived in very diffuse manners by the participants, if they even believe that said sacredness can be eradicated at all (Leonhard 2012, p. 148).

Winfried Haunerland points to the fact that the current liturgical books are not helpful when it comes to the question of whether or not a liturgical celebration that ritually marks the ending of the liturgical use of a church building could or should be performed (Haunerland 2016, p. 68). The substantial difference between the grandiose festive first use of a new church and the administrative act that marks the end of the use is, in Haunerland's assessment, hardly appropriate (Haunerland 2016, pp. 68–69). With reference to such an elaborate ritual start of a church building, Haunerland concludes that its ending should also be ritualized in an appropriate form (Haunerland 2011, p. 245). Haunerland has designed, on commission of the German Bishops Conference, a "model rite" for the deconsecration of churches (Zimmerhof 2012, p. 54; Ritus Anlässlich der Profanierung Einer Kirche 2003). Since this rite is the proposed "model rite"—it is not a compulsory form (Haunerland 2011, pp. 246–47)— for Roman Catholic church deconsecration in Germany, I will discuss this rite in more detail here.

For Haunerland, the historical ritual preoccupation with the altar in deconsecration rites should not be reinstated, but, nevertheless, the memory thereof should enforce a reverent dealing with sacred places and objects today. The same applies to the reverence for statues and images, as it is expressed in some of the descriptions of the historical rites (Haunerland 2016, pp. 76–77). Another point that Haunerland furthermore stresses is the importance of the liturgy in a pastoral sense, since the process of church conversion is often a painful one. Here, the transferal of the relics and statues and images in a procession to the new church should function as the start of a new chapter in a new home (Haunerland 2016, pp. 77–78; Haunerland 2011, p. 247). As churches are usually used liturgically right up until the moment they are taken out of liturgical use, the last Mass should be celebrated just before the church is deconsecrated. Haunerland also feels it is sensible to read the profanation decree out loud, not as a means to provide information, but as a performative act in which the public proclamation of the decree actually effects the bishops' decision (Haunerland 2016, pp. 78–79). Here, it is implied that this performative act should function as a speech act (Austin 1962) and that this act has the power to create another reality, namely make the sacred space into a profane place by saying these words out loud. Due to the church functioning as the custodian of the Eucharist in the tabernacle and the sanctuary lamp functioning as a sign of its presence, Haunerland proposes that the ciborium is taken out of the tabernacle and carried out of the church and that the light is extinguished as a sign that this space will no longer be used for liturgical means. Furthermore, he suggests the consideration to celebrate the Eucharist as a way of thanksgiving or read a votive Mass for the titular saint, since the patronage ceases to exist (Haunerland 2016, pp. 79–80). Haunerland puts considerable emphasis on the future outlook, which could be expressed in a festive procession of the parish members as they transfer the ciborium to the new church. He also puts forth the option of transferring other objects of meaning to the new church. As a concluding rite in the new church, Haunerland suggests requesting God to let the faithful find a new home there and that both communities may be successful in their communal path thereafter. A final suggestion he makes is to sing a song of praise for the statue or image of the former patron saint in the new church to show that the saint and the community have arrived in the new parish. An informal gathering in which hopes and fears are discussed should conclude it all (Haunerland 2016, pp. 80–82; Haunerland 2011, p. 245).

In the description of the rite, Haunerland discerns two parts, the first he names "The last Eucharistic celebration—the farewell rite" ("Die letzte Eucharistiefeier—der Abschiedsritus") and the second part he names "Procession and final station in the 'new' church—a rite of passage" ("Prozession und abschließende Statio in der 'neuen' Kirche—ein Übergangsritual"). This second header refers to the theory of the French ethnologist Arnold van Gennep. To Haunerland, the deconsecration rite should indeed function as a rite of passage, it should not focus too much on leaving the old church, but more so on a new phase of being church. He applies the tripartite structure of Van Gennep to the deconsecration ritual: 1. separation rite: church deconsecration, extinguishing of the sanctuary lamp, procession out of the church, 2. transition rite: procession, and 3. incorporation rite: setting up the image of the patron saint in the new church, liturgical completion, and the repositioning of the ciborium. If it is not possible to have a procession towards the new church, the ciborium should nevertheless be transferred to another church. The incorporation in the new church could take place at a later point in time by celebrating Mass there for the first time. The rite Haunerland designed aims at helping people to cope with the pain of the valediction and their sadness and enabling people to become mutually active once again (Haunerland 2011, p. 247; Haunerland 2016, pp. 81–82). The officiator of the rite should ideally be the diocesan bishop, according to Haunerland, since a bishop is the person who originally dedicated the church and since he is the one who decides whether or not a church is to be taken out of liturgical use. Only if the diocesan bishop is indisposed, another bishop, or if that is not possible, another priest, could perform the last ritual. The officiator should ideally celebrate the last liturgy with those priests who were responsible for the liturgical celebrations in that church (Haunerland 2016, pp. 82–83).

Clemens Leonhard also underscores the fact that there is a huge discrepancy between the dedication of a church and its deconsecration and therefore there is a need to undertake ritual action if a church is to be deconsecrated (Leonhard 2012, pp. 131–32). He distinguishes three categories of reasons for designing deconsecration rites nowadays: first, there is an interest for the presentation and publication of legal instruments that are regarded as the only effective means in this context, second, there is an interest for the desacralization of sacred spaces and places as well as for the removal or disposal of the sacred objects within them, and third, there is an interest in communal farewell celebrations for church buildings (Leonhard 2012, p. 126). Leonhard discerns between deconsecration rites ("Profanierungsrituale") and farewell ceremonies ("Abschiedsfeiern"). Rites that aim to dissolve the dedication (legally) or to annihilate the sacredness of a building are deconsecration rites and they differ from farewell ceremonies in the sense that deconsecration rites, in contrast to farewell ceremonies, do not do justice to the social and ecclesiastical reality (Leonhard 2012, pp. 126–27). According to Leonhard, only the last designated use of the church effects the decommissioning of the church building. The eradication of sacredness, a ritual act of demolition, the transfer of sacred objects, or the issuing of a decree do not effect this. Therefore, according to Leonhard, the superior way of any liturgical celebration in this context should be a farewell ceremony and not a liturgical staging of the deconsecration of the church. The farewell ceremony should preferably incorporate a Mass because it is to assume that the celebration of the Mass was the main reason for people using the church building and also because the use of a church starts with the celebration of the first Mass and in this sense a concluding Mass bridges the start and the end of the use (Leonhard 2012, pp. 147–48).

In his analysis of the rite designed by Haunerland, Leonhard assesses that the transfer of the host, relics, statues, etc., from the former church to the new church implies that the sacredness is also transferred or even ceases to exist when it is removed. He doubts whether these acts can annihilate the auratic sacredness and puts forth that this implies a mobile understanding of sacredness that does not take into consideration a specific part of the buildings use, namely its purpose as an assembly room for the faithful. The transferal of objects also suggests that the sacredness of the space predominantly consists of it being a container of sacred matter. The explicitly desired procession within this ritual design is also ambivalent, since a procession is not a prerequisite for deconsecrating a church and this makes Leonhard ponder whether or not the people in the procession should only be regarded as decorum for the sacred objects they transfer and that they actually play a secondary role (Leonhard 2012, pp. 140, 149). He also problematizes the bishop as being the one who celebrates the last Mass, the bishop is not a member of the assembly and performs an act that in most cases people do not wish to be performed, namely the closing of their church. The bishop thereafter leaves without suffering a loss in the same sense the parishioners do and he does not have to deal with the everyday problems of the parish (Leonhard 2012, p. 142). Furthermore, since the issuing of the decree is, according to canon law, the legitimate way to deconsecrate a church, and requires no additional liturgical staging, the participation of the bishop is not required in a farewell celebration. In this way, having the bishop act as the officiator of the last rite could lead to the erroneous assumption that this rite actually is a rite that reverses the rite of church dedication (Leonhard 2012, pp. 145–46, 148). Leonhard prefers a last celebration without any form of ritual demolition or ritual transfer of objects, he proposes a celebration that deals with feelings of thankfulness and sadness, without triumphalism (Leonhard 2012, pp. 146–47). He indicates that ritual designs that try to instill a sense of hope and that predominantly focus on the future are simply out of place and he paints the following picture:

> "The procession of the faithful through the neighborhood, which is witnessed by the other residents on the sidewalk in incomprehension, is no victory parade. The church building is not given up for a new building, but abandoned for demolition or reuse. The churchgoers do not move out of the slave house towards the promised land, but give up territory that once was filled with life forever. The refill of these empty spaces with shelves and containers for the ashes of the deceased is also a powerful sign pointing in the same direction. At least the Catholic church in Germany stages the death of the national church vividly by using the church buildings that the living no longer have use for, for putting on display the mortal remains of their former members."[1] (Leonhard 2012, pp. 142–43).

Leonhard refers here to the West German popular form of the reuse of churches into columbaria. As Paul Post remarks, the Roman Catholic church uses processions as ways of "occupying" the public domain and thus profiling itself (Post 2010, p. 201). If, as Leonhard states, such processions are actually incomprehensible for the bystanders that witness them, one could indeed ask if the performative message the church wants to send is in fact the opposite message senders receive.

Haunerland is aware that the deconsecration rite he proposes is no substitute for the mourning work that must be done to alleviate the hurt and anger people may feel (Haunerland 2011, pp. 247–48). Haunerland responds to the critique uttered by Albert Gerhards who states, with reference to deconsecration rites, that a church cannot lose its sacredness just by declaring that the space is a profane space from now on, that although this critique may be just, the question still remains of what one should do if church closure is inevitable. Even if one is critical of church closure, the situation still demands that one reflects on the way in which one deals with those affected (Haunerland 2011, pp. 250–52).

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[1] "Der Zug der Gläubigen durch das Stadtviertel, den dessen übrige Bewohner vom Bürgersteig aus verständnislos betrachten, ist kein Triumphzug mehr. Das Kirchengebäude wird auch oft nicht zum Neubau, sondern zum Abriss oder zur Umwidmung aufgegeben. Das Kirchenvolk zieht nicht aus dem Sklavenhaus in Richtung des gelobten Landes aus, sondern gibt Territorium, das es früher einmal mit Leben gefüllt hat, für immer auf. Die Auffüllung solcherart freiwerdender Leerräume mit Regalen und Behältern für die Asche der Toten ist ebenfalls ein mächtiges Zeichen, das in dieselbe Richtung deutet. Zumindest inszeniert die katholische Kirche in Deutschland den Tod der Volkskirche anschaulich, indem sie in den Kirchengebäuden, die die Lebenden nicht mehr benützen, die sterblichen Überreste der ehemaligen Mitglieder zur Schau stellt." Translation: KdW.

9. Deconsecration Rites: Future?

Contrary to what one may assume, the deconsecration of church buildings is not as straightforward as one would think, not even with reference to canon law as the contradictory interpretations of Huels and Schöch with reference to what may be considered "grave reasons" for church deconsecration or the position of substantial financial donors in such cases show. In addition to this, the fact that a church, even after it has been deconsecrated according to canon law, may not be used in a "sordid" way, leaves room for the interpretation that the church recognizes that said sacredness is not completely annulled by the issuing of the profanation decree, something that the historical practice of erecting a crucifix at the place where a church once stood as a remembrance, as Leonhard points out, also alludes to.

With regard to deconsecration rites it is noteworthy that a shift has taken place in the perception of reasons why such a rite should be conducted. In contrast to historical requirements that mainly focused on such acts for the purpose of the "legitimate" way of relegating the church to profane use, nowadays the wellbeing of the affected parishioners seem to be the main reason for the performance of such rites. One element that Leonhard clearly points out and that seems to be a complicating factor for the success of such rites is the fact that such a rite is, in the eyes of the church officials, not necessary for the effective deconsecration of a church building. The "staging" of the deconsecration could be considered a meaningless rite since it has no effect in the sense of canon law, it does not bring about the profane status of a church building. The mixture of the deconsecration act and rites that aim to help parishioners cope with feelings of anger and sadness creates a ritual muddle. Leonhard's proposal of not mixing these two different acts seems to be a solution in cleaning up this ritual muddle.

It can also be questioned whether or not the official Roman Catholic church should issue official ritual regulations for a deconsecration rite at all. There obviously is a ritual void and a ritual need, but the necessity for any prescribed and universally applicable form may be questioned since every case of church closure or reuse and the history of a particular church is quite individual. Whereas in one case the relegation of a church to profane use may cause a lot of pain and sorrow, in another case it may not be all too painful, and parishioners may even feel freed from a burden. Individual cases may ask for individual solutions. In the case of St. John Baptist in Altenessen (De Wildt 2019), the opponents of church closure I interviewed expressed being far too angry to attend any farewell celebration and said that they would not attend such a last ceremony as a sign of protest.

It is also noticeable that two German scholars of liturgical studies, Clemens Leonhard and Winfried Haunerland, chose the following titles, which are phrased in the form of questions, for their respective contributions on the topic, Leonhard: "Profanierungsritual oder Abschiedsfeier?": "Deconsecration Rite or Farewell Ceremony?" and Haunerland: "Abschiedsfeier oder Übergangsritual?": "Farewell Ceremony or Rite of Passage?" Both Haunerland and Leonhard seem to underscore, with the choice of these titles, the unclarity of what actually entails church deconsecration and what the status is or should be of the rites involved here. This unclarity is exemplary for the current situation regarding church closure: what does it mean to deconsecrate a church building, notwithstanding the fact that the deconsecration of a church building is a matter of canon law too, is a juridical discourse alone able to do justice to this multilayered phenomenon? Does a church building cease to be a sacred space by the issuing of a decree? Does it require an "official rite" to undo the sacredness of the church building and thus, if that is even ritually possible, transform it into a profane space? Does the design of a rite that takes the feelings of those affected into consideration suffice as a means to appease all those affected?

Moreover, the design of a rite by a ritual expert, even if it does not aim to be a rite of the sort that says one size fits all, is a top down approach that does not take into consideration the particularity of each and every specific case with its own history. If such a rite is meaningless in the sense of canon law and actually unnecessary to deconsecrate a church—if it is only performed for the good of the souls—should such a rite even be performed at all? The shift towards more subject orientation in ritual designs for church deconsecration seems incongruent with the liturgical approach in Roman Catholic rites for dedicating a church building, which are more object orientated, but this shift can also be regarded as an effort to keep in pace with the emotional needs of the faithful. However, do the faithful feel taken seriously in their emotional needs if they are aware that they are taking part in a ritual that, in the logic of the church they adhere to, is completely unnecessary and has no effect?

In conclusion, it can be said that the diverse rationales that underlie the concept of sacredness within the Roman Catholic church complicate the deconsecration of church buildings. Furthermore, the question of what constitutes a successful deconsecration should be answered first. However, whom should be asked? The church as an institution? If that is the case, one could simply refer to canon law, since a juridical act suffices. If one were to ask the faithful, more than a juridical act would probably be needed. Nevertheless, if a rite has no official status for the church as an institution that those affected adhere to, it will remain questionable if such a rite indeed can fulfil the needs of those faithful.

The simple dichotomy between sacred and profane does not reflect the more complex reality that underlies the problem church deconsecration poses. If reality is far more complex than this dichotomy presumes, then the way in which a transformation of sacred space should be managed ritually is also complex and multilayered and should be handled in an individual and differentiated manner. Making and marking a clear distinction between the act of church deconsecration and the last farewell celebration is helpful in the sense that it clears up the current ritual muddle. The intra-ecclesiastical conviction that an act of deconsecration is required could be met by the issuing of a decree. This should then be differentiated from the farewell ceremony, which should be explicitly understood as a ritual that does not bring about the unmaking of sacred space in the sense of canon law, but can be helpful in tending to pastoral needs. These pastoral needs can be very diverse, a need to deal ritually with anger and hurt, a need to ritually mark the end of the liturgical use, a need to ritually frame a new beginning, and even a mixture of all these and other elements. Therefore, a bottom-up approach of ritual design of those affected would be the obvious answer. A ritual design that, already in the preparation phase, considers the needs of those affected and tries to frame this ritually. Church closure is a process that cannot be effected at a certain point in time. In analogy: when does one actually let go of a deceased loved one? When that person actually dies? During the farewell service? In the grieving process afterwards? Or perhaps one is not able to ever really say goodbye.

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Monastic Form-of-Life Out of Place: Ritual Practices among Benedictine Oblates

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Abstract: Although ritual participation in Christian churches is decreasing in the Netherlands, one of the most secularised countries in the world, monasteries are increasingly attractive to people not committed to a life in an abbey, but who rather transfer monastic practices to their personal life. Guesthouses are full, reading groups conduct meditative reading, and monastic time management is applied in professional arenas. Obviously, the ritual practices conducted beyond abbey walls have a different character than the ritual repertoire of monks and nuns. The ritual transfer is a challenge, as monasteries are secluded spaces, separated from the world. In its history, monasticism has turned out to be especially capable of this process. What does the transfer from one context to the other imply when people ritualise prayer, reading and everyday practices without being monastic? A specific group of people who conduct this transfer intensively are Benedictine oblates, laypersons affiliated to a particular monastery. This article addresses the following main question: which monastic ritual practices do Benedictine oblates in the Netherlands perform, and how do they transfer these to their personal context? To explore this question, the results of a qualitative research among 53 respondents are presented—oblates of three Benedictine abbeys in the Netherlands. The results demonstrate experiences on a new ritual field, with practices that seem to be 'out of place' but are highly vivid to the practitioners.

Keywords: form-of-life; monastic spirituality; ritual practice; ritual transfer

1. Introduction

Monastic practices turn out to be attractive for many abbey visitors, even in a secularised country like the Netherlands. Although the majority of the Dutch are not affiliated with any denomination and do not participate in ritual practices regularly or not at all (Bernts and Berghuis 2016, pp. 21–29), guest houses of abbeys are full and often have long waiting lists. People who are not necessarily practising Catholics participate in the prayer services; groups are formed at various places who practice sacred reading; and professional organisations benefit from applying a monastic time rhythm to organise work and leisure time (Quartier 2015, pp. 115–17). All these practices are originally constitutive for the ritual form-of-life led by monks and nuns (Quartier 2017a, pp. 61–63). In recent years, philosophical analyses have pointed out once again that monastic life is ritual in its very essence, as there is no practice conducted by monks and nuns which is not determined by a rule that provides life with structure and meaning (Agamben 2013, pp. 65–72). However, there is a shift going on. As monastic communities are crumbling rapidly in the Netherlands, the appeal of the form-of-life for people who are not monastic is growing. Monastic convents often play an active role in promoting parts of their lifestyle (Jewdokimow 2020, pp. 207–24). The impact of the spiritual tradition might be different for those who do not live within the overarching context of a monastery but still engage with the ritual lifestyle. The structure of the practices might be experienced differently, and they may also have a different meaning (Quartier 2017b, pp. 97–99). For a better understanding of this spiritual shift, exploring experiences of rituals with those who actually perform them can prove an appropriate lens (Post and Sparks 2015).

The meaning of the form-of-life for monks and nuns is determined by their Christian faith, based on Holy Scripture. In Western monasticism, St Benedict of Nursia (480–547), wrote a rule that became extremely influential and aims at a life according to Divine commandments. The purpose of this form-of-life is: "Never swerving from his [God's, TQ] instructions, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom" (Fry 1980, Prol 50). This theological meaning aims at a different ritual context than the context of guests participating in monastic practices. The structure provided by the secluded space of monastic life has a different character when moved to life in a profane setting. The practitioners conduct a "ritual transfer". This concept has been established to analyse "the transfer of a ritual from one context to another, or—more generally—a change of context surrounding the ritual. Processes of transfer can take place within time or space" (Langer et al. 2006, p. 1). What does the ritual transfer of monastic practices exactly entail and who conducts it?

It is important to realise that monastic life in particular has turned out to be especially capable of ritual transfer in its history. Already by the Middle Ages, members of religious orders were engaged in a twofold exchange with the world: first, they "incorporated, investigated and criticised the knowledge of the world within their search for God", as Melville points out in his excellent summary of studies on medieval monasticism. Examples include "scholastic techniques that helped to proof the validity of rational argument and to break it open with mystical experiences, at the same time" (Melville 2012, p. 311). Second, they enriched their religious way of life by striving for a good education for monks and nuns: "Education helped religious persons to deepen their path to salvation". Here the examples of "grammar, rhetoric, and logic or dialectics" are mentioned (*trivium*), which coloured monastic life intensely (Melville 2012, p. 314). The interrelatedness of monasticism with its cultural context led to very different forms of monastic observance. The need for religious experience changed prayer life, and the possibility for study was interwoven with sacred reading. One interesting example of how this weave with culture influences monastic life is termed "monastic experiment" by Evans: "By the end of the eleventh century, suddenly, adults were choosing to enter monasteries which had previously received many of their future monks as child-oblates". That led to significant "changes which were social as much as spiritual" (Evans 2016, pp. 134–36). The changes strengthened monasticism in that time, as those who were familiar with recent developments in the world joined communities. Still, you need to be aware that "the relationship between monasticism and culture is inherently complex, since it is universally characterised by a degree of separation from ordinary human activities (*fuga mundi*)", as Pfeifer summarises investigations of the relationship from various disciplines (Pfeifer and Nouzille 2013, pp. 12–13). You should by no means get the impression that the contemporary shift going on with regard to the social position and identity of monasticism is a new phenomenon in its history. For this reason, monastic groups form a particularly interesting case in today's secular society.

However, there is a certain shift that has also been important for the dynamic development of monasticism. This is in its relationship with "lay spirituality", a form for which "historical research has not developed a framework in the sense of a 'secularised spirituality'", as Waaijman states (Waaijman 2007, p. 42). Again, it was in medieval times that oblates were not only small children (*pueri oblati*) but also those in the world who offered themselves to God by affiliating their life to a particular monastery (Koller 2009, pp. 98–100). Today, the word "oblate" has a different meaning to the one Evans mentions. It refers to groups in the "Order of St Benedict" (OSB) who live a life under guidance of the rule of the founder, without taking monastic vows in the strict sense. They number over 25,000 worldwide (Koller 2009, pp. 283–84).

Especially in the secularised Netherlands, where membership of religious communities seems to be diminishing, the number of oblates affiliated to the three male Benedictine abbeys in the country is growing.[1] This is surprising, as, although they do not take monastic vows, oblates still commit lifelong to one and the same abbey. Societal trends are exactly the opposite: flexibility and variation. Only a very small minority of these lay members live within the cloister ("regular oblates"). The majority spend their lives within society, often with a family and a job, just like any other citizen ("secular oblates"). They receive spiritual guidance from the abbey, visit regularly, and—most significantly—share in the monastic practices of Benedictine life. These groups illustrate the dynamic development of monasticism and its paradoxical interrelatedness with its cultural context.

The Archives of the Benedictine Confederation describe this form-of-life as follows: "Oblates of St. Benedict are Christian individuals or families who have associated themselves with a Benedictine community in order to enrich their Christian way of life. Oblates shape their lives by living the wisdom of Christ as interpreted by St. Benedict. Oblates seek God by striving to become holy in their chosen way of life. By integrating their prayer and work, they manifest Christ's presence in society" (Archives OSB 2020). The context in society seems to contradict the context of the cloister, which exists to give shelter from societal mechanisms and duties. To be able to participate fully in this contemplative life according to the Gospel, you need to transform your identity, as Casey points out: "It asks us to take on a new identity and to be reshaped according to a different culture. This refashioning must come from within" (Casey 2005, p. xi). Although the transformation is not necessarily bound to the territory of the monastery, you can ask whether a performance of monastic practices outside this context is not at odds with the basic idea that monastics are "strangers to the city", as Casey puts it.

It might be that the form-of-life of oblates is "out of place", happening in unexpected places and moments (Grimes 2006, pp. 101–2). Not only do oblates usually not live in an abbey, they are also engaged in social networks which monks and nuns, ideally speaking, are not. The Constitution of Italian Benedictine Oblates from 2000 provides the following description, taking into account the societal embeddedness of oblates: "The Benedictine oblate is a lay or clergy Christian man or woman, who, leading a normal way of life, acknowledges and accepts God's gift and His call to serve Him in conformity to the potentialities of baptismal consecration and to the needs of his social status" (Constitution 2000, article 2). Of course, this is a different way of life than Casey's view on culture. Still, the otherness of life might be established by ritual practices: mainly prayer, reading and everyday practices.

In recent years, research has been carried out on the structure of monasteries, their presentation to the world (Jonveaux 2018), the internal organisational processes within contemporary abbeys (Hochschild 2013) and the perception of liturgical services by monks, nuns (Quartier 2016) and abbey guests (Quartier 2014). Yet, until now, there has been no data available on the ritual practices of oblates. For this reason, this article will explore the experiences of Benedictine oblates in the Netherlands with ritual practices of spirituality. The key question is this: which monastic ritual practices do Benedictine oblates in the Netherlands perform, and how do they transfer these to their personal context?

To answer this question, a qualitative questionnaire was disseminated among Benedictine oblates in the Netherlands. It contained open questions on the chief practices to be found in the Rule of St Benedict (Quartier 2011a) and provided space for the oblates to give personal answers and to describe individual experiences. There was no theoretical or empirical evidence on how oblates perform these practices, what their attitude is, or how they experience the ritual transfer to their own personal context from the specific context of the abbey to which they are affiliated. Therefore, the chosen method is as open as possible (Grimes 2014, p. 47). We did not use theoretical concepts and operationalize them in the questionnaire, but rather chose to ask about major topics and let the respondents freely share their personal experiences. A total of 53 respondents shared their experiences and attitudes by returning the

[1] The focus is on the male abbey, as the female abbeys in the Netherlands do not have oblate groups. However, the groups mentioned here consist of both men and women.

questionnaire.[2] Their answers have been divided into quotes and coded. In a first step, specific topics the respondents mentioned in their answers were translated into sensitising concepts. An example of this is 'morning prayer' or 'evening prayer'. In a second step, these sensitising concepts were merged into codes on a more general level—in the example mentioned, into 'Liturgy of the Hours'. After that, the major categories within the codes were distinguished, for example, 'Prayer', to form a code group. This allowed the experiences of the respondents to be compared, whilst keeping the codes from the earlier round visible. In what follows, the general code groups will be shown and, later, the codes that were the result of merging the sensitizing concepts.[3] As a result, codes and quotes were found to shed light on the following research questions, which will hopefully be answered in the following sections:

(1) What is the monastic and personal context of Benedictine oblates in the Netherlands?
(2) Which monastic ritual practices do the oblates perform and how do they experience these?
(3) How do respondents experience the ritual transfer of monastic practices?

2. Ritual Contexts: Spiritual and Ritual

The first research question (1) reads: what is the monastic and personal context of Benedictine oblates in the Netherlands? The ritual context of monastic life establishes the otherness of the individual and the institute. It can be understood as liminal in a twofold sense: first, the cloister provides a liminal space for the individual monk because he continuously lives in ritual sequences and is in permanent transformation. This state was coined as liminal in rites-of-passage theory (Van Gennep 1960), and later broadened to ritual phases or moments in multiple settings (Quartier 2019a, pp. 121–25). The spiritual self is in continuous motion, in a permanent phase of liminality (Waaijman 2002, p. 426). Second, the monastery takes a liminal position towards society by not being caught up in the common patterns of social interaction. The members of the convent do not have a social status in the world; they are "structurally invisible." To provide this institutional "anti-structure", a ritual structure is required within the monastery (Turner 1967). Both forms of liminality are established by the ritual practices provided by the Rule of St Benedict. The ritualised nature of monastic life implies that all activities go beyond the functional realm of social and economic life. The monastery offers a secluded space where this ritual spectrum can cover the life of a community. But what happens when a ritual transfer takes place and people engage with parts of the spectrum in a different ritual context?

Waaijman includes members outside the spiritual centre of the monastery in this liminal state of life, because, in the development of a spiritual tradition, it is "an important step that people can acquaint the basic intuition in their own way" (Waaijman 2002, p. 116). This means that oblates not only consume the ritual life provided by monks but enact their own ritual repertoire in their own personal context. They possess their own attitude towards ritual practices in relation to their form-of-life. The idea of double liminality—towards the outside and towards the inside—could also be characteristic for the ritual fields that oblates discover. It might be the case that they live discrete from their context by praying. Perhaps they prevent themselves from being caught up in social competition by ritualising everyday practices, and reading possibly helps oblates find meaning in the structure they give to their life.

In the Netherlands, there are three Benedictine abbeys, which each have a group of oblates affiliated to their monastic community. They are all contemplative houses but belong to different congregations within the Benedictine Confederation. St Willibrord Abbey in Doetinchem belongs to the Congregation of Subiaco-Montecasino, St Adelbert Abbey in Egmond to the Congregation of the

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2 In total, 200 questionnaires were sent out; this represents a response rate above 25%. The questionnaire contained six open questions, with sub-questions, on their affiliation with the abbey (1), personal background (2), practice of prayer (3), reading (4) and work (5). Finally, respondents were asked about the problems they experience in practising their form-of-life (6).

3 Atlas.ti (Version 8.4.15) computer software was used. Quotes were merged in such a way that respondents were counted once by being given a code. The techniques used were "merge codes" and "form code groups". To be able to compare respondents, we used the function "form document-groups".

Annunciation, and St Benedict Abbey in Vaals to the Congregation of Solesmes. St Willibrord[4] has a special characteristic, insofar as it is largely open towards oblates. Until recently, secular oblates were even buried in the cemetery of the abbey, something entirely exceptional. Furthermore, the abbey has decades of experience in interreligious dialogue, especially with Eastern religions. Numbering 110, the current group of oblates is large relative to the 10 monks of the abbey. They meet twice a year for oblate days. St Adelbert[5] has a comparable openness towards oblates, but the building is larger, so the distance between monks and oblates is traditionally greater. The abbey runs a journal which is read by many oblates, and regularly organises retreats. In addition, the abbey operates a shop that serves the community, the local area and beyond. The present group of oblates numbers 90 and is comparable to the first group, but the number of monks is larger at 16. They come once a month for oblate days. The St Benedict Abbey[6] has the smallest number of oblates, 40, with 12 monks living in the abbey. The group is separated from the monastic community, which is more closed in character due to a traditional strict observance. The oblates usually come twice a year for oblate days. In all the abbeys, oblates arrive at the guesthouse as individual guests and are spiritually supervised by one of the monks, the oblate rector or other members of the community.

To understand how their own personal context and that of the abbey the oblates are affiliated with relate to their practices, the respondents were divided into groups. This allowed the groups to be compared.[7] Concerning the monastic context of the abbeys, 32 questionnaires were received from St Willibrord, 15 from St Adelbert and 6 from St Benedict. The ages of the respondents and their church affiliations were closely examined in regard to their personal context. Seven respondents were under 50, 26 were between 50 and 70, and 17 were over 70. Thirty oblates participating in the research were Roman Catholic, nine were Protestant, and eleven had another ecclesial affiliation. The relationship of the respondents with the monastic context of the abbey differs when considering how often they physically visit the abbey. The largest group (22) visit between five and ten times a year, some visit less than five times (14), and some visit more than 10 times (11). Of the respondents, 33 were male and 20 were female. Concerning their education, nearly all the respondents had completed higher professional education or academic study; only six had not.

3. Ritual Practices of Oblates

The second research question (2) reads: which monastic ritual practices do the oblates perform, and how do they experience these? Monks and nuns should at all times of the day enact their spirituality, as is stated in the Rule of St Benedict in his chapter on humility, one of the basic virtues of a monk's life: "A monk always manifests humility in his bearing no less than in his heart, so that it is evident at the Work of God, in the oratory, the monastery or the garden, on a journey or in the field, or anywhere else" (Fry 1980, vol. 7, p. 63). The ritual form-of-life shapes the attitude of monks and nuns, not only at particular moments or in specific places. Interestingly, this also applies to life outside the monastery ("on a journey"). Still, there are concrete, embodied practices that help to develop this attitude: "Whether he sits, walks or stands, his head must be bowed and his eyes cast down" (Fry 1980, vol. 7, p. 63). According to Casey, it is important to note that Benedict is "descriptive and not prescriptive" in these sentences. For him "humility is a habitual disposition which results from the repetition of the appropriate actions" (Casey 2001, p. 57). The right moral behaviour, according to this perspective, is exercised in ritual practices which help monks focus on the contemplative basis of their life.

There are basic practices that help to develop and maintain such an attitude, and also help avoid losing the symbolic impact that a ritual has on your life, namely prayer, reading and work (*ora*, *lege* et

[4] For more information, see the website of the abbey: www.willibrordsabdij.nl.
[5] For more information, see the website of the abbey: www.abdijvanegmond.nl.
[6] For more information, see the website of the abbey: www.benedictusberg.nl.
[7] Atlas.ti offers the possibility to compare groups of respondents with "Code Document Tables".

labora). Benedictine life is strongly characterised by seven daily prayer services, starting with Matins in the early morning and ending with Compline. They provide structure and form the angle of monastic life, as St Benedict says: "Indeed, nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God" (Fry 1980, vol. 43, p. 3). Around these services, monks are busy with the two other practices: "Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should have specified periods for manual labour as well as for prayerful reading" (Fry 1980, vol. 48, p. 1). Reading and work are not merely functional; the soul benefits from both. This means that their benefits go well beyond merely gaining information or producing goods. All three practices can be interpreted as belonging to the ritual spectrum of monks (Quartier 2011a). Prayer happens in a liturgical way, but reading and work are also enacted with structure and meaning, the basic characteristics of ritual (Quartier 2017b, p. 95). Not all the oblates do professional work anymore, whilst the Dutch word for "labour" ("werk") mainly applies to employment. Therefore, it was decided to ask for "everyday practices" to invite the respondents to share their experience on what Benedict indicates as "manual labour".

The main source for understanding these practices in a monastic sense is the Rule of Saint Benedict, which becomes visible in the formation programme for candidate oblates. In the cases we observed, they take part in a programme consisting of several retreat days over a single year. The topics of these days are all taken from the Rule: humility, obedience, silence, prayer, reading, work. "Oblates receive a copy of the Rule in ceremony at the beginning of their noviciate, and we try to help them read and understand the Rule during that year," one of the oblate fathers explained during the preparation of the research presented here. Commentaries and studies on the Rule are used by the monk who presents the topics to the oblates for their preparation. This is why the focus is on the primary text of the Rule of St Benedict in this article. Where necessary, commentaries or earlier published examples are added (Quartier 2011a, 2019b).

Oblates make their own choices in reading about the Rule or taking part in additional courses. About half of them regularly follow the basic program of the monastery (retreat days), the remainder depend on personal preference. The three code groups that resulted from the analysis, corresponded with three core-topics from the Rule and demonstrated differences between groups of respondents.

Three background characteristics of the respondents demonstrated significant differences: their monastic background, their age and their church affiliation. For the questions discussed here, no significant differences were found with regard to gender and level of education. For that reason, these have not been included in the presentation. The first groups were about the monastic context and included respondents for St Willibrord, St Adelbert and St Benedict, as shown in the following table (Table 1). The percentages indicate the number of merged codes for each of the three abbeys that formed the monastic context of the research:

Table 1. Code groups and monastic context.

Code Group	St Willibrord	St Adelbert	St Benedict	Total
Prayer	35.7	32.8	32.8	34.7
Reading	26.3	28.1	27.5	26.9
Practices	38.0	39.1	39.7	38.3

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

Care is required when interpreting these figures. They do not necessarily indicate (the level of) agreement and are by no means representative for the entire population of Dutch oblates. The only conclusion to be drawn is that experiencing Benedictine spirituality within everyday practices is mentioned most frequently by the respondents, followed by prayer, and finally by reading, which is mentioned least often. The differences between the groups of oblates from the three abbeys are not very great. The transfer of the ritual practices from the monasteries happens in the first place by implementing it into personal everyday practices, independent of the abbey oblates are affiliated to.

These practices are mentioned even slightly more often than prayer. The accent in Benedict's Rule is the other way around: there, prayer is most imperative.

When it comes to the personal context of the respondents, the sample is divided into three groups. Those above the age of 70 mention the integration of their rituals in their daily life more often than the average respondents. Respondents below the age of 50 talk more often about their reading activity. Middle-aged oblates talk about prayer most often (Table 2).

Table 2. Code groups and personal context—age.

Code Group	50 or Younger	51–69	70 or Older	Total
Prayer	34.0	36.4	32.8	34.7
Reading	29.1	26.7	26.3	26.9
Practices	36.9	36.9	40.9	38.3

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

It is probably easier for oblates who have already retired to reflect on the symbolic meaning of their everyday practice than for those still busy with a job. They mention more often that they consciously make time for reading. The explicit activity might fit better into their daily schedule. Middle-aged oblates are perhaps more used to the habit of daily prayer than their younger brothers and sisters.

Besides the three age groups, the respondents were also divided into three groups concerning their church affiliation. Only two oblates had no formal church membership, but both were still engaged in Christian networks. Remarkably, the Protestant respondents talked much more often about prayer than the two other groups. The reason might be that Protestants who feel attracted by a Catholic monastery feel a stronger need for prayer than they find in their original denomination. The second remarkable detail is that the members of small ecclesial groups ("other") talk much more often about everyday practices as being a ritual than the other groups. The reason might be that these groups offer a stronger cohesion and penetrate more fields of life than larger churches (Table 3).

Table 3. Code groups and personal context—church affiliation.

Code Group	Catholic	Protestant	Other	Total
Prayer	34.3	40.3	32.5	34.7
Reading	27.2	25.4	25.8	26.9
Practices	38.5	34.3	41.7	38.3

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

This general overview already reveals that it is important for oblates to integrate ritually their form-of-life into their concrete situation, as their everyday practices are central in their answers, as well as being considered rituals. This also relates to their personal context, as age and church-affiliation play a role in several ways. The next paragraphs will look more closely at the three practices, searching for dimensions of what respondents say about prayer, reading and everyday practices and, once again, what the relation is to both the monastic context they are affiliated with and their personal context.

3.1. Dimensions of Prayer

Prayer is the top priority of monks in their daily schedule, in a temporal and spatial sense, as Benedict states: "On hearing the signal for an hour of the Divine Office, the monk will immediately set aside what he has in hand and go with utmost speed, yet with gravity and without giving occasion for frivolity" (Fry 1980, vol. 43, pp. 1–2). The promptness of following the signal, even running (currere) may be surprising because of the calmness that seems to be a characteristic of monastic life. However, there is a theological meaning in this command. By training the strictness of the prayer rhythm, "monks prepare themselves for the ultimate signal at the end of times", as Böckmann comments on this passage (Böckmann 2013, p. 507). This is a rule that seems unrealistic in almost all circumstances outside the monastery. According to a commentary on this passage for lay people, "the lesson of this chapter is this: when the time has come for doing something we must immediately do it, whether it is setting off for our afternoon fresh-air exercise or getting out of bed when we intend. [. . .] These are little, unspectacular opportunities for self-control and for doing God's will, fitting in with his design" (Cary-Elwes 1992, p. 115). Still, the question remains how oblates enact this prompt readiness and how they maintain the attitude of being ready for the signal to prayer, albeit symbolically, in their life.

Three types of prayer were found in the oblates' experiences: the Liturgy of the Hours, creative personal forms, and spontaneous moments of prayer during the day. How are these forms understood ritually? The Divine Office, as described in St Benedict's Rule, can be interpreted as a "rite", a traditional and rule-governed model of prayer that has to be strictly followed (Grimes 2000, p. 24). In different circumstances, the Rule offers some flexibility. Monks should adhere to the rhythm of their brethren, but are sometimes able to do this in a more flexible form: "Brothers who work so far away that they cannot return to the oratory at the proper time—and the abbot determines that is the case—are to perform the Work of God where they are, and kneel out of reverence for God" (Fry 1980, vol. 50, pp. 1–3). Benedict prescribes a ritual transfer that adheres to the rite, because the brother "may not neglect their measure of service" (Fry 1980, vol. 50, p. 4), but gives freedom at the same time. Oblates, it can be assumed, apply creative solutions when confronted with this conflict on a daily basis. They might use ritual elements from the Office said by the monks and implement these individually in their own way. Ritually speaking, this could be called a "ritualising" process (Grimes 2000, p. 25). Still, this implementation will imply that prayer becomes part of the daily routines and connected to them. It can even be so familiar that it is not mentioned or planned separately. But, if you reflect upon it, it can be interpreted as a ritual prayer. This third dimension can be called a "ritualization" (Grimes 2000, p. 25). The following figure provides two representative quotes from the respondents for each type (Figure 1):

Dimension	Quotes
Rite	- I pray the Office of the brothers at home every morning and evening - The Liturgy of the Hours as given in the Breviary helps me to pray
Ritualising	- In meditative moments, I find my own prayers of silence - I use different texts in the morning to contemplate and pray
Ritualization	- At unexpected moments I have a feeling that I'm praying - Prayer is a way of doing everything in the presence of God

Figure 1. Dimensions of prayer—quotes.

The respondents usually pray at home, mostly in a place set aside in their house with an icon and candles. They use all the elements of the rite of the Divine Office of the monks, which in all three monastic contexts is the most important praying activity (Table 4). Most frequently, oblates mention "the Breviary" (liturgical book for the liturgy of the Hours of the Roman Catholic Church), smaller editions by monasteries, and online tools such as prayer apps that provide the psalm texts of the hours together with the biblical lessons of the day. Most also mention the morning and the evening as ritual moments. The groups affiliated to the three abbeys differ regarding the creative invention of prayer. This is much stronger than average in St Willibrord. As already mentioned, the abbey has a large group of oblates and a tradition of using new techniques such as meditation. This may be the reason that the respondents from that group talk more frequently about ritualising processes such as finding personal moments of meditation or making up personal prayer texts. The ritualization is mentioned more than average by the respondents of St Benedict Abbey, which implies that prayer is a self-evident ingredient in their daily routines. One reason might be that this abbey represents a stricter rhythm of prayer, which may motivate oblates to work on the link between their prayer and their daily activities.

Table 4. Dimensions of prayer—monastic context.

Code Group	St Willibrord	St Adelbert	St Benedict	Total
Rite	49.5	50.0	50.0	49.6
Ritualising	27.3	17.9	10.0	24.1
Ritualization	23.2	32.1	40.0	26.3

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

The different age groups displayed interesting differences, too (Table 5). The rite of using the official form of the Liturgy of the Hours was mentioned most frequently by middle-aged oblates, whereas young oblates talk more often about creative adaption. Perhaps the middle-aged respondents are in the midst of their professional life and are at the same time still familiar with the idea that liturgy is given by the church. Older oblates talk much more often than average about making prayer a self-evident daily routine. The reason may be that their daily schedule offers more possibilities to do so than with the other two groups.

Table 5. Dimensions of prayer—personal context—age.

Code Group	50 or Younger	51–69	70 or Older	Total
Rite	41.7	53.5	44.7	49.6
Ritualising	33.3	25.4	15.8	24.1
Ritualization	25.0	21.1	39.5	26.3

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

Finally, church affiliation was considered an important element of the personal context of oblates (Table 6). It was found that the members of mainline churches—Catholic and Protestant—talk more often about the rite, which is the ecclesial form of the daily prayer. The Protestant oblates are more explicit about the creative manner of praying. The reason might be that the Catholic form is not their original form of prayer, therefore they are inclined to think about adjusting it. The members of smaller ecclesial groups—other affiliations—mention most that daily prayer becomes a part of their routine, and that all the activities during the day can also mean an occasion for prayer. It seems that their engagement is more overarching in this respect than with respondents who belong to mainline churches.

Table 6. Dimensions of prayer—personal context—church affiliation.

Code Group	Catholic	Protestant	Other	Total
Rite	51.1	50.0	44.4	49.6
Ritualising	26.6	28.0	18.5	24.1
Ritualization	25.3	24.0	37.1	26.3

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

To summarise the dimensions of prayer distinguished in the answers of the respondents: generally speaking, the most frequently mentioned manner of praying for all is the rite of the Divine Office. Half of the oblates mention this. A quarter of them also talk about prayer becoming a daily routine, whilst another quarter mention creative adaption and invention. The monastic context demonstrates parallels between the ritual accents of the abbey that the oblates affiliate to. Concerning their personal context, it was found that their age and church affiliation highlighted differences among them, as would be expected.

3.2. Dimensions of Reading

When Benedict encourages the monks to read, this is more than just spiritual advice. It belongs to their duty, which becomes especially clear when the Rule talks about Lent: “During this time of

Lent, each one is to receive a book from the library and is to read the whole of it straight through" (Fry 1980, vol. 48, p. 15). The book given to each individual brother is a bible book, and the time is spent continuously reading it during particular hours of the day. The reading is enacted ritually; thus, its performance is not merely functional but meditative. The form of the reading is as important as the content. Benedict wanted to ensure the discipline of reading by giving clear rules and guides, namely older brothers who control the observance: "Their duty is to see that no brother is so apathetic as to waste time or to engage in idle talk to the neglect of his reading, and so not only harm himself but also distract others" (Fry 1980, vol. 48, p. 18). Sacred reading is a collective activity, it offers a structure that can be filled with meaning, both temporally and socially.

The aim of monastic reading is not to gain information or to be entertained but to run through the classical steps of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation (*lectio divina*). Yet, these steps are again a ritualising structure that can be helpful but can never be reduced to predictable results. Rather, the insight is received, never achieved actively, as Casey points out: "The prayer latent in meditation on Scripture is released unpredictably later when engaged in an entirely different activity. Some people combine reading, reflection, and prayer in a single 'exercise', others separate them in time and space" (Casey 1996, p. 59). This interpretation already implies some flexibility in giving form to the practice of reading. Within abbeys, how sacred reading is practiced can indeed be different. Some Trappist abbeys (who also follow the Rule of St Benedict) still have collective reading. In Benedictine houses today, monks usually practice individual reading in their cells, but they do this at fixed moments during the day for approximately one and a half hours.

As well as daily time spent on its practice, sacred reading depends on an attitude of reverence and receptiveness, as Casey describes: "It is reverence that makes us assiduous and persevering in our exposure to God's word. We recognise the limitations of an existence without God and we want to provide as many openings as possible for God to enter our life and to influence our living of it" (Casey 1996, p. 27). How can this attitude be developed if you do not live in a monastery where moments are reserved for opening up to God? Do oblates succeed in practising sacred reading daily?

Next to their own experience, they were asked about the amount of time they spend reading. 39% read 2 h or less during a week, another 39% read between 3 and 6 h, and 22% read 7 h or more. The second question asked was whether they follow a particular method when reading: 68% read without a specific method, and 32% follow a method, mostly the four steps mentioned above. What were the dimensions of reading, the respondents mostly talked about? Four dimensions were found in the respondents' answers. The following figure (Figure 2) provides illustrative quotes:

Dimension	Quotes
Bible	- I read the Bible every day, mainly the Gospel and the Psalms - The Lessons of the liturgical calendar are my daily reading
Monastic	- Mystical texts from monastic tradition inspire me to read - I read texts of ancient and contemporary monastic authors
Time	- I reserve an hour for reading at least three times a week - Reading daily gives me inspiration for the things I need to do
Attitude	- I try to be as open as possible when I read an inspiring text - Sometimes a sentence touches my heart and motivates me

Figure 2. Dimensions of reading—quotes.

These dimensions are not to be understood as a conceptual structure of reading, as they clearly relate to two different areas. We present them in the same tables to get an overview over the most prominent topics in our questionnaires. The first two dimensions relate to the texts read. The most-read text is the Bible (Table 7). The respondents mainly talk about reading the lectures of the day according to the liturgical calendar, the psalms or the Gospel. The second type of text frequently mentioned is texts from monastic tradition, including the Rule of St Benedict and texts by medieval and present-day monastic writers. Related to the monastic context the oblates belong to, it is noted that at St Willibrord there is less mention of the Bible. The reason could be that there is a tradition of reading several types of spiritual texts from various sources, including texts from other religions. Another difference is that, at St Benedict, the oblates focus on the texts from monastic tradition. Probably, the climate in the abbey, which is strongly influenced by traditional monasticism, influences the way respondents enact their own reading. Concerning the time spent on sacred reading, the oblates of St Willibrord talk less about this than the two other groups. Obviously, they are less concerned about the amount of reading time. Their percentage of reading as an attitude is higher than average. The oblates of St Benedict talk less about the underlying attitude. Perhaps the strict observance of the abbey, again, makes them focus on the concrete practice.

Table 7. Dimensions of reading—monastic context.

Code Group	St Willibrord	St Adelbert	St Benedict	Total
Bible	22.2	29.3	28.6	24.7
Monastic	21.2	14.6	28.6	20.1
Time	24.2	31.7	28.6	26.6
Attitude	32.3	24.3	14.3	28.6

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

Concerning age, oblates show a stronger interest in the Bible among the older and younger than among the middle-aged respondents (Table 8). The renewed interest among the oblates of 50 years of age or younger also applies to texts from monastic tradition. They are less focused on lectio as an attitude than average. Could this be a new generation of oblates who more consciously deal with concrete practices and texts from the Christian and monastic tradition?

Table 8. Dimensions of reading—personal context—age.

Code Group	50 or Younger	51–69	70 or Older	Total
Bible	26.1	20.2	30.8	24.7
Monastic	26.1	22.6	15.4	20.1
Time	26.1	25.0	28.2	26.6
Attitude	21.7	32.2	25.6	28.6

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

Finally, differences revealed between respondents of different church affiliations were investigated (Table 9). They reasonably concur when indicating the texts read, but when it came to the frequency of mentioning the time for the lectio, the members of small ecclesial groups talk of their concrete practice much more frequently than the members of mainstream churches. Attitude, on the other hand, is far more often mentioned by Catholics; it is mentioned less frequently than average by Protestants. Perhaps the Catholic tradition is less exclusively scriptural and focuses more on the underlying process, whereas smaller groups with a high commitment and many common activities are more concerned with concrete practising time.

Table 9. Dimensions of reading—personal context—church affiliation.

Code Group	Catholic	Protestant	Other	Total
Bible	24.1	26.1	24.2	24.7
Monastic	20.7	21.7	21.2	20.1
Time	25.3	26.1	30.3	26.6
Attitude	29.9	26.1	24.2	28.6

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

To summarise the findings regarding dimensions of sacred reading, it can be said that the Bible forms the central source for reading, followed by texts from the monastic tradition. Generally speaking, reading as an attitude is mentioned more often than the exact time spent on it. However, the monastic context influences this; for example, when it has a stricter observance. The transfer is, again, influenced by the abbey, but also by the personal context of the oblates. Young oblates show a surprising engagement with regard to tradition. Members of small churches focus on the time spent reading, which is less the case among the members of mainline churches.

3.3. Dimensions of Everyday Practices

In Benedictine life, everything has a "liturgical" character (Quartier 2011a). When Benedict talks about the cellarer of the monastery, the monastic father stresses that everyday practices presuppose a liturgical attitude: "He will regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar, aware that nothing is to be neglected" (Fry 1980, vol. 31, p. 10). This liturgical attitude implies not only a certain style of treating goods and other persons, but—even more importantly—a moral claim, as Michaele Puzicha comments on this chapter: "Sharing of goods, sensible use of property and care for the poor belong to the duties mentioned here" (Puzicha 2002, p. 295). Thus, the attitude of the cellarer is not only applicable to economic circumstances, but needs the virtues related to himself, the other and God (Quartier 2011b). Further on in the chapter, it says: "Above all, let him be humble. If goods are not available to meet a request, he will offer a kind word in reply. […] For he must remember what the Scripture says that person deserves who leads one of the little ones astray" (Fry 1980, vol. 31, pp. 13, 16).

The virtues of humility and generosity are founded in the responsibility of the monk towards God. St Benedict refers to the Gospel of Matthew, here: "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Mt 18,6). The negative motivation to avoid the ultimate punishment by God becomes a positive one in the liturgical life of a monk, by giving his everyday practices a structure open to the meaning of being responsible for himself and the other because of the dedication of his life to God. The transcendent motivation for moral behaviour is not only a question of an inner conviction, but also of outer ritualising actions. The formal attitude of acting everywhere and at every moment, such as in the liturgical setting of the Eucharist ("sacred vessels of the altar"), reminds the monk of the deeper meaning of everything he does.

Even in the context of the monastery, it is difficult to keep the meaning of your everyday practices concerning yourself, the other and God open. This is the reason why Benedict quotes such a harsh passage from the Bible. Outside the monastery, where there is not a given frame of behaviour and a rather small community, it must be even more difficult to enact symbolic practices that express personal humility and generosity. For example, as Rosa points out, a calm and peaceful manner, often understood as purely directed for the benefit of personal wellbeing and a salve against the "acceleration" of life, has both a "functional" and an "oppositional" meaning in society. It contributes to a climate of social responsibility and solidarity (Rosa 2010, pp. 50–51). Monastic life forms a counterpoint of social life in a world continuously speeding up and harming the individual, the social relations and the relationship with God. The ritualization of everyday practices is a manifestation of a responsible and empathetic way of life. How is this manifestation of a religious consciousness enacted and experienced by oblates, who often live in the midst of the acceleration and alienation of themselves, the others and God? Three dimensions were found in the answers: self, other and God. Illustrative quotes are provided in the following figure (Figure 3):

Dimension	Quotes
Self	- Being peaceful inside helps me to live my Christian life - Attentiveness to myself belongs to my practice of being an oblate
Other	- I try to focus myself on the people who need my attention - To feel compassion with others belongs to my daily experiences
God	- God is present in everything I do and safeguards me - I listen to what God says to me in every situation, every day

Figure 3. Dimensions of everyday practices—quotes.

Generally speaking, it was discovered that the oblates mentioned their responsibility towards God most frequently as the content of everyday practices (Table 10). In their answers, they largely describe the support and safety they experience from God. Second, they talk about their responsibility for others, especially being open to the other and receptive to his or her presence. The third motive is being responsible for themselves. Hence, differences emerge depending on the monastic context the respondents are affiliated to. Self-related meaning is found to be much stronger among the respondents of St Benedict Abbey. It may be that the classical monastic paradigm of being on your own finds its echoes in how the oblates talk about their everyday practices. The other-related meaning is stressed most strongly by oblates of St Adelbert. It might be that the community and its service for people via the shop and the journal influences how oblates understand Benedictine everyday practice. In St Willibrord, the God-related dimension is mentioned more frequently than average. The offer of meditation and other programmes by the monks probably has an influence here.

Table 10. Dimensions of everyday practices and monastic context.

Code Group	St Willibrord	St Adelbert	St Benedict	Total
Self	28.7	31.1	35.7	29.9
Other	33.9	37.8	35.7	34.5
God	37.4	31.1	28.6	35.6

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

When the frequency of mentioning self-related meaning of everyday practices related to the personal context of the age of the respondents is considered, younger oblates show a much higher number of merged quotes than the other groups (Table 11). Those who are 50 or younger might be more concerned with giving shape to their own life, whilst they still have the opportunity to do so. The same applies to other-related meanings, although the difference with middle-aged and older respondents is smaller. The God-related content of everyday practices is more often mentioned by respondents above 50, even more frequently above 70. An explanation could be that, at a later stage in life, the reliance of God in life becomes more explicit.

Table 11. Dimensions of everyday practices and personal context—age.

Code Group	50 or Younger	51–69	70 or Older	Total
Self	39.1	28.1	29.4	29.9
Other	39.1	34.8	31.4	34.5
God	21.8	37.1	39.2	35.6

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

Finally, the differences among respondents with different church affiliations were striking, especially among Protestants (Table 12). They mentioned self-centred meaning much more often, which may be explained with the duty ethics dominant in their religious education. They are less oriented towards others and God but see their own responsibility first. Catholics and members of smaller ecclesial groups do not differ that significantly from the average.

Table 12. Dimensions of everyday practices and personal context—church affiliation.

Code Group	Catholic	Protestant	Other	Total
Self	28.0	37.0	28.9	29.9
Other	35.5	29.6	35.6	34.5
God	36.5	33.4	35.6	35.6

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

To summarise the everyday practices with regard to their structure and meaning, it can generally be said that oblates talk mostly about God-related meanings, even more so when they are older. Protestants refer to self-related meaning more than other groups; for them, this is the most important category. When asked about the specific monastic meaning of the everyday practices that the respondents acquire from being an oblate, it is remarkable that the theological basis for their moral attitudes covers all three dimensions: self, other, and God. A frequently given response is that "God is present every moment of the day and in everything you do". The differences concerning the monastic context show how oblates are indeed influenced by the spiritual accents of the abbeys they are affiliated with. It was also observed that their attitude towards their everyday practices is formed by the personal context they transfer the ritual to.

4. Ritual Transfer

In the last paragraphs, it was seen that the Dutch oblates who participated in this research indeed ritualise their spirituality in prayer, reading and everyday practices. By splitting the population into groups, it was also observed that the monastic context has an impact, as does the personal context, which has then been coded with regard to age and church affiliation. Although the results are only explorative signals, they can still suggest that oblates form a group who actively engage in the ritual transfer of monastic practices. Their form-of-life seems "out of place" in a secular world at first glance, but, perhaps in these unexpected positions, there exist creative initiatives for new ritual fields (Grimes 2006). Among oblates, a combination of old practices and new life circumstances can be observed. However, it would be strange if there would not be problems in the experiences of the oblates, as the transfer is always a result of trial and error, negotiation and compromise.

After all the different dimensions, it is time to finally explore the third research question (3): how do respondents experience the ritual transfer of monastic practices? The problems they actually experience was scrutinised. As they are directed to God, the most frequently mentioned problem that oblates experience in transferring monastic practices from the monastery to a secular setting is the alienation they feel among colleagues or family members who do not believe. Another issue is the difficulty in finding a temporal and social structure for prayer. Illustrative quotes are provided in the following figure (Figure 4):

Dimension	Quotes
Belief	- In my surroundings nobody understands what belief in God means - I often feel alienated because I cannot share my belief
Prayer	- I often miss a community to pray with, like it is in the abbey - The discipline to maintain the regularity of prayer is difficult

Figure 4. Problems of ritual transfer—quotes.

It is problematic to experience God as a foundation of the oblate's belief and to bear witness of that experience in a secular society (Table 13). The less traditional the monastic context, the more oblates of that particular abbey talk about this problem. The second problem is prayer, especially concerning the regularity and the lack of a praying community. Here, the relation with the monastic background is exactly the other way around. The more open the abbey the respondent belongs to, the less mention there is of the structure of prayer being a problem.

Table 13. Problems of ritual transfer—monastic context.

Code Group	St Willibrord	St Adelbert	St Benedict	Total
Belief	48.9	60.0	66.7	53.0
Prayer	51.1	40.0	33.3	47.0

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

With regard to the personal context of the respondents, two problems again show an opposite relationship: the experience of God in a person's life is largely an issue for older oblates, who feel alienated in the world. The structure of prayer is more problematic for younger respondents. Obviously, they are more occupied by the obligations of employment or family and do not easily have the opportunity to find a ritual structure in their daily routine (Table 14).

Table 14. Problems of ritual transfer—personal context—age.

Code Group	50 or Younger	51–69	70 or Older	Total
Belief	40.0	51.4	60.0	53.0
Prayer	60.0	48.6	40.0	47.0

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

Finally, the church affiliation once again shows two opposite pictures concerning belief in God in everyday life (meaning) and form of prayer (structure). Alienation because of a belief in God is mostly experienced by members of small ecclesial communities (Table 15). It could be that those oblates, who identify more fully with their church, find it more difficult to experience God in a secular society and give witness to this experience. Those more loosely bound to their church find this less problematic. The structure of prayer is found most challenging by members of mainline churches, less by members of small communities. An explanation could be that the less a person is socially involved in an ecclesial context outside the monastery, the more difficult he or she will find it that there is no given structure of prayer and no praying community.

Table 15. Problems of ritual transfer—personal context—age.

Code Group	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Total
Belief	40.0	51.3	62.5	53.0
Prayer	60.0	48.7	37.5	47.0

n = 53; numbers: relative number of merged quotes in %.

To summarise the problems oblates experience: the ritual transfer can be difficult in a secular setting when concerning the belief in God in a person's practices, especially for oblates from the most traditional abbey, for those embedded strongly in their church community, and for older oblates. The structure of prayer in the sense of discipline and community is also experienced as difficult, but more by oblates who belong to the most open abbey, younger ones, and those more loosely embedded in ecclesial groups.

5. Conclusions

This article started with the following main question: which monastic ritual practices do Benedictine oblates in the Netherlands perform, and how do they transfer these to their personal context? After having answered the research questions in the previous paragraphs, ritual prayer, reading and everyday practices can be identified as constitutive ritual practices for Benedictine oblates' spirituality. Although they do experience issues when transferring practices from the monastic context they are affiliated to into their personal context, they still report positively on their ritual form-of-life.

When the first World Conference of Benedictine Oblates took place in 2005 in Rome, the Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation, Dom Notker Wolf OSB, explained his motive for stimulating an exchange about this form-of-life as follows: "The treasures of the Rule of St Benedict should not be hidden inside monasteries. Our societies should be rooted in Christ, again, and become a huge family, in mutual love and respect" (Koller 2009, p. 283). Of course, the research cannot indicate what impact the life of oblates exerts within their own personal context. But in each case, it can be concluded that they are well aware of the task the general superior formulated. The unique ritual character of Benedictine life makes the lay members of the order different from lay members of other Christian orders and congregations. Their liminal form-of-life is in the first place enacted by practices relying on their monastic context and integrated into their personal context, without fully being a part of the social mechanisms the oblates are confronted and obliged with in the world (Quartier 2020).

The self-reports of the Dutch Benedictine oblates have shown that there is a high degree of reflection among the oblates, thus the practices of monastic spirituality outside monastery walls can form an interesting ritual field. Practically, it is hoped that the findings will help people—oblates and others—to reflect on their ritual life as a source for spirituality. For ritual studies, it is also hoped that this article demonstrates that a further exploration of monastic life can be a source for discovering ritual fields related to Christian churches, but which stem from a different tradition, and which can relate to the secular environment in a nuanced way. Because—although all the respondents are Christian—they differ in the way they experience their religion. Oblates, often a forgotten group in research, can help with further reflection on the relevance of monastic practices in a substantial way.

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The Invention of Sacred Places and Rituals: A Comparative Study of Pilgrimage

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Abstract: During the last twenty years around the world there has been a rapid increase in the number of people visiting long established religious shrines as well as the creation of new sites by those operating outside the boundaries of institutional religion. This increase is intimately associated with the revival of traditional routes, the creation of new ones and the invention of new rituals (religious, spiritual and secular). To examine this process, I will focus on the European region and two contrasting destinations in particular—the Catholic shrine of Lourdes, France, and the pre-Christian shrine of Avebury, England—drawing on my personal involvement in travelling to both destinations and being involved in ritual activities along the route and at the two destinations. In the discussion section of the paper, I will explore the relevance of these two case studies to the analysis of power, agency and performance and the ways in which they expose (a) the role of institutions and entrepreneurs in creating rituals and sacred places and (b) the relationship between people and the domesticated landscape.

Keywords: ritual; pilgrimage; institutional religion; routes; sacred places; landscape; agency; power; entrepreneurs; Europe

1. Introduction

Pilgrimage destinations have benefitted massively from the global expansion of the travel and tourism sector. These are not just those organised by religious institutions, such as Mecca, Amritsar, Varanasi, and Lourdes but also destinations associated with alternative cults usually categorised as "New Age", "alternative" or "spiritual" (see Bowman 1993; Ivakhiv 2001; Rountree 2006; Fedele 2013), as well as with death and suffering, such as military cemeteries in Flanders and Gallipoli or the death camps in Poland (Walter 1993; Lloyd 1998; Feldman 2014) and with celebrities, such as Elvis Presley and Jim Morrison (King 1993; Margry 2008). The intimate relationship between pilgrimage and tourism has been analysed in terms of such hybrid categories as pilgrimage tourism, tourist pilgrimage, and religious tourism (see Nolan and Nolan 1989; Eade 1992; Vukonic 2002; Badone and Roseman 2004; Collins-Kreiner 2010, 2016).

This expansion has involved not only long-established religious pilgrimage centres but also the emergence of new religious and non-religious sites, the revival of traditional routes such as the *camino* to Santiago de Compostela (Post 2011) and the invention of new routes (see Frey 1998; Sanchez y Sanchez and Hesp 2006; Steil 2017). These developments have gone hand in hand with the adaptation of traditional rituals and the invention of new ones. Analysis of pilgrimage ritual has been deeply influenced by the pioneering *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978) written by Victor and Edith Turner, who argued that ritual celebrated the temporary, liminal commonality of its participants (normative *communitas*). Subsequent debate focused on the contested and diverse meanings evident in such ritual (Wikan 1990; Eade and Sallnow 1991), whereas research has also demonstrated the manifold ways in which religious and non-religious rituals are invented and constantly change (Abélès 1988;

Grimes 1992; Karant-Nunn 1997; Coleman and Eade 2004), as well as "the uncertain and open-ended nature of ritual practices and processes" (Stern 2012, p. 77, see also Gordon-Lennox 2017a, 2017b).

At the same time, the study of people's engagement with material culture and landscape has also expanded. Thomas Tweed, for example, has explored the dwellings and crossings involved in pilgrimage flows across landscapes to places and sacred objects by reflecting on his own positionality and engagement with religion (Tweed 2006). Pilgrimage has been interpreted as a kinetic ritual where people engage with a landscape's immanent features and aura. Such an approach can lead to an analysis of how "mobile practices help construct apparently sacredly charged places", the "power of place", and the "role of landscape aesthetics in the 'spiritual magnetism' of pilgrimage sites" (Maddrell et al. 2015, pp. 6–7; see also O'Brien 2008; Mantsinen 2020).

This attention to mobile practices, flows and the relationship between people and places has helped pilgrimage studies to explore new avenues but careful attention still needs to be paid to the role played by power and authority in ritual invention and performance. The rituals performed by groups journeying to shrines and at the shrines themselves are typically orchestrated by leaders, such as priests or experienced laity, who draw on specialist knowledge and their ascribed or achieved status as "experts" (Bajc 2007). Their role as leaders is very similar to that performed by tourist guides (Feldman 2007; Kormina 2010; Mesaritou et al. 2016) and pilgrimage journeys may involve both pastors and tour guides (see Bajc 2006, 2007). These leaders play an integral part in the global expansion of the travel and tourism industry (see Kaell 2010; Reader 2014) where the interweaving of pilgrimage and tourism has been analysed in terms of the hybrid category 'pilgrimage tourism' (Collins-Kreiner and Kliot 2000; Bar and Cohen-Hattab 2003; Schramm 2004; Shuo et al. 2009; Lopez 2013).

2. Research Question and Methodology

To explore the role played by leadership, power, and authority in ritual invention and performance, I will bring together two contrasting case studies—rituals observed at the Roman Catholic shrine of Lourdes, France, and those performed during a pilgrimage to the prehistoric Avebury Ring in South West England. The research is based on document study (both offline and online) of my personal involvement in travelling to both destinations and being involved in ritual activities along the route and at the two destinations. From a methodological viewpoint, this research can be considered as a form of ethnography (Blommaert and Jie 2010; Blommaert 2018) and even, at least partly, auto-ethnography. Both ethnography and auto-ethnography "[use] a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences" (Adams et al. 2014, p. 1). In the comparison of the two cases described in this article, I will focus on (1) the role of institutions and leaders or guides and (2) the relationship of the people involved in the pilgrimage and the landscape. The first issue is directly related to the main research question regarding leadership, power, and authority in ritual invention and is the result of a deductive way of analysing the materials and experiences I gathered during the fieldwork. The second point of interest came to the surface through the comparison of the two cases as a result of an open, inductive way of coding the gathered data (Miles et al. 2013).

3. Lourdes: The Invention of Place, Routes, and Rituals

Lourdes is a small town in the foothills of the Pyrenees near the French border with Spain. Its fortunes were transformed in the aftermath of visions of Mary, the mother of Jesus, experienced by Bernadette Soubirous, a young shepherdess, at a grotto outside the town during 1858 and subsequent claims of miraculous healing associated partly with a spring that she uncovered during her séances. The Roman Catholic Church quickly moved to carve out a sanctuary around the grotto where three churches were built on the cliff overlooking the grotto and a large esplanade was laid out for the daily performance of collective rituals. The spring was channelled into private baths for those wishing to immerse themselves in 'Lourdes water', whereas others could take away the water by accessing the taps constructed along a wall near the grotto and the baths (Sorrel 2016).

A new pilgrimage town grew up between the old town and the sanctuary, and a new route was provided through the building of a railway loop connecting Lourdes to the expanding national and European railway network. In 1871—only thirteen years after Bernadette's visions—the first international pilgrimage group arrived from Belgium and soon afterwards the first Irish pilgrimage arrived having crossed by boat to England, by railway to Dover, ferry to Calais, and then down to the margins of France. The development of a national road network enabled growing numbers of people to arrive by car or coach, and after the Second World War, the volume of arrivals massively increased, aided by the expansion of international air transport. Between 1949 and 2008, the numbers of people arriving, mostly during the pilgrimage season between May and October, rose from approximately 2,500,000 to around 9,000,000. The sanctuary provided a variety of ritual events to cater for this mass of visitors that ranged from celebrations performed inside the three basilicas, at the grotto, and, more recently, across the river at an altar installed on the meadow to the regular afternoon Eucharistic or Blessed Sacrament procession, popularly known as the Blessing of the Sick ceremony, and the evening Torchlight Procession, both of which used the esplanade.

Although the last two celebrations have caught the eye of many observers (see Zola 1995; Harris 1999; Kaufman 2005), pilgrimage groups also performed rituals on the way both to and from the shrine. During the train journeys groups organised by parishes, dioceses, Catholic orders, and national institutions prayers were intoned while the Lourdes Hymn was joyfully sung as the main basilica standing high on the cliff overlooking the grotto came into view. Those who came by coach sometimes had the opportunity to stop at other famous shrines on the way, such as Nevers, where Bernadette's body is on display (see Dahlberg 1991), Lisieux or Chartres. For the increasing number of people arriving by plane there were very few opportunities for ritual performance, but once everyone had disembarked and were seated in the coaches taking them from the airport to the town, there were also opportunities for the recitation of prayers and perhaps a verse of the Lourdes Hymn.

The Blessed Sacrament Procession: Ritual, Power, Leadership, and Bodies

My involvement with Lourdes began when I joined the Oxford Chaplaincy pilgrimage group in 1969. We stayed for a week as volunteer helpers under the command of the lay confraternity, the Hospitality of Our Lady of Lourdes, which coordinated work at the shrine, the station and airport, such as helping people in and out of trains and planes, helping with crowd control at the grotto, outside the baths and during the main events, and assisting inside the baths and hospitals. I continued to go on pilgrimage with the group until 1992 and returned again for six years in 2013. This lengthy acquaintance with Lourdes enabled me to observe the relationship between ritual, power, leadership, and ritual changes.

To many visitors, including those who popped in for the day and those who only went on pilgrimage a few times, these rituals could appear to be long-lasting and unchanging. However, they have changed significantly to reflect wider religious and social transformations. The afternoon Blessed Sacrament ceremony provides a clear illustration of both ritual stasis and change. During the 1970s, when I first started to visit Lourdes on pilgrimage, the ceremony followed a regular routine. It began at 4:30 p.m. and involved the Host being taken in a monstrance by a senior cleric (often a bishop or cardinal) followed by a long line of priests, doctors, members of the Hospitality, pilgrimage groups, and Catholic organisations. It began near the grotto and snaked up to one of the main gates to the sanctuary and then down to the main square where the *malades* were assembled in rows. Shepherded by senior members of the Hospitality, the priest walked in front of the lines of *malades* and the crowds behind them, blessing them with the Host. When this was completed, he stood at the foot of the steps in front of the three basilicas while the assembled throng sang the Latin hymn to Our Lady (St. Mary, mother of Jesus)—*Salve Regina* (Hail, Holy Queen). At the end of the ceremony the Host was taken inside one of the basilicas and placed inside a tabernacle while the participants dispersed.

This particular format was developed by Fr. Picard in 1888 to make use of the new esplanade. He had observed the procession that another priest had initiated for his pilgrimage group where he processed with the Host from the basilica to the grotto for evening benediction (Harris 1999, p. 279). The Eucharistic or Blessed Sacrament procession was popularly known as the Blessing of the Sick ceremony because the climax of the ritual for many people was the parading of the Host around the serried ranks of *malade* and the repeated invocation for healing by the master of ceremonies. During the late nineteenth century, the procession became intimately associated with claims of miraculous healing. As Suzanne Kaufman notes, "whereas only six of forty-two verified cures in 1888 took place during the first Procession of Blessed Sacrament, more than half of the verified cures happened there by 1894, a margin that continued for the rest of the decade" (Kaufman 2005, p. 107).

Ruth Harris (1999) provides a description by a French woman of her cure in 1890. Mlle Benogni felt "unable to ask for a cure until she saw the procession again two days" after she had bathed in the *piscines*:

> [T]he procession was advancing slowly, coming from the grotto, where several invalids had risen on Christ's passage [referring here to the Host as Jesus's body, J.E.]. Two stretcher-bearers helped me to get out of the little carriage. Jesus was coming forward, blessing and curing the souls and the bodies. A supernatural force made me walk, part the crowd and place myself behind the platform! . . . Then, upright and steady . . . I followed the procession, imbued with love and gratitude, for Him whose single glance had restored me to life! (quoted in Harris 1999, p. 316)

By the 1970s, the association between the procession and miraculous healing had become faint. The ritual appeared to emphasise more the sacramental character of the Host rather than the ceremony's wonder-working energy (see Dahlberg 1991). The ceremony was moving, especially when the *malades* were blessed, but it lacked the drama of miraculous healing recorded during the late 19th century. This change reflected the role played by the religious leadership at the shrine and their hierarchical authority as representatives of the Catholic Church.

The continuously changing character of the ritual reflected the reforms initiated by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). A key change involved the language of the Mass. Latin had been used for centuries in this prime liturgical celebration and because many worshippers could not understand this ancient language two modes of devotion had emerged—the priest conducting the Mass with his back to the congregation and many within the congregation pursuing their own devotions, such as reciting the rosary. To close this ritual gap between the clerical leadership and lay worshippers, more and more elements of the Mass were communicated through national languages. At Lourdes, this led to the increasing use of vernacular languages for the prayers, invocations, and hymns performed during the Blessed Sacrament ceremony with Latin only being used in the *Salve Regina* hymn at the end of the ceremony. Yet, the ritual still seemed to emphasise the Church's authority over the passive, disciplined body; the active agents were the officials—priests, members of the Hospitality, and those in the procession looking on, especially the doctors—led by the cardinal or bishop wielding the Host in its glittering, golden monstrance.

When I returned in 2013 after a twenty-one-year break, the ceremony had been radically changed. It began opposite the grotto around a large altar and a long procession wound its way across the river, up to one of the main gates, and down to the massive underground basilica, leaving the esplanade empty. *Malades* formed an integral part of the procession and their helpers stayed with them throughout the journey. The *malades* were far less passive objects of an official gaze and their agency was vividly expressed through their use of cameras, mobile phones, and iPads to record the Blessing of the Sick. Yet, despite the greater mobility and increased agency of the lay participants, the fundamental character of the ceremony remained—the climax of the ceremony was still the arrival of the clergy with the senior celebrant blessing the congregation with the Host in its golden monstrance.

4. The British Pilgrimage Trust and the Invention of Place, Routes, and Rituals

The growing popularity of walking and walking tours during the last fifty years in Britain and other European countries (Albers 2007) has encouraged the revival of mediaeval pilgrimage routes, such as those leading to Santiago de Compostela, Catholic shrines in France and Italy, as well as to cathedrals, former monasteries, and other sacred places across Britain. As the burgeoning literature on pilgrimage tourism and religious tourism has shown (Raj and Morpeth 2007), many walkers are not involved in institutional religion and express a wide variety of reasons for travelling along these ancient routes and new routes.

The British Pilgrimage Trust (BPT) illustrates this dynamic situation very clearly. Since its foundation in 2005, it has developed courses and walking tours through the resourceful use of social and mass media and by building networks between official bodies, such as English Heritage and the Church of England. In a 2006 article, "Pilgrimages are back with less Christianity", by the deputy editor of a Catholic weekly, the founders clearly articulated their approach:

> The BPT stresses that not all pilgrims are religious: 'Bring your own beliefs' is the slogan. Guy Hayward, who co-founded the BPT with Will Parsons, observes: 'We have to tread very carefully around the language of spirituality and religion.' But he thinks pilgrimage has a universal appeal: it connects you to the world, and to other people. 'You're walking in the land, in nature, you're talking to people. It's not complicated, but at the same time it's very tangible. 'Perhaps, then, pilgrims should leave their smartphones at home? 'No, no!' Parsons is emphatic. 'We think that modern pilgrimage requires modern technology to make the most of it.' Phone maps are better than a fold-out when you're lost in a wood. The BPT plans an app to link pilgrims with accommodation spots—churches, fields, village halls.[1]

This was the background to a pilgrimage and walking tour I undertook on 2 February 2020. The eleven-mile circular walk was booked online, and its prime destination was Avebury, a village in South West England, and the Avebury Henge and Stone Circles, a UNESCO World Heritage site. According to English Heritage:

> Built and much altered during the Neolithic period, roughly between 2850 BC and 2200 BC, the henge survives as a huge circular bank and ditch, encircling an area that includes part of Avebury village. Within the henge is the largest stone circle in Britain—originally of about 100 stones—which in turn encloses two smaller stone circles.[2]

As English Heritage proceeds to explain, Avebury "is part of an extraordinary set of Neolithic and Bronze Age ceremonial sites that seemingly formed a vast sacred landscape". These sites "include West Kennet Avenue, West Kennet Long Barrow, The Sanctuary, Windmill Hill, and the mysterious Silbury Hill" and this World Heritage landscape extended to the more famous Stonehenge only forty-five minutes away by car. Avebury attracted those who wanted to explore beyond the country's Christian heritage and the walk provided a vivid insight into the invention of rituals that contrasted sharply with those performed at Lourdes.

Guy Hayward, the co-founder of the BPT, sent instructions about where to meet by email and the walk began at the village of East Kennet. Twenty-five participants assembled in the village church where Guy and his two colleagues, Chris and Charlotte, greeted us and explained the significance of the day. In the Christian tradition, it was Candlemas, which commemorated the presentation of Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem, and the Church of England's celebration involved the blessing of candles brought by worshippers who would use them throughout the year as a memento. However, Chris and Charlotte chose to emphasise the pre-Christian origins of the festival. Chris was a member

1 www.spectator.co.uk/2016/07/pilgrimages-are-back-with-less-christianity/.
2 www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/avebury/.

of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, a storyteller, ecological artists, and beekeeper, who lived not far away[3], whereas Charlotte ran a business in London as a modern-day alchemist, natural health practitioner, pilgrimage ceremonialist, and ritual facilitator and provided an online apothecary.[4]

Chris referred to the goddess Brighid, whose wooden cross he was holding, and explained that she was associated with Imbolc, the festival of light and fire that celebrated the half-way point between the winter solstice and spring equinox. He gave everyone a blunt pin to which we could attach our hopes and prayers for what we wanted from the day and later place it in the River Kennet. He also explained about the development of agriculture, settled populations, and religious functionaries. Charlotte then spoke about Brighid as goddess of fertility with her close link to Ireland, her many names (Bree, Britannia, Brigid, Brich). Guy finished this introduction by talking about Christianity, the nearby River Kennet, and the importance of water. He then sang a song (he was a former Cambridge University choral scholar) about our relationship to nature and explained where we were walking to.

As we walked to the next stop—a Neolithic stone circle—I was able to take stock of the group and get to know some of them. Most appeared to be white middle-class professionals between the ages of 40 and 65, 17 of the 25 were women, and, judging by people's attire, many were experienced walkers. They included two travel writers; a journalist who was going to write an article on the day for *The Guardian* newspaper[5]; an IT project manager; a researcher; a retired businessman; a local farmer; several small business entrepreneurs, including the BPT organisers (Guy, Charlotte, and Chris); an American regular visitor to Britain; and a duchess, who was one of the BPT's trustees. Because I was only able to talk to a few in the group, I was unable to learn much about the participants' beliefs concerning pilgrimage, but they were clearly open to the inclusive approach adopted by the group leaders even if some had come from conventional religious backgrounds (one was a clergyman's daughter, another was a regular Anglican worshipper, whereas another was a Muslim convert).

At each Neolithic site, the leaders had devised a small ritual to help people connect with one another and with the place itself. At the first stop on the walk, after everyone had looked at the signs provided by English Heritage that explained the site's history and slowly walked round the outer ring of stones, we formed a circle in the centre. Guy explained the site's history and reminded us to think about our intentions for undertaking the pilgrimage while Chris blessed a nearby stone with mead he had brewed himself from a small glass jar. As the wind and rain blew across the open landscape, he asked us in turn to pronounce our first names and then look carefully at each member of the group. At the end of this ritual, he explained that names bore the essence of a person or thing.

The weather improved as we made our way to the Long Barrow where once again Chris outlined the history of the place and the surrounding landscape. He explained that the entrance, marked by a massive stone, faced east to the rising sun, birth, heat, life in contrast to the west where the sun sets. He encouraged people to go inside and hum like the bees to evoke the spooky atmosphere, whereas Charlotte suggested that we commune with the stone by pressing our foreheads against it, bringing our prayers, petitions, and blessings.

The third place we visited was the most interesting in its rich symbolism. We walked across fields and down to a spring linked to the River Kennet by a small stream. Chris explained the significance of springs and wells, Charlotte again referred to Brighid and asked us to pronounce her names and encouraged us to wash in the water. We were also encouraged to use some stepping-stones to stand in the middle of the stream and experience the flow of the water rushing by. Only two were brave enough to stand on the wet stepping-stones—there were more volunteers to drink from the water filter that Guy filled from the stream. A weeping willow tree stood near the junction of the stream

3 www.wisdomkeepers.earth/post/interview-with-chris-park.
4 See www.instagram.com/pulvers.apothecary/?hl=en.
5 The article was published on February 29 by Holly Tuppen, 'Stone circles, silence and sanctuary: finding yourself on an Avebury pilgrimage', www.theguardian.com/travel/2020/feb/19/stone-circles-silence-sanctuary-avebury-pilgrimage-silbury-hill, accessed 23 July 2020.

and the river and Charlotte explained the meanings associated with this tree, whereas another nearby willow tree was festooned with coloured ribbons and other mementoes. The sacred quality of the site was, however, spoiled for some by the black plastic covers and rubbish left by other "pilgrims" in the nearby undergrowth.

After singing a song in praise of nature and our relationship with our environment, we continued on our way. People were getting tired as we had to negotiate a steep ascent to the next site—a burial ground on the outskirts of the Avebury complex—where we rested and had a picnic. We then walked down to Avebury itself where the pilgrimage neatly brought together pre-Christian and Christian heritage as we walked round the famous stone circle (henge) and visited the parish church with its rare surviving rood screen. The henge was constructed between 2850 and 2220 BCE and originally comprised

> [A] huge circular earthwork mound and ditch that surrounds the inner stone circle. The circle consisted of large sarsen stones, some as large as 40 tonnes and a height of over 4 m, and originally it had around 100 stones in total. This outer circle then encased a further two inner circles.[6]

It was abandoned after 1800 BCE and a village gradually developed with the inhabitants making use of the abandoned stones.

> [A]lmost all of the large sarsen stones have been removed in previous centuries by locals for either religious reasons (many were destroyed in the 17th and 18th century when Puritans were more mainstream in the country and also in the 14th century as is seen with the discovery of a body under a buried stone) or for building materials. (Ibid)

A busy road now runs through the henge as it leads up to the motorway between London and Bristol.

The members of the group were invited to perform two rituals that referred to Avebury's pre-Christian and Christian heritage. When we arrived at the henge, Guy talked about its history and then invited people to commune with its history and material energy by sitting on a seat carved into one of the remaining huge stones on the outer ring. A few solemnly proceeded to do so, whereas others walked over to the rampart circling the henge and the 'Tolkien trees' with their profuse, exposed, snake-like roots, festoon of ribbons and messages left on their trunks.[7] After crossing the busy road and a toilet break, Guy led us to the village church, stopping at the lynch gate, which he described in terms of the Christian break with pre-Christian traditions. Although the sacred was immanent everywhere before Christianity, the gate was a liminal space marking the transition from the secular world into the sacred space of the church and its surrounds. In the apex of the gate's lintel was carved a scallop shell—a reference to the church's dedication to St James the Apostle and a link to another pilgrimage route, the *camino*, leading to St. James's shrine at Santiago de Compostela (Spain). After browsing around the church, which seemed very welcoming to this eclectic range of visitors/pilgrims, the group made their way as night fell back to their cars, completing the circular tour, and group solidarity quickly broke down as tired limbs and minds encouraged people to make a quick get-away.

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6 https://lostinlandmarks.com/guide-to-visiting-avebury-stone-circle-village-wiltshire/

7 In a blog, written by a 'twenty-something traveler, occasional female solo traveler', the trees were associated with Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*: 'My friend, who had been before, told me these trees had been the inspiration for JRR Tolkien's 'walking trees' or Ents in The Lord of the Rings. If you've either seen the film or read the books, you'll recall the walking trees I'm talking about ... Ents are the huge talking trees that help the hobbits. People have tied ribbons to the tree's branches with wishes written on them. Unfortunately, I didn't know this was also the Avebury wishing tree, so I didn't have a ribbon on me'. See www.travelherstory.com/europe/visit-jrr-tolkiens-trees-avebury.

5. Discussion

I have brought together here two case studies of how rituals are invented and deployed, drawing on my personal experience. Although my involvement with pilgrimage to Lourdes has been far more extensive and long term than connection with the British Pilgrimage Trust (the lockdown following the outbreak of Covid-19 in Britain as of March 2020 put an end to subsequent trips), I believe that there is sufficient material here for comparison and a more general discussion.

5.1. Creating Sacred Places and Rituals: Institutions and Entrepreneurs

The case studies illustrate the role played by institutions and entrepreneurs in establishing the sacrality of particular places and inventing the rituals at these places. The emerging cult at Lourdes was developed by the Roman Catholic Church, whose religious leaders drew on a rich heritage of meaning-making through ritual. The grotto where Bernadette experienced her visions, was sacralised by the ceremonies held there, the erection of an altar and a massive candle tree, and the channelling of the spring. The long-established tradition of processing and blessing worshippers was utilised to create the Blessing of the Sick ceremony performed in a new sacred space—the Esplanade—flanked by altars and overlooked by statues of renowned saints.

As for the Avebury pilgrimage the rituals were invented by members of a very different institution and referred to a very different past. The British Pilgrimage Trust was a recent network of young entrepreneurs who took a highly eclectic approach towards pilgrimage and the past, drew on the interest in walking to devise a variety of walks and revive historic routes, and sought to take advantage of virtual communication through the internet and mobile phones. The practices devised by the three leaders for the February walk were influenced by 'New Age' beliefs and were designed to celebrate the sacrality of a pre-Christian social and material world. Although the day began and drew to a close at two village churches, the focus was on the sacred sites of a Neolithic landscape and pre-Christian heritage.

The invention of ritual and the creation of sacred space raise the issue of authority. At Lourdes, Bernadette explained her visions to a sceptical parish priest, and it was only after a detailed investigation by the local bishop that the full weight of the institutional church swung behind the emerging cult. The ceremonies introduced at the sanctuary were devised and controlled by the clergy, even if their performance was assisted by the lay volunteers who worked for the confraternities. In other words, authority was primarily vested in the ascribed status of Church officials. Members of the Hospitality could achieve authority and wield limited power over others through long service and progress to the higher reaches of the confraternity's hierarchical structure, but overall authority within the sanctuary was exercised by representatives of the Church Universal.

Similar to members of the Lourdes Hospitality, those leading the Avebury pilgrimage relied on their achieved status within the British Pilgrimage Trust as experts on heritage and folklore and as performers. Guy, for example, drew not only on his wide range of reading about pilgrimage but also on his choral training and experience of performing musical comedy. The BPT was a loose coalition of different interests and people that depended on a variety of events and worked with more permanent institutions, particularly the Church of England and English Heritage. Its development relied heavily on the enthusiasm of a few dedicated members, who survived financially through their entrepreneurial skills and connections.

In both cases, the rituals and the creation of sacred spaces is dependent of the ritual experts who have a certain authority. However, the participants (the pilgrims) also have agency. The Lourdes case showed that ritual change occurs under influence of cultural and social changes through which people, the *malades*, are considered to have agency and authority of their processes regarding their illness and their physical and mental condition. In the period between the 1970s and 2013, they have changed from mere objects of the ritual to active participants. In the Avebury case, there seemed to be more interaction between the ritual experts and the participants. Ritual performances were proposed and stimulated, but it depended on the willingness of the participants whether the rituals were actually performed. The rituals during the Avebury walk were inspired by 'New Age' or alternative spiritual beliefs and practices. These were most evident during Chris's blessing of the stones at the Sanctuary, the rituals performed by Guy and Charlotte at the spring, the references to the energy of the landscape's ley lines, to the goddess Brighid, and the festival of Imbolc. Yet, although the leaders acted as guides to the route and the sacred places, initiating kinetic rituals and referring to the magnetic power of the landscape and imparted specific knowledge about heritage and pre-Christian beliefs and practices, many participants appeared to draw on their own stocks of knowledge and performed their own rituals (see Mesaritou et al. 2020). In both cases, we see the increasing agency of the ritual participants, who brought their own knowledges, questions, and consumer items to record their experiences (i.e., cameras, smart phones, and iPads).

5.2. Ritual and the Relationship between People and the Landscape

The case studies provide strikingly different illustrations of the relationship between people and the landscape. At Lourdes, Bernadette's visions occurred at a place outside the town, which was associated with dangerous spirits, and the Church moved quickly to domesticate the grotto and the surrounding landscape. The erection of a gothic style basilica on top of the cliff overlooking the grotto was a reminder to visitors of the Church's presence and power. By the end of the nineteenth century, sacred space had been created behind the two main gates and the surrounding walls that contained the grotto, the baths and medical bureau, a hostel for the *malades*, the esplanade and the processional avenues, and the three churches rising up to the crown of the cliff. During the 1950s, the building works within the sanctuary began again with the construction of the massive underground church, whereas later building works have extended across the river in the meadow with the construction of a hospital, conference centre and chapel, a large altar, a youth centre, and an easy access Stations of the Cross, which complemented the old hilly Stations of the Cross overlooking the sanctuary.

At first sight the landscape encountered during the walk to Avebury and the rituals performed there appeared to be very different. In contrast to the bustling town of Lourdes and its busy sanctuary, the route took us across empty fields, up to wind-swept hills, down to a winding river surrounded by trees, and along an avenue flanked by ancient stones to the Avebury henge itself. Although Avebury was a village with shops, pub, church, and busy road, the journey was devoid of other people and we were continually reminded of our relationship with nature. The rituals devised by the leaders encouraged us to engage with the immanent energy and power of material things, such as the massive stones, the spring and river, the trees and their snaking roots. Many of the participants clearly enjoyed touching and feeling the stones, listening to the sound of their voices humming inside the long barrow, drinking the water from the stream, and sitting inside the massive stone at the Avebury henge. Ours was a sensual, embodied experience in other words (see Honarpisheh 2013; Maddrell 2013; Maddrell and Scriven 2016).

Yet, care needs to be taken not to overemphasise the differences between the two pilgrimages. In both cases, the rituals were designed to engage the senses and to heighten the emotional engagement with others—not just other humans but more-than-human others such as the Host and saints at Lourdes and the stones, spring, and trees during the BPT pilgrimage. If the landscape at Lourdes has been highly domesticated, the fields, hills, and woods across which we walked towards Avebury had also been domesticated through intensive agriculture and other forms of human ordering.

6. Conclusions

In this article I have explored the ways in which rituals have been invented and adapted over time in the context of pilgrimage to different types of sacred sites. The two case studies reveal, not surprisingly, significant differences in ritual discourse and practice but also similarities that challenge conventional typologies. The comparison revealed two key themes—(a) the role of institutions and entrepreneurs in creating rituals and sacred places and (b) the relationship between people and the domesticated landscape.

Ritual studies has demonstrated the manifold ways in which particular ritual discourses and practices both shape and are shaped by wider social, political, and economic processes. The case studies show that the participants possess their own agency and power, which is expressed through the growth of consumerism and leisure, alternative forms of knowledge, the questioning of traditional expertise, and increased mobility (see Urry 1995, 2000; Pink 2016). Institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church have sought to respond to these general developments expressed in the decline across Western Europe of congregational worship by seeking to draw the millions visiting shrines across Europe into Church ritual. An alliance is sought between the territorial model of parish and diocese and the mobilities integral to pilgrimage (see Eade 2017). The BPT also seeks to draw on the territorial model of parish and diocese—in this case, the Church of England—but its ritual discourse and practices reflect even more the mobilities, flows, and mixture of elements characterising the wider changes taking place across Western Europe during the last fifty years.

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