Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion 10.1–2 (2022/2025) 182–194 *JCSR* ISSN (print) 2049-7555
https://doi.org/10.1558/jcsr.25039 *JCSR* ISSN (online) 2049-7563

The New Anthropology of Ritual

Jordan Kiper

University of Alabama at Birmingham, United States

jkiper@uab.edu

Nick Mauro

The Ohio State University, United States

mauro.60@osu.edu

Rituals evolve socially over time, become powerful cultural technologies in their communities of practice, and offer several individual and societal benefits, including group cohesion and coordination. It is therefore tempting to consider the power of rituals and how to harness them to address current sociocultural crises. However, as scholars of religion and human rights, we wish to concentrate further on the potential harmful impacts of rituals and attempts (perhaps by policymakers) to harness rituals for some envisioned benefits. In this article, we center our discussion around Dimitris Xygalatas' new book, *Ritual: How Seemingly Senseless Acts Make Life Worth Living* (2022), which raises compelling evidence and methodologies for what we describe as the "new anthropology of ritual" but also intriguing arguments about the power of ritual. We argue that *Ritual* offers new insights that invite scientists of religion and cultural anthropologists to revisit longstanding debates over dangerous rituals, cultural intervention, and the limits of human rights.

Introduction

Dimitris Xygalatas, a renowned scholar of religion, offers a new anthropology of ritual that not only combines the precision of lab experiments and the contextual sensitivity of fieldwork, but also the history of ritual theory and his own research with colleagues to answer the question: why do humans engage in the apparently senseless acts of ritual? Xygalatas (2022) answers that rituals stem from our very nature and function as mental and cultural technologies

Keywords: anthropology, culture, interdisciplinarity, morality, ritual, ritual and costly signals, ritual and religion, ritual behavior, ritual theory

Submitted: 2022-12-22 Accepted: 2024-08-14

that have the power to enact social identities, help us cope with stress and anxiety, strengthen group solidarities, imbue our commitments with meaning, and make life worth living. Accordingly, rituals "serve functions that are much too important for humans to live without" (Xygalatas, 2022, p. 247).

As we convey in our précis (see Kiper & Mauro, 2024), which accompanies and complements this article, Xygalatas' research and lines of argumentation are highly persuasive. Here, we wish to build on our précis by saying more about the strengths of Xygalatas' book, while also taking a more critical stance toward the book's potential implications. To these ends, we defend two observations in what follows. First, whatever scholars or policymakers take away from Xygalatas' book, Xygalatas has advanced ritual studies beyond what many prior scholars have done. He has shown, for instance, through a series of remarkable experiments and extensive fieldwork, that ritual is a fundamental part of being human, creating social realities, and instilling group commitments. However, and this is our second observation, there's more to be said for Xygalatas' claims about harnessing the power of ritual. Bearing in mind other findings in the cognitive science of religion (CSR) and anthropology (e.g., Rappaport, 1999), we are not sure that rituals are always amenable to our control. We wish to complement Xygalatas' work by suggesting that rituals which evolve organically and become part of a community's traditions are powerful forces that are culturally embedded deeply within a people's way of life. Thus, it may not be possible – or as easy as Xygalatas or Whitehouse (2021) suggest – to harness the power of rituals to specific or novel ends.

Though we consider ourselves scholars of CSR, we are also active in the field of human rights, and bearing the latter in mind, we notice time and time again that ritual plays a complicated role in human rights, conflict prevention, and transition justice. Moreover, the power of ritual also brings us back to long-standing questions and ethical concerns in anthropology regarding rituals that contribute to violence within and between populations. Specifically, rituals can lead to destructive ends, which Xygalatas admittedly acknowledges, but we would like to consider those dangers further in what follows. Such rituals give us pause about attempting to harness the power of ritual. We agree with Xygalatas that rituals offer many societal benefits; but we want to consider at what cost – for instance, at what cost to human rights?

Scholars working exclusively in CSR may wonder why they should care about the above question – a fair retort. Our answer is twofold. First, work in CSR intersects with the broader concerns of anthropology, including moral cognition, contemporary political divides, and ethical commitments to vulnerable populations. Second, Xygalatas' book points to mechanisms that, we suspect, policymakers may attempt to use for their own ends. Put simply, if rituals

are powerful, then further reflections on that power, for better or worse, are in order. Consequently, we believe it is important for scientists of religion to consider how CSR connects to wider trends in anthropology and also how their findings may be interpreted and even utilized by others.

In what follows, we begin by reflecting on Xygalatas' argument that humans are a ritual species and ask why exactly we need ritual, but also whether ritual is something we can entirely control for our desired benefits. After that, we review Xygalatas' empirical findings to speculate about ritual in the contexts of human rights, conflict prevention, and transitional justice. We then come to our main concern: we ask what the new anthropology of ritual entails about rituals that contribute to violence or human rights abuses.

What Does It Mean to Be a Ritual Species?

Xygalatas, as a good scientist, begins from sensitive observations about the world around him, including fascination with rituals from his youth in Greece. As a seasoned anthropologist, he observes that virtually every social institution is replete with ritual (p. 4). Although these rituals inevitably vary across cultures and ecologies, they share certain characteristics which distinguish them from habits. Rituals are memorable, causally opaque, command our attention, involve symbolic actions, and produce no obvious practical results (pp. 4–9). From these observations Xygalatas infers that studying ritual presents scientists with multiple challenges. Chief among them is that because rituals exist in real-life settings, they cannot be replicated fully in the lab, nor can they be measured with a high degree of control in the field (p. 8). Moreover, as we point out in our précis (Kiper & Mauro, 2024) when ritual adherents are asked about their rituals, they often have little more to say than the common mantra heard by anthropologists the world over. That is, "What do you mean, why do we do our rituals? We just do them. It is our tradition. It is who we are. That's what we do" (p. 16).

To address these challenges, Xygalatas has broken new ground by combining sensitive measures (biometric sensors, psychometric tests, and participant observation), researching ritual behavior in a variety of contexts (lab experiments, field experiments, fieldwork, and phenomenology), and testing falsifiable predictions (pp. 16–17). In so doing, he has triangulated an impressive array of data that is unparalleled when it comes to findings on synchrony and extreme rituals. Unlike his forebears, Xygalatas has moved well beyond philosophical speculations about ritual based on participant observations alone and has instead delivered what may be the most comprehensive body of research on ritual in anthropology (comparable to such groundbreaking work as Bell, 1997; Douglas, 1966; Malinowski, 1922; Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Rappaport, 1999; Sosis, 2007; Whitehouse, 2004).

Connecting his findings to the broader field of ritual studies and CSR, Xygalatas argues that "rituals are part of human nature" (p. 20). Furthermore, we as humans are not alone in being a ritual species; ritualized behavior is, in fact, widespread among animals. But what sets humans apart is that we, as a highly intelligent species, engage in collective rituals, which are formal ritual performances undertaken together that, in turn, allow a community of practitioners "to outwit themselves" (p. 27). That is to say, rituals allow us to overcome collective action problems in ways that we as individuals or central planners could not. This is because rituals are a protolanguage that, if performed correctly, which means adhering to actions that have evolved socially over time to render the ritual with efficacity, can signal group commitments and thereby engender trust. What is more, ritual performances can create social identities, assuage anxieties, and separate the mundane from the sacred (pp. 31–49). Hence, Xygalatas argues that we are a ritual species who cannot live without ritual.

We pause here to note that even without considering Xygalatas' impressive findings any further (though we inevitably return to them in the next sections), ritual does appear to be a defining characteristic of being human. However, this claim creates a tension with two points that Xygalatas raises at the end of his book. There, he observes that we, in the industrialized West, are witnessing a decline in traditional ritual practices, and thus we should expect new rituals to emerge to face existential uncertainties that are bound to arise as we leave the (perhaps anomalous) relative stability of the twentieth century (p. 267). Fair enough – we cannot see any reason to dispute this point as it stands. Yet, Xygalatas also suggests in the same line of reasoning, as the title of the final chapter indicates, that we can harness the power of rituals for our benefit. In particular, we can harness rituals to overcome current global challenges, including the ongoing Covid pandemic, widespread mental health crises, and social fracturing worldwide.

On this point, we are sympathetic but skeptical to a degree, and for the sake of reflection, we wish to pull on this skeptical thread. If we are a ritual species, such that our need for ritual is continuous with other animals and, critically, that traditional rituals allow us to outwit ourselves, then it would suggest that we ourselves do not control the effects of rituals. Rather, rituals control us. After all, that is the very power of rituals according to Xygalatas: they are cultural technologies that have evolved and survived over time because they provide the means for us to do collectively those things which we as individuals cannot (p. 27). Rituals may originate with a person or group, but their power emerges only over time as they evolve socially within a greater cultural system. As such, it is the cultural system – not central planners – that provides the feedback channels

by which rituals are altered across generations to achieve individual and collective, including reproductive, success and group cooperation, respectively. Unless it can be demonstrated that a ritual purposefully created in a single generation by a group of individuals engenders the kind of benefits that Xygalatas detects in longstanding rituals, such as the Kavadi rite, it is unlikely that we can wield rituals that we invent for our own benefit. Instead, we can only participate (or enter into) those that have, for lack of better words, survived the test of time.

Granted, Xygalatas discusses the creation of Burning Man, an annual self-reliant event for artists and self-expressive societal escapists in the desert of Nevada. He points out that its founder, Larry Harvey, studied the anthropology of ritual, which motivated him to enact several ritual features into Burning Man such as purifying the event's space, forming therein zones of liminality, and burning a giant effigy of "the man" at the festival's finale (pp. 252–259). We have no doubt that many people who attend Burning Man enjoy the event, but it is an open question whether its attendees' experiences are remotely close to, say, the firewalkers of San Pedro Manrique (see below). Moreover, even though Burning Man includes ritual elements, we are not sure that they – or the overall event itself – constitute a ritual, according to Xygalatas' own definition. Again, rituals are causally opaque, command people's close attention, but also involve symbolic actions and are rigid, repetitive, and redundant (pp. 4–6, 66–71). Burning the effigy at the event may be the only ritual that parallels the synchrony of firewalkers or commitments involved in the Kavadi rite. However, it may also parallel – and be more like – the catharsis of college revelers burning couches in front of their fraternity houses after a football game. Without using careful measurements for new cultural practices as Xygalatas has used for traditional rituals, it remains an open question whether novel rituals can be invented for our benefit. Equally as true, it remains a question whether beneficial rituals only necessarily emerge over time from the complexities of the religious system (for a review of the religious system, see Purzycki & Sosis, 2022).

Before turning to the costs of rituals, we wish to consider the possibility of controlling rituals for our personal gain even further by returning to the question: what does it mean to be a ritual species? We believe that it means something similar to being a genetically evolved species. Like genetics, rituals make us human, but of course rituals do so in a social sense. Additionally, as with genetics, we should proceed with caution if we venture into the domain of attempting to wield the very powers that have created us. In the case of genetics, it is our biological makeup, while in the case of ritual, it is our social realities. Granted, genetic tampering is far more dangerous than ritual tampering, but evidence suggests that tinkering with rituals may not swing in favor of those who enact desired changes. An example, well-known to religious studies, is the

massive drop in attendance among Roman Catholics after Vatican II, when the mass was changed from Latin to the vernacular (Putnam & Campbell, 2012). As this example suggests, established rituals are terribly important, and we can participate in them to achieve the benefits outlined by Xygalatas. But we may not be able to harness those rituals in ways that we specifically desire.

What Are the Costs of Ritual?

Returning to the strengths of Xygalatas' work, scholars know far more about rituals today than in previous decades thanks to Xygalatas. His main contributions to anthropology and CSR are ongoing, including offering strikingly precise data and weaving his findings into the greater history of ritual studies. Regarding his methods and data, Xygalatas, like Branislaw Malinowski (1922), has trailblazed a new kind of anthropology. Above all, Xygalatas is well known for – and has inspired a generation of new scholars – who are likewise dedicated to combining experimentation, ethnography, and extensive participant observation. In this section, we discuss four major studies by Xygalatas and attempt to draw connections to our interests in human rights, conflict prevention, and transitional justice.

Arguably the most compelling results for applied anthropology, which Xygalatas and his colleagues have outlined, is that ritual is a natural response to anxiety. This thesis complements the prior studies of Malinowski (1922) and Gmelch (1978) on ritual magic. In one study, for instance, Xygalatas and his team tracked and examined the stress responses of two groups of participants in Mauritius using biomedical devices such as heart rate monitors. They placed one group in a scientific lab and the other in a Hindu temple, and asked both groups to write an essay in which they imagine a natural disaster. Although both groups experienced stress, those in the temple recovered far more quickly, indicating that affective spaces, which provide access to rituals, allow participants to reassert control over unpredictability and thereby alleviate their stress. Accordingly, Xygalatas provides concrete data to support Malinowski's thesis that ritual can reduce anxiety and thereby help humans cope and survive in any environment, and ultimately contribute to our well-being and fitness (pp. 78–85).

As it relates to our own areas of research, Xygalatas' findings are significant for persons and communities experiencing transitional justice, in which former combatants and survivors often struggle with PTSD and are forced to adapt to uncertain post-conflict environments. Persons who have experienced war or suffer from wartime traumas often feel a loss of control over their environment and lives, which ritual can alleviate (e.g., Sosis, 2019). Likewise, veterans routinely suffer from both war and returning to peacetime societies. In the latter

case, we speculate with others (e.g., Johnson et al., 1995) that more formal rituals demarcating a veteran's transition from warrior to civilian life could alleviate stress from combat and contribute to behavioral pathways to treat PTSD and moral injury (e.g., Molendijk, 2021).

However, if rituals function to reduce anxiety and allow humans to cope in any environment, then we should expect rituals to arise spontaneously where humans need them. Yet, in transitional or post-conflict environments, they are not always evident, raising several questions. Why are collective rituals, which could help communities cope, often missing in such environments? And if humans ought to perform them to circumvent social problems, what causes their blockage in contexts such as communities disrupted by war, gross injustices, or soldiers returning from combat? It is likely that the absence of rituals in these circumstances is a recording error, in which case the absence should not be interpreted as evidence. For rituals associated with cargo cults (e.g., Whitehouse, 1995) and recent conflicts (e.g., Sosis, 2007; Sosis & Handwerker, 2011) do indicate the emergence of rituals. But perhaps we as scholars are missing something when we gloss over other environments where we should expect new rituals but do not find them. In any event, answering these questions, as well as those outlined above, may be relevant and provide opportunities for future research in both transitional justice and the CSR.

Another remarkable finding – one for which Xygalatas is now famous – is the shared synchrony of firewalkers with their closest friends and loved ones. These data are foundational for the concept of collective effervescence in religious studies. Specifically, in San Pedro Manrique, Spain, participants, both firewalkers and observers, experienced synchronized spikes in heartrates when performing the firewalking rite. Based on these findings, Xygalatas argues that ritual which leads to collective effervescence not only engages affect but also mirror neurons that together create intense states shared across the group (pp. 129–136). Thus, again, Xygalatas provides compelling data to support a long-standing idea in religious studies.

Regarding the intense bonding that often results from rituals, Xygalatas is right to draw connections to Henry Tajfel's (1970) research on the minimal group paradigm (p. 95) and Whitehouse's (see also 2021) latest work on identity fusion (pp. 177–178). Similar to the minimal group paradigm, identity fusion often results from collective rituals where adherents come to see their individual and group identities as one. This in turn causes them to see attacks on the group or themselves as one in the same, for which they are willing to make extreme sacrifices. Xygalatas thus observes that rituals can be used to fuse individuals into violent groups, for which they are willing to engage in extreme acts, including indiscriminate violence and even self-sacrifice (p. 178).

This observation is one that cannot be overlooked. Rituals may make humanity, as Rappaport (1999) observed, but that "humanity" is often parochial and restricted to "us" and not "them." Several studies have found that the key to building violent coalitions, whose members are willing to sacrifice themselves and kill members of a recognizable civilian population, is ritual (e.g., Alcorta & Sosis, 2013; Atran, 2021; Sosis, Kress, & Boster, 2007; Whitehouse, 2021).

These studies support Xygalatas' claims that ritual engenders group commitments, prosociality, and meaning (pp. 174–213). However, they raise a problem that is apparent to scholars of conflict studies, and one that often gets overlooked by scholars who wish to portray our human nature as ultimately prosocial or peaceful (e.g., Fry, 2013). Xygalatas himself never claims this, but we can imagine other scholars – who are motivated to make such claims – inferring it from the CSR. But what we wish to highlight here is Xygalatas' warning about seeing rituals as entirely positive. As much as we may aspire for rituals to bring us together into a global community of peace (see Fry, 2012), the ethnographic record supports the fact that ritual is often likewise used to build communities that are highly cooperative but often not with outsiders (e.g., Atran, 2016). For this reason, we suspect that it may be useful to reinforce Xygalatas' warnings by considering ritual as a pharmakon. It is a powerful tool that can function not only as a remedy, but also as a poison (e.g., witchcraft accusations, scapegoating, and cultivating violence cadres), depending on the context.

Still, we are open to the possibility that a ritual could be used to create an overarching identity for humanity, by which the global community uses ritual to somehow scaffold greater peace practices (Fry, 2012). Along these lines, one of the most exciting results in the behavioral and brain sciences is Xygalatas' finding that participation in extreme rituals, such as the Thaipusam Kavadi, does in fact increase prosociality. The Thaipusam Kavadi, a pilgrimage in Mauritius, involves devotees to Murugan, a war god, who pierce their bodies with a multitude of objects and drag or carry heavy shrines in a procession to the local temple. After engaging in these rituals, Xygalatas and colleagues measured participants for pain and solicited for donations, whereby it was found that pain was highly correlated with donation amounts. Thus, dysphoric and high-intensity rituals can indeed promote prosocial attitudes toward others (pp. 158–174).

Returning to the dangers of rituals, these results are remarkable and raise questions for scholars of human rights. To illustrate, many extreme rituals have fallen under the scrutiny of the international human rights community and elicited questions about their legitimacy as respectable traditions or human rights violations. Consider, for instance, female genital cutting or mutilation (e.g., Wiener, 2017); intense initiation rituals of youths that, from the perspective of

many western nations, constitute child abuse (e.g., Herdt, 1999); or witchcraft accusations (e.g., Koning, 2013; see also Badar & Florijančić, 2021 for blasphemy charges). When evaluating these rituals, should human rights scholars consider the prosocial outcomes engendered by them? How should we deal with the human suffering of extreme rituals if they yield collective benefits? We do not pretend to have the answer to these questions. But we do think that scholars in the CSR, who defend the power and functional efficacies of extreme rituals (e.g., Whitehouse, 2021; Xygalatas, 2022), may need to be in greater conversation with human rights scholars about them. More may need to be said about rituals and human rights as well as tampering with extreme rituals (whether internally by practitioners or externally by outsiders).

Where Does the New Anthropology of Ritual Leave Us?

In this final section, we would like to ask: where does the new anthropology of ritual leave us? When it comes to future studies in the CSR, it is beyond doubt that Xygalatas has given scholars a new direction. It is one that not only inspires the rigor that he himself has achieved in his research, but also the care to analyze the many effects of ritual individually, with precision and sensitivity. As scholars of CSR, we identify with this camp – and we are inspired by Xygalatas. However, as scholars of human rights, we foresee a potential problem that may need to be anticipated.

Part of Xygalatas' argument, as we understand it, is as follows. If rituals are rigid, repetitive, redundant, and symbolic and thus require close attention during their performance, it is likely that rituals have these qualities only because they are organic. By that we mean they are systematic but also naturally ordered, meaning they have evolved socially. And if this is true, then rituals are alive within traditions. What we mean here is that rituals live and breathe within cultures; if the culture dies, then the ritual dies too, and if the ritual is removed from its culture, it will need to adapt to another local culture and ecology to harness its efficacy. But if this is true, then it would entail a conservative position about ritual as a cultural practice. That is to say, from Edmund Burke (2009 [1790]) to Alister Macintyre (2007 [1981]), conservative philosophers have argued that progressive positions, such as changing or abolishing cultural practices, will often fail because they ignore the power of traditions, which have developed (and evolved socially) within a culture. Be that as it may, progressive philosophers (see Kelly, 2005) have routinely rejected conservative arguments on the grounds that the traditions in question usually entail practices that are today arbitrary and ineffective. Yet, that argument may not hold true in light of the new anthropology of rituals. As Xygalatas has argued, rituals appear to be integral to both culture and the bonds they create among adherents. Consequently,

Xygalatas' argument may support conservative philosophical claims about traditions and culture more generally.

This may not be a problematic conclusion – after all, there is nothing inherently right or wrong about conservativism or progressivism, especially the underlying philosophies thereof, despite what our present-day's dysfunctional politics in the U.S. may suggest. And we may be reading too far into Xygalatas' implications since he is quite careful to give a nuanced perspective on rituals. Nevertheless, extreme rituals put scholars like us into a thorny dilemma, which we raised in the last section. If the new anthropology of ritual supports the power of ritual to the extent that we should consider the prosocial benefits of extreme rituals, it will likely require scholars of the CSR and human rights to reconsider debates in cultural anthropology about seemingly harmful traditions.

For example, we may have to face up to the problem of people using rituals to their own political advantage. This danger is not just isolated to politics but extends to disputes in the social sciences. As an illustration, the postmodern movement in anthropology and other cultural studies have often excused harmful rituals, such as female circumcision, because they are said to be crucial to cultural and ethnic identity (e.g., see Ahmadu & Shweder, 2009; Gourdine, 1996; Shweder, 2000). Leaving aside the question of whether female circumcision is harmful or whether social scientists have any business policing such matters, our point is this: some people will have a stake in what experts have to say about rituals. And we are simply observing that Xygalatas' talk of the "power of rituals" could get exploited for their political gain.

Of course, a counterpoint to our observations is that science is value neutral, and scientists are to follow the evidence – end of story. In Xygalatas' case, he has done exactly that. But again, he has done more. He asks us to consider the power of ritual and how it can be used for societal benefits. While we agree that it is inevitable to regard the power of ritual as a technology for humanity's advantage, we worry about the implications. What position should we take as scholars when it comes to policymaking? For instance, should we consider the prosocial benefits of hazing, violent initiations, scarification rites, and so forth before intervening in these potentially lethal activities? Again, we are not sure. But we suspect that answers may come from Xygalatas' own research program in conversation with others, if not developments on philosophical points he touches upon in his book, which may provide inroads to answering the above inquiries.

To illustrate, most of Xygalatas' research is on high-intensity, dysphoric rituals that occur infrequently, and thereby induce physiological responses that minimize stress and increase prosociality. However, by focusing so closely on

these rather fascinating rituals, Xygalatas leaves another side of ritual rather underexamined: namely, low-intensity, high frequency, but still euphoric rituals. We suspect that many, if not all of, Xygalatas' observations will hold in many of these cases. For instance, Xygalatas references Paul Zak's (2012) research, which shows that euphoria and prosociality still result from small-scale rituals, but the effects are largely limited to a small circle of participants. In any event, the work Xygalatas has done will surely inspire scholars to research a variety of rituals across the spectrums of high to low frequency rituals as well as those that span from dysphoric to euphoric experiences. In so doing, they may shed even more light on the variety of reasons that rituals survive in a local environment and, importantly for our purposes, provide new data to consider rituals and their relationship to contemporary culture.

Conclusion

To conclude, we wish to defend what we see as the least controversial claim in this article. That is, Xygalatas has authored a brilliant and provocative book, and Xygalatas' body of research has changed the field of ritual studies and will continue to inspire generations of scientists. Xygalatas' research program has offered remarkable evidence to reinforce big concepts in religious studies and advanced a new anthropology ritual. As we hope to have suggested here, the influence of Xygalatas' work is likely to expand well beyond the CSR and into the farthest corners of anthropology, where it will matter significantly for scholars wrestling with some of the most longstanding and compelling problems in the social sciences.

References

Ahmadu, F. S., & Shweder, R. (2009). Disputing the myth of sexual dysfunction of circumcised women: An interview with Fuambai S. Ahmadu by Richard A. Shweder. *Anthropology Today*, *25*(6), 14–17. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8322.2009.00699.x

Alcorta, C. S., & Sosis, R. (2013). Ritual, religion, and violence: An evolutionary perspective. In M. Juergensmeyer, M. Kitts, & M. Jerryson (Eds.), *Handbook of religion and violence* (pp. 571–596). New York: Oxford University Press.

Atran, S. (2016). The devoted actor: Unconditional commitment and intractable conflict across cultures. *Current Anthropology*, *57*(13), 192–203. https://doi.org/10.1086/685495

———. (2021). Psychology of transnational terrorism and extreme political conflict. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *72*, 471–501. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010419-050800

Badar, M., & Florijančić, P. (2021). Killing in the name of Islam? Assessing the Tunisian approach to criminalizing takfir and incitement to religious hatred against

international and regional human rights instruments. *Nordic Journal of Human Rights*, *39*(4), 481–507. https://doi.org/10.1080/18918131.2021.2021665
Bell, C. (1997). *Ritual: Perspective and dimensions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Burke, E. (2009 [1790]). *Reflections on the revolution in France*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics.
Douglas, M. (1966). *Purity and danger*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Evans-Prichard, E. E. (1937). *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Fry, D. (2012). Life without war. *Science*, *336*, 879–884. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1217987
———. (2013). *War, peace, and human nature: The convergence of evolutionary and cultural views*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Gmelch, G. (1978). Baseball magic. *Human Nature*, *1*(8), 32–39. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02908325
Gourdine, A. K. M. (1996). Postmodern ethnography and the womanist mission: Postcolonial sensibilities in possessing the secret of joy. *African American Review*, *30*(2): 237–245. https://doi.org/10.2307/3042357
Herdt, G. (1999). *Sambia sexual culture: Essays from the field*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
Johnson, D. R., Feldman, S. C., Lubin, H., & Southwick, S. M. (1995). The therapeutic use of ritual and ceremony in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, *8*(2), 283–298. https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.2490080209
Kelly, P. (2005). *Liberalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Kiper, J., & Mauro, N. (2024). An overview of Dimitris Xygalatas' *Ritual: How seemingly senseless acts make life worth living* (2022). *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion*.
Koning, N. (2013). Witchcraft beliefs and witch hunts: An interdisciplinary explanation. *Human Nature*, *24*, 158–181. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-013-9164-1
MacIntyre, A. (2007 [1981]). *After virtue: A study in moral theory*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
Malinowski, B. (1922). *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An account of native enterprise and adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge.
Molendijk, T. (2021). *Moral injury and soldiers in conflict: Political practices and public perceptions*. New York: Routledge.
Purzycki, B., & Sosis, R. (2022). *Religion evolving: Cultural, cognitive, and ecological dynamics*. Sheffield: Equinox.
Putnam, R., & Campbell, D. (2012). *American grace: How religion divides and unites us*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
Rappaport, R. (1999). *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Shweder, R. (2000). What about 'female genital mutilation'? And why understanding culture matters in the first place. *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, *129*(4), 209–232. http://www.jstor.com/stable/20027671

Sosis, R. (2007). Psalms for safety: Magico-religious responses to threats of terror. *Current Anthropology*, *48*(6), 903–911. https://doi.org/10.1086/523015

———. (2019). Can rituals reduce stress during war? The magic of Psalms. In J. Slone & W. McCorkle (Eds.), *The cognitive science of religion: A methodological introduction to key empirical studies* (pp. 193–202). New York: Bloomsbury Academic Press.

Sosis, R., & Handwerker, P. (2011). Psalms and coping with uncertainty: Religious Israeli women's responses to the 2006 Lebanon War. *American Anthropologist*, *113*(1), 40–55. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2010.01305.x

Sosis, R., Kress, H., & Boster. J. (2007). Scars for war: Evaluating alternative signaling explanations for cross-cultural variance in ritual costs. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *28*, 234–247. https://doi-org.uab.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2007.02.007

Tajfel, H. (1970). Experiments in intergroup discrimination. *Scientific American*, *223*(5), 96–103. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24927662

Whitehouse, H. (1995). *Inside the cult: Religious innovation and transmission in Papua New Guinea*. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. (2004). *Modes of religiosity*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira.

———. (2021). *The ritual animal: Imitation and cohesion in the evolution of complex society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wiener, M. (2017). Freedom of religion or belief and sexuality: Tracing the evolution of the UN Special Rapporteur's mandate practice over thirty years. *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, *6*(2), 253–267. https://doi.org/10.1093/ojlr/rwx005

Xygalatas, D. (2022). *Ritual: How seemingly senseless acts make life worth living*. London: Profile Books Ltd.

Zak, P. J. (2012). *The moral molecule: The source of love and prosperity*. New York: Penguin Group.