



Anthropology of the Middle East

Call for Papers

Religious rituals' reflection of current social conditions in the Middle East

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Guest Editor: Dr. Ingvild Flaskerud, Oslo University

The focus of this special issue of *Anthropology of the Middle East* is the dynamic relationship between ritual and social conditions. Peoples' performance of religious ritual is never isolated from the social and political setting in which it takes place. It is therefore inevitable that ritual and its participants somehow contend with the current social context. In acknowledging the key role that ritual plays in the social life of individuals, groups, and communities, we invite papers that explore how Muslim rituals are performed and negotiated across the Middle East in response to social conditions.

Muslims engage in ritual practices daily, as in performing prescribed prayers and spontaneous supplications. A person's transition through various phases of life is managed in life cycle rites. Local and regional pilgrimage sites attract thousands of people throughout the year, and communities come together in the celebration of prophets' and saints' birthday and the commemoration of their death. But ritual has many and often contradictory meanings and functions to people. As ritual often refers to something beyond itself (Hüsken and Simon 2016) it can be a means of achieving, for example, identity building and maintaining groups and traditions, of challenging or extending authority, power and influence, and of contesting or promoting ideologies, moralities, different forms of religiosity and ritual forms. In such meaning-making endeavors, rituals are constantly evaluated, assessed and critiqued (Grimes 1990). The critique can be positive or negative, either supportive of existing practices, or demanding a return to something believed to be lost, or even promoting reforms. Normative debates on 'correct' ritual practice are thus not uncommon and ritual practice and its interpretation may undergo substantial modifications, as long as this appears as meaningful in a given socio-political context.

In this special issue, we examine religious ritual as a form of technology or method for accomplishing something in the real world (Driver 1998) and invite papers that analyse the performance of ritual from a participant perspective. Which social concerns are addressed through or in ritual performance? How are the identified issues negotiated in ritual performance? Who is involved? How do negotiations affect the ritual form?

Embedded in our approach is attention to the ritual participants' ability to critique and act reflectively and strategically, regarding both the social conditions in which they live and the existing ritual practice. What is the social vision that ritual participants seek to establish and how do ritual participants reflect on the meaning and usefulness of traditional or existing ritual practices? These questions relate to matters of authority and interpretation. Do people consolidate around hegemonies and the validity of long-followed ritual, or usher new interpretations and spur demands for change? How are rituals made meaningful on individual, societal and political levels? What happens to the ritual form? Is it subject to solidification, reaffirmation reformulation, deletion, or invention?

Submission

Authors should submit a title and abstract (200–300 words), along with their name, title, and institutional affiliation to guest editor Dr. Ingvild Flaskerud (ingvild.flaskerud@teologi.uio.no) as soon as possible. We also invite reports on books, films, conferences and exhibitions that deal with the above issues.

Deadline for submitting articles: 15 July 2021

More information, including the style guide, can be found at www.berghahnjournals.com/ame.