

Christiane Brosius and Karin M. Polit [eds.]. *Ritual, Heritage, and Identity: The Politics of Culture and Performance in a Globalised World*. New Delhi: Routledge Press, 2011. 308 pages. \$95.

Travel to a foreign country provides opportunities, sometimes frustrating and other times enjoyable, to discover and experience different languages, cultures, and social and religious rituals. We learn not only about other people, we also gain new insights and clarity about ourselves. When we read books that lie outside our areas of expertise, new vistas appear, which can deepen and enrich our own discipline. Brosius and Polit's edited work is a double journey, intellectual and cultural. In this edited collection, scholars interested in cultural anthropology engage questions of identity, culture, ritual, and politics given a globalized, postmodern world, relying mostly on illustrations taken from the India's diverse and rich society.

The journey begins with an observation that in an increasingly globalized world, ritualized performances "are not clearly tied to and defined via national territories and identities." (2) Moreover, the book, the editors note, is a response to the tendency of UNESCO to treat rituals as heritage and the political and societal implications for doing so. The authors raise new questions about ritual and heritage and their relation to politics, power, and commodification of rituals. Questions arise, as well, about the relation between ritual and communal and social identity, especially given the movement within and between nations or groups of people and their respective cultures. What are the social and communal functions of rituals? How are rituals related to heritage—a creative process of individual and group imagination conveying intangible meanings? (21) What is the relationship between ritual and culture, given the fluidity of movement between and among groups in a pluralistic society? Who owns ritual performances? The authors of these intriguing chapters take pains to define ritual, heritage, and identity as they take up these and other questions from the perspective of cultural anthropology and the laboratory of Indian society.

There are always reluctant travelers who must be given good reasons to embark. I believe this may be true of some readers who are ensconced in their own traditions and rituals. A detailed review of the various chapters of the book may provide people with enough information to entice them to read it, but space limitations make this approach impossible. Instead, I suggest several benefits one may obtain in reading this book and, if not the whole book, various chapters that spark one's interest. Let me first note that, as ministers and seminary professors, religious rituals and the Judeo-Christian traditions are our bread and butter. We recognize that the practice of our rituals and heritage provide the basis for religious identity and community in a society that is increasingly complex, varied, and secular. One benefit of this book is that it provides clear definitions and illustrates how concepts such as ritual and heritage are integral to individual, social, and communal identity.

Another important advantage of this book is that it shifts our perspective, helping us to see the growing impact of globalization vis-à-vis our own religious heritages and "performances" of ritual. Many ethnically rooted Christian denominations in the U.S. are losing members, suggesting that some of our religious rituals and heritages may be slowly moving to museum status. The loss of members for some may be gain for others. Brosius and Polit's book also provides a way of thinking about cultural fluidity and changes vis-à-vis those cultural and religious rituals that become moribund, while others gain in importance. A related benefit of this book is its addressing how macro variables such as political and economic systems, can both shape ritual performances, as well as undermine them. Put differently, there are occasions when

there is a question of who “owns” the heritage and, at times, ownership may function less to preserve a specific identity and culture than to serve as an economic tool. We have seen variations of this with First Nations people in the U.S. and Canada. If this seems far from the various Christian denominations and their heritages, then we remember our annual political conversations about the rituals surrounding Christmas in the public realm. From a larger perspective, this book provides definitions and illustrations that can bring into focus our own society’s struggle to handle diverse cultural and religious rituals in a pluralistic society, as well as to take note of the societal tendency toward ritual as spectacle.

For readers who enjoy exploring new terrain in the hope of returning with new perspectives that will enrich their lives and work, this book will not disappoint.

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