

Call for Contributions | CARGO 17

"Rituality and Economy: The Material Thickness of Rituals"

This special issue is coordinated by:

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Article Submission Guidelines and Timeline

The title, abstract (10 to 15 lines), and keywords of the article should be submitted in French or English to the coordinators of the special issue, Katerina Seraïdari (k.seraidari@gmail.com) and Artemis Skrepeti (artskrepeti@yahoo.com), and to the journal's editors (cargo.canthel@gmail.com) by **November 7, 2025**. Selected contributors will be notified by **November 30, 2025**.

Articles, in either French or English, should be between 30.000 and 50.000 characters including spaces and bibliography. The articles may contain copyright-free illustrations. The first draft of the article must be submitted to the editorial team by **February 27, 2026**. The second draft, revised according to the team's feedback, should be submitted for double-blind peer review by **April 24, 2026**. Before submitting your article, be sure to consult the "Note to Authors" available on the journal's website. This step is important to ensure your submission meets all editorial standards.

Abstract

In social sciences, the study of rituals has long been a domain of predilection for the sociology and anthropology of religion. In this context, the meaning of rituals, their relation to the concept of symbolic efficacy, and their contribution to social cohesion and the reproduction of myths have been broadly examined. Since some decades, the interdisciplinary field of "ritual studies" has broadened the scope, analyzing secular, religious, initiatory, syncretic, and hybrid rituals and their dynamics with the aim of understanding how they shape and transform individuals and societies. In this theoretical framework, ritual is approached as a distinct object of study (Bell, 1997 ; 2009). Here, we will focus more specifically on its material thickness, that is its material and economic dimensions.

As the foundational works on the Potlatch by Boas (1897), the Kula ring by Malinowski (1922), and the question of gift and counter-gift posed by Mauss (1923-1924) demonstrate, the economic dimension of rituals has been a key subject of analysis from the very beginning of social and cultural anthropology. These theoretical approaches can still be applied in the analysis of contemporary rituals, which are far more permeated by market logic. They still invite us to examine the role of gifts and debt in contemporary rituals. By what means does a ritual manage to distance itself from the market sphere? Who pays for what and for what reason, and what rules define the payment? Is payment made in kind or in money, and is it done openly

or secretly? How can one know the “fair price” to pay in a context where secrecy is the predominant dimension (Favret-Saada, 1977)?

In this special issue, we will examine how ethnographic fieldwork, grounded in different theories of economic anthropology, can highlight the material thickness of rituals.

According to the formalist approach, rituals can be analyzed as rational choices where participants maximize gains (social or spiritual), by calculating costs of goods, time and energy. Within this theoretical framework, it is considered that core concepts, derived from neoclassical economics, such as rationality, scarcity, and maximization, can be applied to all societies, regardless of cultural context. How can we interrogate in this case the collective and symbolic dimensions of rituals without reducing their complexity to a simple cost-benefit equation?

Substantivism, which views the economy as “embedded” in social and cultural institutions (Polanyi, 1944; Sahlins, 1972), allows us to move beyond both the market logic and the oversimplification according to which a primitive economy is merely an economy of scarcity. On the contrary, the study of certain societies, particularly those which challenge the Western model of development, reveals the possibility of rejecting the dominant economic logic. These can be seen as societies against the economy (Clastres, 2017). In this approach, which re-defines the notion of abundance, rituals act as mechanisms of reciprocity (gift exchange) or redistribution (centralizing and sharing goods). They do not aim at individual profit but at the creation and maintenance of social ties. Hence, rituals reveal an economic logic which is not based on supply and demand but on the gift and social obligation.

In *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss (1962: 46-7) explains that a game is disjunctive, as at the end of the match, the participants “will be distinguished into two categories : winners and losers.” In contrast, a ritual is conjunctive, since “the 'game' consists of making all participants switch to the winning side.” This approach often presents the ritual as a locus of selflessness, as a social anti-structure, where the abolition of protocols allows people to fraternize with no ulterior motive and to enter into communion, far from any form of social antagonism and rational calculation, as illustrated by Turner's concept of *communitas* (1969).

According to the Marxist approach proposed by Godelier (1966; 2000), rituals aren't simply ideological superstructures. Instead, they are practices that actively contribute to the creation and consolidation of relations of production and power. This perspective raises a fundamental issue: how can rituals not only reproduce power relations but also generate forms of resistance or subversion against dominant economic and social structures?

Bourdieu's theory of practice (1994; 2000), sheds light on rituals as processes allowing actors to accumulate various forms of capital (economic, social, cultural) while transforming them into symbolic capital (prestige, honor). For Bourdieu, ritual often operates within an “economy of priceless things” (*ibid.*: 182), where the actor cannot be reduced to a purely calculating subject. Instead, he remains an agent who “leaves the question of economic interest implicit, or, if it is stated, it is through euphemisms, that is, in a language of denial” (*ibid.*: 184).

The edited volume by Gudeman and Hann (2015) should also be mentioned here. Opting for an analysis that challenges traditional macroeconomic approaches, it demonstrates how ritual and household microeconomics are intertwined in certain post-socialist regions. The authors argue that, contrary to modernization theories that predicted the decline of rituals in favor of economic rationality, these two spheres remain deeply connected.

Bringing together economic anthropology and ritual studies will hopefully allow us to explore these questions in depth and in a novel way. Should the analysis focus on, or refuse to consider the economic interest and utilitarian aspects of ritual (traditionally situated outside the world of labor and the market)? How can a methodological position be justified in relation to a specific ethnographic fieldwork? How do we conceptualize ritual in relation to contracts and exchanges, offerings and alms (Bondaz & Bonhomme, 2017), asceticism and luxury, accumulation and consumption, or even the destruction of goods? How do objects circulate from one ritual to another, and to what extent is this recycling process justified by symbolic, practical, and economic reasons? Other questions emerge within this context: What is the economic dimension of objects used during a ritual, of religious souvenirs (Kotsi, 2007), or of the places that participants frequent, whether these are natural, improvised, and temporary, or, conversely, constantly expanded and majestic (Albert, 2000)? How does scarcity or material deterioration define the value of things within a ritual context? In which cases of ritual activity can we speak of impoverishment or, conversely, enrichment?

The economic dimension also relates to the festive expenses and funding sources of rituals (Skrepeti, forthcoming; Baudry, 2023; Seraïdari, 2005: 75-136), to religious tourism, as well as to the economic losses and benefits generated by the performance of ritual activities (Makrides and Seraïdari, 2019). The relationship between the value of objects and their ritual efficacy is another compelling topic. Indeed, a low-cost item can sometimes be far more powerful, in a ritual context, than something made of precious materials.

The goal is to analyze how rituality creates, mobilizes, and redistributes resources. What are the financial costs, and who bears them? How is labor divided, and what role does volunteerism play? How do goods circulate in the form of offerings, gifts, sacrifices and food? How do we define the production of symbolic value (prestige, status, legitimacy) that can be converted into economic capital?

By moving beyond the classic opposition between the economic and the symbolic, we aim to focus on objects, bodies, and places, and their ritual and economic implications. We are seeking analyses that explain how rituals are integrated into systems of production and consumption, that examine how they generate wealth, subordination or debt, and that question their capacity to structure (or not) inequalities and power relations. Proposals should demonstrate how ethnographic fieldwork (interviews, observations, and inquiries into local socio-histories) highlights and renews theoretical approaches pertaining to the economic dimensions of rituals.

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