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In *Food, Festival and Religion*, Francesca Ciancimino Howell takes readers on an intimate journey through Italian cities and countryside, providing insight into communal feasting, pilgrimage, rituals and costumed events that weave together the sacred and mundane. Each of her intricate ethnographic accounts ties into an argument that “heterotopic space”, like community festivals and other ritualized gatherings, creates a deeper connection between people and place, “allowing for a flow of deeper communication and awareness” (p. iv). Her study, the culmination of a decade of fieldwork, provides a captivating interdisciplinary narrative that contributes to a number of fields, such as religious studies, environmental studies, philosophy, anthropology and food studies.

Howell begins by situating readers within her theoretical framework in Chapter 1. Drawing on theories of materiality, sense of place, animism and relationality, Howell lays the foundation upon which she intends to analyze her ethnographic work. Central to her argument are Ingold’s notions of “poetics of dwelling” and “relational epistemology”, as well as Foucault’s “heterotopia”. These theoretical underpinnings give rise to Howell’s argument that “religion, lived customs and embodied traditions help us to weave our world and develop meaning” (p. 19).

Following this introduction to Howell’s theoretical precedents are three chapters describing her ethnographic fieldwork and three chapters containing her theoretical contributions. Before launching into her fieldwork, Howell uses Chapter 2 to introduce the history and traditions of festivals more generally, as well as the specific concepts of *feste* (Catholic saints’ days or “feast days”) and *sagre* (culinary or agricultural events) in Italy. Here, Howell draws on the idea of “time-out-of-ordinary-time” to argue that the value of studying festival in Italy and festival foodways lies in their ability to generate a connection to place and celebrate lived religious tradition.

Throughout Chapters 3 and 4, Howell guides readers through the communities and festivals of northern Italy, specifically the regions of Lombardy (Chapter 3) and Piedmont (Chapter 4). In Lombardy, Howell explores the intersections and differences of the *Festa del Badalisc*, a long-running annual January festival in a small Alpine village, and the *Capodanno Celtico* (“Celtic New Year”), a large urban festival held in Milan. Employing theories of civil
religion and heterotopia, Howell illustrates that while the Badalisc festival provides a liminal festival experience and the Celtic New Year lacks an integration to hometown, both festivals provide ritualized experiences that engage with place, creating a “bridge between Nature and culture” (p. 96).

In Piedmont, a historically agricultural region in Italy, Howell turns her attention to Italian Druidry and gastronomic festivals. Here, readers learn how local foodways intertwine with folklore, the built environment and community ritual as Howell outlines the origins of the Slow Food Movement, the traditions of the Pumpkin Festival (La Sagre del Zucca) and the rituals of the Saint Martin Festival. Nature and the harvest take center stage in this chapter, as communities focus their celebrations on local and seasonal produce that celebrate regional food and maintain collective memory. This orientation to nature is explored further in Chapter 5, where her discussion of Druidry and Pagan festivals in Italy reveal an attachment to and celebration of localized and embodied traditions. These movements are characterized by their search for connection to nature through place-based materiality.

Chapters 6 and 7 mark a departure from ethnographic narrative and a return to theories previously outlined in Chapter 1. In Chapter 6, Howell discusses connections between her fieldwork on Italian festivals and the critical theories underpinning her work (e.g., Foucault’s theory of heterotopia, Latour’s cultural hybridity and Ingold’s relational epistemology). She closes by presenting her analyses and conclusions in Chapter 7, where she introduces her quantitative “Scale of Engagement”, an index based on her Theory of Active Place by which to measure specific aspects and qualities of each festival outlined in her study. Howell’s scale comprises four categories by which each festival can be quantified: (1) organization, (2) depth of connection, (3) materiality and power of place, and (4) perceptions of place.

While her book provides an example of compelling, thick ethnography combined with well-grounded theoretical contributions on a particularly distinctive subject, it does, at times, seem that Howell misses an opportunity to integrate more fully the role of food and foodways in place-making. In a handful of chapters, food feels like an afterthought, despite its prominent role in the title of the volume. In spite of this limitation, Howell’s care for this work is evident throughout her writing, which provides the reader with an opportunity to connect more deeply with her narrative accounts. Howell’s work provides scholars with a nuanced perspective on food, festival and lived religion, as well as an excellent toolkit with which to continue examining the intimate relationship between people and place facilitated by materiality and religion.