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Analysing Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament

SHIRIN M. RAI

This article explores the importance of ceremony and ritual as a frame within which to examine political institutions such as parliaments. It suggests that through such analysis we can trace the circulation of meanings, the particularity of institutional cultures and the sedimentation of power in political institutions. Methodologically, the article challenges the popular view that ceremony and ritual can be regarded simply as 'trappings' of power; it thus emphasises their continued political relevance. Finally, the article assesses the values ascribed to particular forms of institutional power rather than the other – to understand why certain norms, rituals and ceremonies are normalised and others deemed deviant, thus rendering marginal those that are seen to be the 'others' within the institutional space.

Keywords: *power; ceremony and ritual; invented traditions; performance; audience; belonging.*

Cultures are built on the edge of an abyss. Ceremony is a declaration against indeterminacy. (Kenneth Burke in Moore and Myerhoff 1977, p. 16)

Introduction

This introductory article explores the importance of ceremony and ritual as a prism through which to examine political institutions such as parliaments. It examines some issues of definition – what are the key distinguishing features of ceremony and ritual? It then sketches the sociology and the sociopathy of ceremony and ritual – how do they mark tradition and modernity and what exclusions and terms of inclusion do they help stabilise? Finally, it examines the framing of power relations through ceremony and rituals and suggests, following and extending Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), that ceremony and rituals are always gendered and often 'invented traditions' that are critical to stabilising and reproducing the power of institutions. The argument here is that ceremony and ritual are constitutive of and constituted by dominant social relations and that they both help as well as disturb the circulation of power. In conclusion, the article suggests that while 'new institutionalist' perspectives are an important step towards uncovering the various relational ties between formal and informal power (see Waylen, this volume), the study of parliaments would benefit from

examining ceremony and rituals not simply as historical backdrops but as operative frames of power in public life.

Studying Parliaments

Despite continuing and, some would say, growing attacks on parliamentary institutions as weak and ineffective, corrupt and out of touch (Pennings 2000, Kapur and Mehta 2006, Barkan 2008, Hudson and Tsekpo 2009), they continue to be important to the politics of states. Parliaments make laws and develop public norms and also legitimise political systems. For citizens in parliamentary systems, state openings, debates, no-confidence motions or resignation speeches all make for grand theatre. Parliaments are also symbolic institutions – of the national state and its political system: in the context of India, for example, Nehru had referred to the ‘majesty of parliament’ (Kapur and Mehta 2006, p. iii) and called the Indian parliament a ‘temple of democracy’ (Spary, this volume).¹ Often parliaments are housed in grand buildings that symbolise the power of these institutions (Puwar, this volume), as well as that of the nation, or its aspirations towards some democratic norms and ideals. Staged in these buildings, ceremonies and rituals become markers of recognition of us as ‘national’ subjects or of the distance between ordinary citizens and political elites. Parliaments are often presented as undifferentiated institutions although they are historically marked with deep divisions of class, race, gender, (dis)ability and sexuality. In most cases parliaments remain privileged spaces dominated by men from the upper classes, castes or dominant religions, regions and races – for example, men constitute 83 per cent of membership of parliaments worldwide. This privilege finds shape, colour and voice in parliamentary ceremony and ritual as they make visible links with the past, renew a sense of identity of ‘the nation’ as well as the nation-state and construct/reproduce historical privilege. Post-colonial critiques of traditional political anthropology have allowed us to open up the question of the way in which analyses of parliaments continue to assume that legislatures across South Asia carry the mark of the institutions of the ‘mother country’ – the Westminster model for example is taken as read in South Asia (Spencer 2007).

Parliaments are representative institutions but are also representative of a particular phase of modern capitalism. In the second and third waves of democratisation, explicit links are made between representative democracy and efficient and contemporary capitalism. Market preference and political preference come together in the exercise of economic and political power of individual citizens as consumers of economic and political goods. Parliaments, therefore, are critically embedded in the political economy of modern state systems and create spectacles of, as well as represent, a particular set of structures – in-dominance. This representation is often legitimised in ways that do not explicitly make the links between political economy and political institutions. Rather, parliamentary institutions seek to legitimise their representative characteristic through invoking

historical and nationalist aspirations of the modern nation-state in tandem. While this provides a powerful framework of legitimacy, this also creates tensions in the functioning of parliament leading to a fractured identity of the institution. These tensions are often visible in ways in which ceremony seems to synthesise the historical and everyday rituals of contemporary politics, while at the same time revealing gaps between this synthesis and the ever changing political landscape.

Studies of parliaments have largely focused on the functions that parliaments perform – deliberative, legislative, legitimising, and symbolic. Parliamentary Studies as a sub-field has also developed different typologies of legislative institutions, and socialisation of parliamentarians has been an important focus of research as scholars have sought to explain why legislators behave the way they do (Mughan *et al.* 1997, Rosenblatt 2007). This has been examined from functionalist, behaviouralist perspectives, from the perspective of role theory (Saalfeld and Muller 1997) as well as rational choice theory (Strøm 1997). Although these perspectives have contributed enormously to the debates on parliaments, increasingly the insights they have developed have been folded into the broadening field of new institutionalism, which sees institutions ‘not simply [as] equilibrium contracts among self-seeking, calculating individual actors or arenas for contending social forces. They are collections of structures, rules and standard operating procedures that have a partly autonomous role in political life’ (March and Olsen 1984, 2005, p. 3; see also Franceschet; Waylen; and Celis and Wauter, this volume). There has also been some interest in the ways in which architecture and space shape parliamentary business (Goodsell 1988, Dovey 1999, Puwar, this volume) and some interest in the performance of political rhetoric in parliaments (Finlayson 2007, Illie 2003). Political anthropologists have turned their gaze to legislative institutions to explain how cultures of deliberations affect the functioning of parliaments (Crewe and Muller 2006, Crewe 2007). The argument here is that ‘Since abstract entities – such as nation and democracy – can only be perceived through symbolic means, rituals are a way of participating in one’s nation’ (Crewe, this volume). This special issue is a contribution to this rich body of literature on parliaments.

Ceremony and ritual are understood variously in this volume – some translate ceremony and ritual as norms and rules (see Celis and Wauters; Franceschet) while others are careful to distinguish the formality of ceremony from the more informal, everyday unselfconscious performance of ritual; some focus on the disciplinary aspects of ceremony and ritual others on the power of disruption of these (Crewe; Spary); some explicitly address gendered inequalities that sediment through ceremony and rituals (Armitage; Celis and Wauters; Franceschet) while others address this issue indirectly by showing how the performance or disruption of ceremony and ritual demarcates the spaces of gendered participation (Crewe; Puwar; Spary). These different approaches also reflect different disciplinary frameworks – new institutionalism (Celis and Wauters; Franceschet; Waylen), political anthropology (Crewe), sociology (Puwar), post-structuralism (Crewe; Rai; Spary). However, together, this special issue hopes to contribute

to the further opening up of parliamentary studies through bringing ceremony and ritual into focus when analysing parliaments, through which we also open up a new way of thinking about institutional power. The following sections review the literature on ceremony and ritual in the context of political institutions and the study of power.

Defining Ceremony and Ritual – Framing Social Relations

Studying ceremony and ritual in politics challenges the utilitarian and rational choice understanding of political scope, decision-making and policy outcomes. It highlights the role of emotion, sentiment and affect in politics and helps us understand how everyday rituals and ceremonial performances hold disparate interests, histories and visions of the future together against all odds, while at the same time embodying the possibilities of evolutionary, transgressive and disruptive change. As Kertzer suggests, ‘To understand the political process, then, it is necessary to understand how the symbolic enters into politics, how political actors consciously and unconsciously manipulate symbols, and how this symbolic dimension relates to the material bases of political power’ (1988, pp. 2–3).

It can be argued that ceremony and ritual in parliament are deployed both to awe and to put beyond contestation the everyday workings of institutions and in so doing secure the dominant social relations that obtain within it. It can also be argued that ceremony and ritual also provide the glue that binds individuals to each other, to the social forms within which they perform and to commonly held ideals and ideas that cohere within societies and polities. This is not to make ceremony and ritual functional to the study of power but to articulate the delicate and often overlooked interlacing between spectacle and power – power is performed. Following Agamben (2007), one could ask the question ‘Why does power need glory?’ and suggest that the answer might be that glory blinds those who investigate power with all its embellished attachments to the powerful (Agamben 2007)² while at the same time the performance of power often produces the affect of ceremony and ritual. The majesty of power thus materially and discursively delineated through ceremony and ritual structures the possibilities of opposition. This is important because governmental power is, to use Agamben’s phrase, vicarious – it is constructed and reproduced, in part, through ceremony/ritual through which new meanings of power are inscribed. Routinisation, socialisation and ritualisation do not here mean powerlessness or meaninglessness; on the contrary, through these processes power becomes invisible, sedimented, ‘commonsensical’ and part of our way of thinking about ourselves as well as those who govern us. In parliaments, rules and norms become in/visible through ceremony and ritual – mirroring dominant social relations on the one hand and, on the other, almost through a sleight of hand, making them disappear from view. It is this quality perhaps – of combining hyper-visibility with invisibility – that makes it so important to study ceremony

and ritual in parliamentary politics. The next section examines some definitional issues related to ceremony and rituals in politics.

For our purposes, *ceremony* means an activity that is infused with ritual significance, performed on a special occasion while *ritual* means the prescribed order of performing ceremonial acts; we thus distinguish the hyper-visibility of ceremony and routinisation of ritualised performance. We also distinguish between formal (ceremonial) power and informal (ritualised) power. Ceremony can be described as providing the solemnity, formality and grandeur (*gravitas*) to rituals, which are more often seen as the performance of everyday routines, behaviours and activities that reproduce and reinvent power. Ritual can be seen as ‘action wrapped in a web of symbolism’ (Kertzer 1988, p. 9). Where scholars do not distinguish between the two, we see the common features of ceremony and ritual: repetition; acting or performance, which suggests contrivance and not spontaneity, *stylisation* such that ‘actions and symbols used are extraordinary themselves, or ordinary ones are invested with special meanings, setting them apart from others; *order* as a dominant mode, through precise and organised (sometime exaggeratedly so) events; evocative style of staging events to produce a sense of *belonging*, which might lead to commitment – to the cause; and a collective dimension which has a social meaning’ (Moore and Myerhoff 1977, pp. 7–8). Kertzer (1988, p. 11) also emphasises the dramatic character of ritual wherein ‘people participate in ... dramas and thus see themselves as playing certain roles [which] ... provokes an emotional response’. However, much of this literature does not focus on the specifically gendered aspects of ceremony and ritual. Butler (1990) has argued that performative masculinities and femininities are needed not only to shore up our political institutions and cultural discourses but can also be seen as constitutive elements of gendered social hierarchies. Codes of dress, speech and deportment, modes of participative actions, norms and behaviours all provide clues to the social hierarchies that are played out in politics and political institutions. The roles that women and men play dramatise the political moment, the discursive power as well as the gendered social order operative in specific historical contexts and in doing so reveal for us underlying social tensions which point to the palimpsestic nature of political institutions.

Ceremony and ritual can thus be analysed at two different levels: first, institutionally, as the casting of spectacles through which the formal-judicial power of the state is operationalised through the in/formal technologies of legitimation. Here we can view both the formal power of the state and the agentic and capillary power of interpretation (Foucault 1977). These interpretations are mediated by both particularistic identities and universalistic rhetoric. Second, we can analyse ceremony and ritual at the level of performance, where bodies perform in space and time – as men, women, able and less able, black or white – leaving traces which mark exclusions and inclusions (Coole 2007). This effect then enables or disables their ability to represent – their constituents, their identities and themselves. In so doing it also structures the possibilities of destabilisation of power.

Sociology and Sociopathy of Ceremony and Ritual

Durkheim (2001) suggested that social coherence was achieved through a common recognition and translation of ritual to create order in society. There was also, however, in this order the presumption of the sacred – ritual was by definition attached to religion's boundedness, providing *legitimate* cohesion. When ritual is repeated over time, as individuals are taught and identify with key rituals, they recognise each other as co-participants and become a community. The participation in ritual then defined society, as well as made recognition of those 'of the society' possible. Goffman (1971, p. 63) adapted Durkheim's framework to suggest that in contemporary society, 'What remains are brief rituals one individual performs for and to another . . . interpersonal rituals'. However, for Goffman, this performance does not take place through autonomous acts. Rather, through invoking 'framing' as a device, he asserts that individuals *negotiate* their way in performance of rituals *arriving* at the socially embedded frame, not creating it: 'Organizational premises are involved, and these are something cognition somehow arrives at, not something cognition creates or generates' (Goffman 1974, p. 274). Further, he points out that institutionalised practices 'do not so much allow for the expression of natural differences between the sexes as for the production of that difference itself' (Goffman 1977, p. 324); gender matters. Goffman also outlines what he calls 'situational proprieties', which include 'culturally learned practical knowledge' that allow individuals to 'fit in', 'be good' and 'not make a scene' (Goffman 1963, p. 11) as well as 'enabling conventions' (Goffman 1983, p. 5) that frame common expectations against which interactions are judged.

For Durkheim (2001), rituals were seen as 'traditionalising' mechanisms through which societies cohered, while for Goffman, individual interaction is the performative mode of contemporary societies. Durkheim then is a good starting point for us here in that he asks the fundamental question about why we need to study ritual and gives us an answer about coherence of societies³ to which ritual is moot, but ultimately he reproduces the 'orientalist' substructures of power in the distinctions that he seeks to draw between traditional and modern societies through his study of ritual. As we will see below, these traditionalising mechanisms continue to be produced ('invented') by modern states in order to create markers of belonging and recognition among citizens of nation-states. Goffman, on the other hand, suggests that all contemporary societies work through individual interaction which is socially defined, organised, sanctioned and ordered.

Invoking and Critiquing Durkheim

Neo-Durkheimian scholars emphasise that individual identities of citizens find collective shape through witnessing and/or participating in rituals (Shils and Young 1953). In this tradition, where political rituals provide the integrative glue for societies, there were important studies of the Coronation (Warner 1959), Investiture of the Prince of Wales (Blumler *et al.* 1971) and memorial

days, such as Veterans' Day (Warner 1959). While this body of scholarship was not centrally concerned with whether rituals needed religious roots, they were conscious that selective borrowing from religious rituals created powerful symbols of national solidarity which could be mobilised for attainment of national goals (Verba 1965 in Lukes 1975, p. 295). The neo-Durkheimian scholarship thus provides a normative functionalist account of rituals, which Lukes (1975) criticises on the following counts: first, that this scholarship assumes normative consensus, where there might be interpretive disagreement; second, and following from this, that rituals can be better analysed if we see them as contributing to the manufacturing of consent, where alternative value systems are not available (Lukes 1975, p. 298; also see Lane 1984) rather than reinforcing shared values.⁴ Third, Lukes takes issue with the neo-Durkheimians on count of the *particular* rituals that they analyse – largely integrative rather than oppositional – to make their case. In so doing they overlook how rituals, Orange marches in Northern Ireland for example, can also be performed to underline the dominance of the dominant political values and can therefore exacerbate conflict rather than improve social relations between opposing groups (Lukes 1975, p. 300), even while reinforcing solidarity among the dominant groups.

Rather than giving rituals the integrative and uncritical role in society, Lukes posits persuasively that political rituals play, as Durkheim argued, 'a cognitive role, rendering intelligible society and social relationships, serving to organize people's knowledge of the past and present and their capacity to imagine the future ... though placing it [as Durkheim did not] within a class-structured, conflictual and pluralistic model of society' (Lukes 1975, p. 301). Through such an analysis, Lukes is also able to raise different questions about the actors involved and the power exercised: Which social groups have the power to prescribe performance and specify the rules which govern them? 'In the interests of which social groups does the acceptance of these ways of seeing operate? And what forms of social relationship and activity are in consequence ignored as of less or no significance?' (Lukes 1975, p. 302). However, while Lukes outlines what role – cognitive rather than normative functionalist – political rituals play in our understanding of political systems, and elaborates on what study of particular rituals might reveal about specific political contexts, he tells us almost nothing about the sedimented and reflective power of political ritual – of how power is reflected as well as challenged in and through political ritual. This is curious because of Lukes' interest in political power and its circulation. While implicit in the questions that he poses, gendered modes of power do not make an appearance in Lukes' work. Unlike Goffman, he does not make an explicit analysis of gendered power – invoking instead gendered scholarship in his argument with Foucault (Lukes 1975, pp. 99–107). He also does not have much to say about *how* we might research political rituals. What theoretical and methodological frameworks might be useful to understand political power through researching political ritual? In the end, both Durkheim and Lukes also share in viewing ritual as having a function, a purpose in social and political life – unlike post-structuralist

explanations outlined below, they do not reflect upon the *meanings* attached to rituals in everyday life as individuals relate to each other and to the communities of which they are part.

Ceremony and Ritual as ‘Invented Traditions’

In their provocative book, *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) develop an important insight which fundamentally challenges the Durkheimian understanding of ceremony and ritual, which is that while some traditions evolve and adapt over time to become part of our social and historical map, others (and in particular in the context of nationalism) are invented through interventions of political and social elites.⁵ According to Anderson (1991, pp. 10–11), nationalism allowed the secular transformation of fatality into continuity – something that only religious discourses had articulated before the rationalising thrust of Enlightenment. As continuity demanded reproduction of future national generations, of national/cultural values, and stability of social forms, as well as the reproduction of the national populations, and as both class and gender disturbed the stability of the new social relations that were normalised through nationalist political discourses and later through post-colonial constitutional and legal mechanisms, invented traditions became an important glue to hold the nation together. These invented traditions are given a historical foundation through the use of ‘ancient materials ... by borrowing from the well-supplied warehouses of official ritual, symbolism and moral exhortations’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, p. 6) just as they are from placing them within the folds of literary and bureaucratic writings which are the products of colonial invasions, rule and framing (Said 1978). This argument cuts away at the Durkheimian understanding of tradition versus modern – that which is solid (tradition) melts into air when we see its invented and contingent (modern) character.

Thus, the study of the invention of tradition is clearly visible in the colonial and post-colonial contexts where national state formation needs the imaginaries of history. As nationalism, following Benedict Anderson (1991), can be seen to be imagined, ceremony and ritual provide the fixed points of recognition of that imaginary. If nationalism creates the Other it does so in part through the ritualisation of public life, through the evocation of music, art, colour and texts, through ceremonials of the everyday as well as that of dramatic events and in so doing ‘traditionalising’ new as well as old modes of being (Virmani 2008). Nationalism creates and is reproduced through myths – or origin of peoples and nations, and the sanctification of its gendered political norms. Nationalism, in creating the Other, also creates danger – and it demands unity, order and ceremonial to achieve its goals of stability of imagination, of territory and of recognition. Ceremony and ritual tend to close off possible alternative frames of meaning, which at the same time remain challenged from the danger within – of indeterminacy, of plurality, of spontaneity and of opposition or even rejection (Moore and Myerhoff 1977, pp. 17–19). ‘Since ritual is a good form for conveying a message

as if it were unquestionable, it often is used to communicate those very things which are most in doubt' (Moore and Myerhoff 1977, p. 24). Gender relations in particular are grist to this mill of stabilisation – appropriate behaviour, issues of access to public spaces, gendered roles which are sanctified through norms of social interaction, containment of challenges to the social status quo, are all part of the landscape of nations and nation-building (Sangari and Ved 1990, Chatterjee 1993, Rai 2002). There is the affect of stability in a situation of inherent instability; there is an assumption of consensus in the context of alternative imaginaries; there is formality and repetition in the face of informal circulations of power and spontaneous eruptions of dissent. In this framework, thus, ceremony and ritual generate a '*common [gendered] knowledge*' (Crewe and Muller 2006, p. 9) and a gendered *vocabulary* of power, which then influence performativity through recognition, repetition and ritualisation. Ceremony and rituals also create *symbolic knowledge*, which is special to the context and therefore requires 'learning' by those wishing to use or interpret it – often this knowledge is implicit rather than explicit, layered in the levels of meaning to one or more symbols, which might be read singly or together, able to make connections between the past and the present and allow expression of or 'discipline' powerful emotions and relationships within secular, institutional contexts (Crewe and Muller 2006, p. 13).

However, it is worth noting that while ceremony and ritual are a gendered spectacle, which militate against indeterminacy through sedimentation of constructed norms and identities, they are also internally fragile and need repeated shoring up because of the challenges that new actors bring to the stage. The reflection of power in ceremony and ritual, while seemingly constant over time, is constantly shifting – like disturbances in a pond, ripples of disorder roll out through the performance of these but are also quickly contained, reverting the pond to its fragile stillness in the moment. As the traces of power in the performance of ceremony and ritual become discernable to those bystanders, disruption becomes a possibility. Such disruption by its very nature is not predictable and takes different forms, which can be highly creative and carry within it the potential of opening up new political spaces, vocabularies and discourses which challenge the dominant modes of power. Those who are 'space invaders' (Massey 1994, Puwar 2004) in parliaments, for example, are potential conspirators challenging the circulation of power within institutions – women MPs who make public the racism, sexism and homophobia operative in parliaments (Hill and Revill 2008).

Performing, Belonging and Citizenship

Thus far, we have examined the definitions of ceremony and ritual and reflected upon their cognitive and normative functions, which have underlined their necessity for social coherence, marking of political transitions and their securing of power relations as well as of their internal fragility, even if this means inventing traditions where none existed or imbuing old traditions with new meanings. Ceremony and ritual are also critical for marking the boundaries of inclusion and

exclusion – of suggesting citizenship through performance. Ceremony and ritual at times disguise or even conceal what is present – conflict, political differences, social tensions, disruptive moments – by creating a sense of ordered histories of institutions, appropriate modes of behaviour legitimised by performance and recognition over time; they help reify politics. While at times conflict over values that is depicted in and through ceremony and ritual can be a means of mutual recognition, a sense of exclusion from it can also be generated for those witnessing it, which can lead to alienation. As we have noted above, recognition, inclusion and exclusion all take gendered forms and in so doing reproduce the gendered hierarchies that are ritualistically performed. Young (2000) focuses on three aspects of ceremony that signal to these imagined communities that we call nation-states those who are members as well as to those who are not. Belonging is, Young argues, underlined through different modes of public recognition – *greeting* or public acknowledgement which fosters trust between those involved; *rhetoric*, which allows the speaker to bring specific points to public attention and ‘situating speakers and audience in relation to one another’; and *narrative*, which could empower the marginalised to bring their experiences to bear upon public debate (Young 2000, p. 53). Without these being performed and participated in – as making or receiving greetings, for example, or speaking as well as listening, being spoken and listened to, internal exclusions can easily take root in even formally equal settings. We therefore need to understand how ceremony and ritual are preserved, performed and presented in all societies in order to maintain social cohesion and how they leach across time and space, despite challenges, reforms and ruptures, to give new meanings and recognition as societies evolve.

The markers of belonging are embodied – in bodies that can be distinguished in terms of their sex/gender and race, as well as in bodies that are more difficult to distinguish on grounds of class and sexuality. The social relations of a nation-state demand a frame within which to stabilise their form. Feminist work has always seen social relations to be gendered. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) has argued that gendered power is a fiction that needs to be sustained in the domain of political economy through social performativity. Through the enactment of dominant gender roles we recognise, circulate and reproduce the meanings of masculinity and femininity and thus perpetuate gendered social hierarchies. In Butler’s work we find how these social relations, mediated through gender and sexuality, are enacted and performed and in so doing perpetuate gendered social hierarchies constituting and constitutive of political institutions and their workings. While she does not explore the nature of ceremony and ritual, through an engagement with her ideas on gendered performativity we can begin to make linkages between everyday and structural power.

Witnessing Performance

If ceremony and ritual is performance, the question arises, who witnesses these and does that tell us something about the nature of performance, the power play involved as well as the possibilities and limits of the spectacle? Lukes

(2005, p. 91) formulates this in the following terms: 'that if power is to be effective, those subject to it must be rendered susceptible to its effects'. Foucault (1977, p. 86), however, wrote that power 'is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms'. Ceremony and ritual, as noted above, perform on two levels – through their *hyper-visibility* they enthrall those who 'must be rendered susceptible' and through obscuring dominance through theatricality, ritualisation, and *routinisation* they mask the mechanisms through which dominance is exercised. The audience of ceremony and ritual, both internal and external, is then rendered susceptible – either by suggesting that what is performed is what politics is or by suggesting that the performance is of no consequence and therefore neither is the politics that it represents. Further, Baumann (1992, p. 99) brings to our attention a different approach to audience, which suggests that rituals are addressed as much to 'members' – those who belong to nations and its institutions – as to 'Others', and that 'witnesses' do not have to be present to have affect – the presumption of an audience or spectators is built into the performance of ritual. Thus, the audience outside of the space that ceremony is performed is assumed to be witnessing the performance as much as those who are present. This is important to understanding why ceremony and ritual are defended as important to the functioning of institutions such as parliaments as a means of 'ordering' performance.

Conclusion

In a parliamentary institution, where each individual formally carries an equal legitimate power – having been elected by individual citizens in free and fair elections – how do political agendas get represented? How is individual competition within parliament organised, played out in an effective way? What modes of working are normalised such that MPs self-discipline, are able to cooperate as well as compete and the public is able to view parliament as a functioning, worthwhile organisation, reflective of democratic practice? And do ceremony and ritual help in the self-regulation of political institutions such that they might function efficiently and effectively? The new institutionalist framework, diverse though it is – rational choice, historical or sociological institutionalism – has insisted upon viewing institutions as having an 'inner life', with its own logic, norms and rules that determine its actions, making these institutions 'actors' in their own right, displaying an internal coherence. Thus, March and Olsen (1984, p. 734) argue that 'This new institutionalism emphasizes the relative autonomy of political institutions, possibilities for inefficiency in history, and the importance of symbolic action to an understanding of politics'. However, while all the different strands of new institutionalism focus on aspects of how institutions need to gain internal stability (structuring choice, framing choice and normalising or socialising choice-makers) in order to function efficiently, they do not pay enough attention to how this internal coherence comes about in the everyday

life of institutions. This special issue will seek to fill the gap in the study of ceremony and ritual – of space, performance and representation – through which meanings are created, recognised, shared, challenged and transformed.

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Notes

1. It is interesting that both words – majesty and temple – invoke sacrality, which is central to ceremonial moments and the performance of ritual.
2. Agamben, following Foucault, makes the point that 'this is an incredibly sophisticated fiction, this subtle economy of power according to which god in order to govern absolutely must act as if the creatures were governing themselves' (Agamben 2007).
3. The concern with coherence is, of course, also linked to the Marxist study of ideology and/as hegemony that is the set of ideas subscribed to by the dominant social classes and which is underpinned by the power of the state (Hoare and Nowell-Smith 1971) as well as the of the political economy of the ownership of the media and the 'manufacturing' of consent (Herman and Chomsky 2002).
4. An important insight here is that value consensus is not only insufficient as an explanation for social integration, it is also not necessary.
5. See Virmani (2008) on the invention of the Indian flag and the struggles around this invention.

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