

A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL GUIDE

GENDERED CEREMONY AND RITUAL IN PARLIAMENT

GCRP



The Leverhulme Trust

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This bibliographical guide outlines the work of the Leverhulme Trust funded Gendered Ceremony and Ritual in Parliaments research programme, setting out the diverse literatures the programme has drawn upon in developing its approach and detailing the new scholarship emerging in the study of parliamentary ceremony and ritual.





Gendered Ceremony and Ritual in Parliaments

The Gendered Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament Programme, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, examined how struggles over the meanings and performance of ceremony and ritual in parliament secure and reproduce as well as challenge and transform institutional norms. Its insights into the theory and practice or representation are intended to inform democratic practice and invigorate political participation.

Funded by a Leverhulme Programme Grant, GCRP ran for five years from October 2007 – 2012. It was a comparative programme, organised into three research teams, working on India, South Africa and Westminster.

Parliaments are an important institution of democratic governance. They not only make laws and hold the executive accountable, but they also make a claim. The claim is that parliaments as institutions not only represent different constituencies, identity groups and interests within a nation but also that they mirror society and that nation at large. Its authority (authorization) and legitimacy are derived from this claim of representativeness, which in turn has to be underpinned by institutional norms and performed by its members – the legislators, the representatives – and accepted by the citizens at large. Parliaments are then evolving and dynamic bodies that seek to make this claim to representativeness not only through their institutional form but also through the processes by which particular forms take shape and have affect – through modes of behaviour, the negotiation of political and physical spaces, and the creation of institution specific cultures which socialise members in their participation.

Through these processes parliamentary institutions create and maintain powerful symbols of democracy and power. However, this institutional disciplining is also challenged by members – by refusal to participate, by subversion of norms or by disruption of everyday practices of institutional functioning. In parliaments, for example, opening ceremonies, the performance of the Speaker and moments of disruptive behaviour point to how institutional norms and forms are reproduced, maintained but also challenged. This GCRP project took institutional claim-making as a starting point and explored how political and social hierarchies operate within parliaments through ceremonial spectacles, formal and informal rules and rituals, art and architecture. We examined how historically contextualised and institutionally specific spaces are regulated by institutional officers, by informal norms and rules and how these spaces are also subverted through discursive and performative disruptions to debate and rule-making.

GCRP PUBLICATIONS: GENERAL

Armitage, F., Johnson, R., Malley, R. and Spary, C. (2012) 'Researching Gendered Ceremony and Ritual in Parliaments', *Feminist Theory*, 13 (3): 325-336.

Rai, S. M. ed, (2011) *Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament*, London: Routledge.

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Disciplining Representation, GCRP final conference, The House of Lords and the British Library, London, October 2011. Full programme and abstracts available [here](#).

Theoretical Approaches

Ceremony and Ritual

There is a vast body of literature on religious ceremony and ritual in anthropology and sociology which has informed later work on political ceremony and ritual. Amongst the most influential of theorists on religious ritual has been Emile Durkheim. From Durkheim's work there emerged an interest in the importance of material objects or emblems in forging collective sentiments and an understanding of ritual as a means for the making and unmaking of society. A classical 'Durkheimian' definition of ritual has it that a) rituals are particular modes of action b) that express the sacred nature of things; moreover c) they are connected in an intimate way to systems of beliefs, and d) their basic function is both creative and reproductive of social order and morality. Durkheim is often regarded as taking a functionalist approach to ritual, whereby ritual is interpreted primarily from the perspective of the social functions it performs. However, this reading of Durkheim has more recently been reappraised and he is now seen by some as laying the foundations for a 'performative' approach to ritual (see below).

In anthropology many make a distinction between 'ritual', which denotes situations in which participants suppose that mystical powers are involved, and 'ceremony', reserved for symbolic activity with no mystical component. Symbolic or interpretative anthropological approaches to ritual and ceremony have emphasised the polysemic nature of symbols and rituals (Turner, 1969) and the importance of reading ceremony not as cultural mask for political or economic power or a 'function' of social need but as a form of power and a representation of social life that has a meaning in and of itself (Geertz, 1980).

Those who pioneered the study of ceremony and ritual as a part of modern political life have also had varying theoretical approaches. Whilst some have argued that ritual is a mechanism of misrepresentation that inhibits change in political systems (for example Edelman, 1964), others have emphasised ceremony and ritual as sites of contestation in which new political cultures can be forged. Stephen Lukes, for example, emphasised the importance of ritual in defining authoritative ways of seeing society (Lukes, 1975). Historians have argued for the importance of a period of 'inventing' political ceremony and ritual in the forging of national political communities at the turn of the nineteenth century (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). Studies of political ceremony in authoritarian societies have emphasised how ritual can be used to maintain the power of elites (Lane, 1981). Our own approach seeks to understand the place of ceremony and ritual within parliamentary institutional cultures and processes of institutional change and continuity (Rai, 2010).

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Theoretical Approaches

Gendered Institutions

The GCRP programme has been at the forefront of attempts to apply gendered perspectives to the study of political institutions. In this work GCRP has drawn upon the recent work of political scientists advancing a 'feminist institutionalism' (Mackay et al 2010, Krook and Mackay 2011, Waylen 2010). Mackay et al argue that the various strands of 'new institutionalism' that have emerged in politics such as historical institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism, have all, by and large, been gender blind. Since new institutionalist approaches focus on the interplay between formal rules and informal norms and practices, attention to the dynamics of gender norms within institutions and to the way in which gender norms are constructed through institutional practices is a glaring omission. GCRP has also aimed to build upon approaches which highlight the intersectionality of gender, race and class at play within institutional cultures (Puwar 2004, Hawkesworth 2003). Our focus upon gendered ceremony and ritual has highlighted the performativity of institutional gender norms, by which we mean that gender norms are constructed and institutionalized through repeated and reiterative performances (Butler 1990, 1997).

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Theoretical Approaches

Performance

The work of the GCRP programme brings together concepts of gender, democracy, representation and their performance. Claims to representation can be read as a socially embedded set of performances that present some collective aims, norms or ways of doing politics (Giugni, McAdam and Tilly, 1999). A focus on the performance of representation allows us to examine 'restored behavior' (Schechner, 2002) —how performances are made up of previously learned and executed actions which both repeat and also modify the received understanding of their meanings through time. Politics is full of restored behaviours, from the actions of casting a ballot, to the inaugural ceremonies of swearing into office. Roach (1996) emphasizes a comparative and a historically contingent approach to performance as surrogation through which 'dead' traditions are brought again to life; where through performance memory is renegotiated and cultures reinvented. Alexander (2006) has developed a cultural pragmatics of social performance foregrounding the concepts of de/re-fusion and authenticity, which mark the deposition of power. The work of the GCRP has examined how a polished performance produces a greater suspension of disbelief but this also masks the performance itself; at the same time, the disruption of performance shows up the artificial, de-fused nature of ceremony and ritual and also makes room for new/other rituals to take performative shape.

Performance scholars of the 80s and 90s analyzed the roles of performance in political movements such as American civil rights, South African anti-apartheid, and Latin American revolutionary movements; and in struggles against racism, sexism, and homophobia in emergent identity politics. Important books and collections documented this impact (Reinelt 1996, Hart and Phelan 1993, Haedicke and Nellhaus 2001). More recently, however, a strong philosophy and performance sub-field has been growing devoted to political theory, especially Deleuze, Rancière, Badiou, and Agamben (Wickstrom, 2012). These thinkers are often used by performance scholars to argue against concrete political effects in performance. Overall, while it allows us to study politics through an innovative prism, Performance Studies' analysis of politics has tended to focus on marginal or dissident figures and ideas, and the aesthetic properties of given political events (including political theatre).

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Theoretical Approaches

Aesthetics

Linked to ceremony, ritual and performance is the question of aesthetics. Democracy requires a constant renewal of forms – sets of symbols or an aestheticisation of political language, which appeals to people and instills in them a sense of belonging and identification. It does not function through command or coercion. Philosophers and political theorists, many of the Frankfurt school, have argued that aesthetics and spectacle are crucial for understanding the operation of power in modern capitalist systems (Debord, 1967). The increasing disenchantment and disillusion with the state, with political institutions and their practices and performance makes it ever more important to explore the place of aesthetics of power as well as of protest. The widespread movements of resistance and rejection of state power also project ideas through aesthetic modes and make the question of the everyday symbolism of politics more urgent to explore. GCRP has explored moments of state spectacle (see opening ceremony section) and MPs' own practices of legislative protest (see disruption section). The GCRP programme has also taken a particular interest in architecture, exploring the affect of material surroundings on the practice of politics.

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Opening Ceremony

National parliaments based on the Westminster system are usually ceremonially 'opened' at the start of each annual session. In the UK this ceremony reiterates the place of the Monarch in the British constitution; tying parliament's legitimacy and lifecycles to the Monarch (Mannow). A specific ceremonial surrounding this 'opening' that emerged in the United Kingdom out of the relationship between the Monarch and Parliament was exported, through the processes of British imperialism, around the world. It was subsequently adopted and adapted by many post-colonial nation-states. The inheritance of this tradition in the twenty-first century is as complex as the broader post-colonial negotiation of the Westminster model in both the metropole and former colonies.

Today, in the UK, India and South Africa, a ceremony with the same basic structure is performed annually by the three national parliaments. Whilst the basic structure of the three ceremonies is the same, the performances vary in their intentions and importance in the symbolic political lives of the three nations. GCRP explored the politics of tradition and change which crystallize around such a ceremony in different national contexts. Such ceremonies present a unique and important perspective upon political institutions, revealing the power dynamics that structure political spaces and shape political practices.

The comparative study of these ceremonies shows that such ceremonies do not serve one function within modern political systems nor can they be easily dismissed as simple reflections of a national political culture. Rather, the official openings of parliaments can be important sites for making the meanings of modern politics (sometimes through the construction of certain traditions as apolitical) and, in particular, shaping the character of 'the people's' relationship with parliament.



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Legislative Disruption

At the most descriptive level, disruption is disorderly behaviour of MPs in the debating chamber. For example, members gathering in the well of the house, refusing to return to their seats and shouting slogans of protest, or arguing with the Speaker, or refusing to comply with the Speaker's orders.

In the GCRP programme we have defined disruption in both literal and figurative ways: literally, as a disruption of parliamentary business and procedure, and figuratively as a disruption of the rules and norms embedded within the ritual of parliamentary debate.

This approach understands parliamentary debate to be a ritual of democratic representation, which is governed by rules and norms surrounding the performance of deliberation, such as a heightened sense of prestige and formality with respect to space, speech, dress, movement, and gesture.

Disruption is a literal and figurative violation of these rules and norms. Unlike strict proceduralists, our approach does not dismiss disruptions to parliamentary debate as a negative phenomenon. The GCRP programme was interested in how disruptive performances contest both formal rules of parliamentary procedure and established norms of deliberation, as well as why they are performed, how they are justified, what are the consequences of such disruption, and what all of this tells us about specific parliaments in particular, and representative democracy and deliberation more broadly. Following the work of political theorist Iris Marion Young, we have considered whether disruptive performances may be more effective in bringing attention to marginalised voices which have so far been excluded from more conformist debate.

Comparing disruptive acts across different institutions raises the question of why disruptive performances in the chamber are tolerated in some parliamentary contexts but not in others, and how, why, and in what form do they emerge in the first place? Comparing disruption in more than one institution not only tells us more about the similarities and differences in the phenomenon of disruption, but it can also help us to understand more broadly the similarities and differences among the legislative institutions themselves, as well as how the specificities of disruption in a particular institution have developed historically.

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The Speaker

Legislative chambers throughout the democratic world have Speakers or Presiding Officers at their head. However, no two Speakerships in the world are identical; they are constantly evolving political offices. The Speaker affects the parliamentary rituals through which MPs 'do' politics because of his or her responsibility for regulating and controlling debates. Speakers typically have a ceremonial role to play in their country's parliamentary or state occasions, and are thus interesting in their own right as symbolic figures.

Typically the Speaker presides over the legislatures' proceedings and debates, and is responsible for keeping order and enforcing the legislature's rules. In all three legislatures studied by the GCRP, the Speaker has an extensive range of discretionary powers that affect the ability of opposition parties and backbenchers to hold the government to account. The Speaker's power to call individual Members to speak in debates means that there is a personal connection between every member of the legislature and their Speaker, and care is generally taken on both sides to ensure those relationships are respectful. The Speaker also has a range of roles and responsibilities outside of the chamber that add to the office's prestige and influence. These include both administrative and ceremonial roles (Bach, 1999 and Laundy, 1984).

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