

Anthropology of Parliaments

Emma Crewe, SOAS, University of Londonⁱ

Abstract

Parliaments are of the centre of webs created by democracy, complex sites where culture meets economics, psychology and politics; elected politicians consult with lobbyists, constituents and each other; and the political work of law-making and scrutiny is achieved. Inter-disciplinary approaches are vital in fathoming this complexity. Relationships are at the heart of politics so it is surprising to find that few anthropologists have ventured into parliaments. Their findings have revealed the hidden everyday workings of democratic politics in several countries but their approach is poorly understood. In this chapter, ethnographic research by anthropologists over thirty five years is reviewed and contrasted with ethnographies by political scientists, to explain how the theories, methods and contributions of different disciplines are complementary. With the capacity to offer rich accounts of specific parliaments, and generalise about the patterns found across different times and sites, anthropologists in collaboration with other disciplines have the potential to transform the study of parliament into a more entangled form of inquiry.

Keywords: anthropology, ethnography, relationships, methodology, inter-disciplinarity

Introduction

Anthropologists often begin any inquiry by trying to describe the boundaries of the world they have immersed themselves into but parliamentsⁱⁱ are especially difficult to delineate. They are meeting places for politicians to do political work. But a Parliament is also an idea; an institution of the state; a building; and a period of time – a session between elections during which parliamentarians meet to make laws and hold the government to account either in the presence of Ministers (in the case of parliaments) or in their absence (in legislatures). They often operate as both an insular bubble, creating a political workplace for politicians, journalists, lobbyists and staff, but also a forum at the centre of a web connected to others across the country and the world. To study Parliament as an anthropologist, you have to study it locally, nationally and globally – which means that you have to have the world in view – with a sense of change and continuity, culture and politics, as well as the past and the imagined future.

Despite their national importance relatively few anthropologists have studied political institutions within democracies, although legal sites have had more attention (Latour 2010 and see Scheppele 2004 for various ethnographers of the constitution), political parties have been

studied (in Israel by Aronoff 1989, in the UK by Faucher 2005) and the European Union has attracted several anthropologists (e.g., Abélès 2004, Bellier 2000, MacDonald 1996, Shore 2000, Busby 2013b). Despite encouragement to study elites (Salverda and Abbink 2013), surprisingly few anthropologists have gone to the heart of the constellation of formal power to investigate Parliaments but a few are beginning to plunge into the fray. Before I introduce some of these rare anthropologists of national Parliaments, it is worth explaining anthropological approaches to research and how they conceive of ethnography as both theory and method.

An anthropological study of Parliament investigates the everyday concerns of people – the mundane and dramatic, the logical and puzzling, the soothing and jarring – and keeps in view both the pluralities and commonalities of experiences within their historical and cultural contexts. Ingold explains that anthropologists don't study people – they aren't *objects* of study – but they learn *with* people, it is a participatory form of research: 'Anthropologists follow their noses, sniffing out promising sources and lines of inquiry. They are like hunters on the trail. To hunt, you have to dream the animal; get under its skin to perceive as it does; know it from the inside out' (2018:118). This makes anthropology a form of philosophy but with the people still in. Geertz described what you do to make sense of the descriptions, as 'interpretation' – relying on the 'power of the scientific imagination to bring us in touch with the lives of strangers' (1973: 317). Good interpretation doesn't take you away from the descriptions but revels in them: 'cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape' (ibid: 318). This means that anthropologists will not necessarily reach a perfect consensus, for example about what is really going on in Parliaments, but aspire towards refined debate and better precision with which to vex each other.

What anthropologists find most significant may be taken for granted by the people we study, the silent traditions that seem so natural that they are scarcely noticed by those recreating them. Once again Ingold points to how the relationship between researcher and researched is intimately entangled. During fieldwork we are drawn to narratives that explain puzzles, disconnections and the messiness of everyday realities so that ethnography is not just data collection and interpretation, it involves writing about people evocatively and with imagination:

'In thickening our descriptions, and allowing a real historical agency to the people who figure in them, we might want to qualify the sense in which these accounts could be considered to be scientific. Ethnographic description, we might well say, is more an art than a science, but no less accurate or truthful for that' (2014: 385).

Anthropologists don't always attain these goals. Jonathan Spencer has offered us a history of British political anthropology which explains why anthropologists lost sight of the possibility of this richness during the last century. Anthropologists like Bailey, Leach, and Evans-Pritchard were attracted to formal models based on structures, systems and factions, while others like Barth promoted individualistic theories such as transactionalism, and most of them ignored values, culture and ritual (1997). They were mimicking the better-funded disciplines, who dominated the study of politics until recently: economics, law and political science, seeking

universal generalisations about the commonalities across different systems but ignoring how African and Asian political systems were embedded in colonial rule (Spencer *ibid*: 9).

US anthropologists became involved from the 1960s, even earlier than Europeans, in understanding the 'problem of democracy' especially in post-colonial countries that were under pressure to embark on the project of modernization (Paley 2002: 472). Some looked at how Western derived democratic processes were translated into local idioms – such as West's work in the 1990s on sorcery in elections in Mozambique or Sabloff linking Mongolian concepts of democracy with their 800 year old political culture (as cited by Paley, *ibid*: 473, 5) – but far more become drawn into critiques of authoritarian state power and more hopeful ethnographies of alternative democracies found in civil society, human rights work or social movements. It was only in 1985 that an anthropologist ventured into a legislature when Weatherford studied US politicians. Although the political scientist Fenno was the first to undertake an *ethnographic* study with elected politicians (1978), Weatherford was the first *anthropologist* to do so. In the next section I will provide an overview of what anthropologists have written about parliaments before contrasting this with political science ethnographies in the subsequent section. I will then reflect on the unique contribution anthropology can make to the study of parliaments and parliamentarians before concluding with an anthropological theory about the shapeshifting work of elected politicians.

Anthropologists researching democratic Parliaments since 1985

The first anthropologist to study a legislature, and the only one to undertake an ethnography of Congress in Washington, was Jack Weatherford. He wrote mainly about relationships, the core obsession of anthropologists, in two particular ways. He was amazed by the extent of kinship relations between politicians and describes the extensive patron-client relations to parody the way people in Africa and Asia are portrayed in ethnographies. In the second area of relationships, he is interested in power: in an almost mocking tone he writes about how ritual occasions are a theatre used by members to consolidate their power:

'The politician enters one scene, is coached by a waiting assistant for a few moments, and then performs the role. His particular performance may have no relation to that of the actors who appeared just before or after him, but the pieces will be edit together afterwards by the staff. The important point is simply that he should get his appearance on record' (1985: 208).

He contends that Congress is no more than a ritualistic show, 'the greatest deliberative body in the world has become the greatest ceremonial body in the world' and ritual serves to prevent interaction (*ibid*: 266, 195). The paralysis of Congress is caused by a web of futile ritual and ceremony. Rather than facilitating decision-making, these rituals are empty of substance so that members spend more time considering minute points of ceremony than they do on matters of national importance. He concludes that 'in most civilisations in which the leaders of the nation were more involved in pageantry and ritual than the affairs of the nation, power temporarily

passed into the hands of those “servants” around them’ (ibid: 268-9). The politicians are busy becoming like New Guinean Big Men, developing their seniority, funding, shamanic power and clans of supporters maintained by patronage, sometimes in competition with each other and at other times like sovereigns in neighbouring kingdoms.

Politicians’ relationships with citizens and each other were also a focus for the work of the first anthropologist to study European Parliaments, Marc Abélès. He had a seminal influence on the anthropology of Parliaments by reaching beyond both instrumentalism – trying to fix the democratic deficit – but also by taking informants at home as seriously as those in foreign places, finding the exotic in the familiar, and injecting history into comparisons between different political worlds. Just because his native France, for example, seemed well-known to him, he did not shortcut the process of intense observation across different sites in a political space. Doing fieldwork in one department of France it was only by travelling around extensively that he realised that a minority of candidates became eligible, in the eyes of voters, as a result of their places in networks of kinship relations (1991: 263). Politicians stress their local roots; a politician is above all the representative of a territory with all its traditions, even a living symbol of a locality ‘... it is more or less obligatory to occupy local and national office simultaneously’ (Ibid: 268, 174). So relationships in politics are not merely about interests, kin connections or viewpoints; politicians have the power of evocation and so are important to people’s imagination. Politicians who ignore the sacred – the ritual, symbolism and drama of politics – and merely try and impress voters with their views, will find it harder to secure support.

Abélès has researched local politics in Ethiopia and France, the French National Assembly and the European Parliament. His approach to ritual in the National Assembly contrasts with Weatherford’s ‘power functionalism’, as US anthropologist Sahlins refers to it, the portrayal of ritual as a mere pawn for US in their jostling for power against each other. He rejects functionalism altogether. In the French National Assembly words, acts and objects are manipulated through ritual to allow the confrontation of different elements of society (2000, 2006). This is not mere theatre; moral battles are fought within parliament about, as examples, homosexuality or state intervention. He distinguishes between the semiotic contest in debates and the theatricalization of conflict, which taken together constitute a ritual struggle or ‘an effective and sometimes violent confrontation of people who incarnate intellectually and physically different elements of civil society’ (2006: 30). The protocols of this struggle symbolize significant aspects of relationships – separation between executive and legislative power for example – but also fortify feelings such as belonging to one side or another.

Latour criticises Abélès for dwelling on myths, rites and symbols – as if ironically comparing to former studies of ‘savages’ and thereby exoticising Europeans – because ritual is less fruitful for cross cultural comparison than science, markets and law (2010: 246-7). However, the differences between the French Assembly and another of his ethnographic sites, the European Parliament, are illuminating and point to an interest beyond ritual. Members of the European Parliament do not share local connections, cultural or political references points and histories, or the same language. Unsurprisingly, the endless negotiation and compromise found in interactions within the European institution requires a completely different choreography. He

summarises that when MEPs from many nationalities speak in the European Parliament, it is ‘a real tower of Babel, where shifting from one language to another neutralizes debate. The plenary sessions often look like a succession of monologues’ (2004: 8). In contrast, when two or more speakers from the same country debate, it becomes immediately clear that they belong to the same discursive universe. Other configurations also emerge – those from Southern Latin nations are differentiated from those coming from the North of Europe with all the associations each bring with them, while across nations and regions there is at least the one shared notion: the ‘common good’ (ibid: 11). But to make Europe work would require a new deterritorialized conception of politics and identity, throwing up challenges which have become even more difficult in the years since then and rendered even harder by the UK’s destructive decision to leave. Furthermore, Latour’s critique is too encompassing when you consider the work Abélès has inspired; as we will see in the next section, looking comparatively at the performance of ritual in Westminster, South Africa and India has revealed commonalities and differences between political worlds without exoticising any of the sites (Rai and Johnson 2014).

Both the linguist Ruth Wodak and anthropologist Amy Busby have undertaken ethnographic work on the European Parliament. Wodak points to how language both reveals social structures and reinforces social power (2003). Adopting a discourse-historical approach, she studied the identity of Parliamentarians in the late 1990s beginning with the premise that identity is not something you have or are, it is an orientation or resource to be used during interaction with others (ibid: 674-5). Particular aspects of identities, or combinations of them, emerge through discourse in different contexts (public and private); as a result, identities are dynamic, fragmented and ambivalent (ibid: 678). This is politics in Europe, so unsurprisingly nationality (or regional, such as Scandinavian) and political party/position are invoked by politicians while being interviewed, sometimes to account for a particular viewpoint or area of expertise (ibid: 687). For the women MEPs, their gender made them unusual, but they used the idea of being ‘special’ as a way to survive and one cast the typical (male) politician as elitist, aloof and patronising. The implication is that male politicians take their gender for granted, it is not invoked because maleness is the norm.

Busby is interested in how MEP practice politics as an everyday activity, studied by working as an intern for a politician (2013a: 96). While previous researchers in other disciplines have pored over voting behaviour and formal roles, she is responding to the need for a better understanding of informal practices, symbolic representations and power relations. She draws on Bourdieu’s post-structural theory to describe how politicians are playing political games backstage partly by accumulating different kinds of capital – securing formal offices or reputations, as examples – despite their claims that the Parliament is co-operative and egalitarian (2013b: 222). One of her contributions is to show that the complexity of the institution can only be understood if the links between processes and action are seen rather than obscured through relying on narrow research questions.

Following in Abélès’ anti-functionalist tradition, my own fieldwork for ethnographies of the Westminster Parliament was undertaken in two phases: in the House of Lords 1998-2001 and in the House of Commons 2011-2013. I found the UK parliamentary debates more like France

than the US (although the US deserves further anthropological scrutiny) – contests that became more controversial the more they encompassed cosmological relationships about sex, animals and the constitution (2005). The rituals served many purposes for different protagonists. In the Lords the ritualised debates both masked but also quietly enabled the continuity of hierarchies, especially those of the ‘usual channels’ or party leaders, who agree the outcome of votes despite the ethos of independent thought and egalitarian decision-making. I continued Abélès’ challenge to rational choice theory by writing about relationships between groups in Parliament, rather than fracturing them into units of individualised interest. By portraying the caste-like relations between priestly parliamentary clerks, kingly politicians, servant doorkeepers and unseen cleaners, and analysing titles as symbolic capital to compensate for peers’ relative lack of power, my book on the House of Lords comes over as a rather conventional ethnography in keeping with the image of a political institution that guards its traditions with enthusiasm.

William Schumann paints a picture of political transformations in Wales seen through a study of the Welsh National Assembly in the 2000s (2009). His fine-grained ethnography was partly possible because he worked as an intern for the Liberal Democrats. It means he describes the formal organisation, most obviously by political party, but also informal codes of behaviour. For example, party loyalty is important but fraternisation across political parties is encouraged: political staffers from different parties meet socially partly to lay the social groundwork for asking favours and passing on information. Within parties the informal communication extends beyond Wales in ways that usually go unseen. Schumann tells a story about how a Welsh special adviser, often conduits of information behind the scenes, texted an MP in Westminster to ask a question and within minutes the MP stood up in the House of Commons to ask for clarification on the government’s intentions to revise decision-making powers in Wales. Despite the rhetoric and mechanisms of open and transparent government, ‘deal-making’ between parties continues away from the cameras because some secrecy is perceived to be necessary for healthy democracy. The traditional approaches to the study of parliament, relying heavily on structured surveys as they do, could not have uncovered these partially hidden processes.

Schumann explores the various layers of legitimation and representation that play out in the Assembly and in the best spirit of anthropological research on politics, he does so with intense attention to context, empirical detail, and drama. First, preparing policy documents and deliberating views in parliament are tools for the Assembly’s legitimation. Secondly, he tells of a process of resistance to UK political discourse in the sense of being distinctively Welsh – that is, legitimising the use of Welsh in UK governance by making the Assembly bilingual in English and Welsh. Speaking Welsh in the Assembly has become a significant way for AM’s to claim both a Welsh identity and to be representing national interests. Thirdly, the semiotic struggles in the Assembly allow AMs to differentiate themselves from each other, when, for example, Ministers displace criticism of the government to a different time, place or remit. Schumann agrees with Habermas’s thesis that parliament is important in giving politicians the means to appear to be representing public interests through rationalised communication but diverges by writing that in Wales, contest rather than consensus is the result.

Only a few years later, my ethnography of the House of Commons also aimed to challenge the public image of politicians and act as a provocation to political science. Parliament is often portrayed as a system or a rule-bound institution, most frequently under the theoretical umbrella of new institutionalism, in a similar vein to the structuralism that anthropologists seemed wedded to during the 1970s and 1980s. This may be an advance on rational choice theory, in the sense that at least some account is taken of patterns created by groups beyond the motives and interests of individuals. But *the House of Commons: an anthropology of MPs at work* was an attempt to offer an alternative to this polarised duality between structure and individual, going beyond the structuralism of Abélès. MPs are both individuals, with complex relationships created by their claim to represent thousands within their constituency, but also continually shifting their attachments to a range of social groups and political configurations, even within one day. Individual freedom and social constraint are paradoxically concurrent. My research was based on embedded participant-observation within the Commons at a particular time – in the middle of the Coalition government of 2010-2015 after a catastrophic scandal about expenses – and some of the findings were out of date as soon as the book was published. This ephemeral quality was exacerbated by pointing to dramatic power shifts between whips and backbenchers, and government and Parliament, as well in changes brought about by the explosion of social media and 24 hour news. This book also offers a different way of understanding those political changes: messier, contradictory, uncertain and ambivalent, in line with the latest anthropological thinking on history, knowledge and performance (e.g., Spencer 2007, Latour 2010).

Jessica Bignell's research continues in this vein theoretically and is the first anthropology on the New Zealand Parliament but is also unique for its focus on political communication by one party – the Green party. She worked more intensively with four MPs in 2013 and analysed their political work of messaging through a Bourdieusian lens. Politicians communicate to win support and political power, but also to influence people's knowledge and understanding of the world (2018: 227-8); so politics entails people doing their best to 'navigate the messiness, uncertainty, and indeterminacy that they are enmeshed in to create change or keep things the same' (ibid: 238-9). She challenges reductionism – both Bourdieu's assumption that in the last resort communication is always in a bid for power, and Lempert's argument that policy content matters less in contemporary politics than the recovery of relationships – in an elegant exposition about the political game. The point for her is that Green MPs are achieving several things at one in their political communication but when you consider the uniqueness of the New Zealand context, and the Greens' oppositional place within their political world, you can see for them how especially vital reputation becomes (ibid: 232-235).

Investigating the question of contextual uniqueness versus generalisability across sites is key to any attempt to theorise about an institution from both within and beyond its context, and parliaments are no exception. Rather than assuming generalisability is more empirically meaningful within particular geo-political regions of the world, based on assumptions about how 'developed' their democracies are, anthropologists have shown that it is the logic of cultural and political practice that should frame the basis of comparison. Take the example of how elected politicians relate to their constituents. Whether it is the UK or the Pacific Islands,

when the state fails its citizens they expect their MP to rectify problems. In the words of a Marshallese politician, “Your constituents don’t expect you to only be their senator in the parliament. They also expect you to be a counsellor in a marriage fight, a psychologist in a suicide attempt, to bankroll a first birthday party or a wedding or a funeral” (Corbett 2015: 75). Politicians in most places get drawn like moths to a flame towards making impossible promises to constituents but there are exceptions. Contrast this picture with Ethiopia, where many MPs only visit their constituents twice a year and almost never get involved in individual cases (Ayenew 2019). Variations *within* countries can be significant. If you read Ruud’s ethnographic work on how people view politicians in West Bengal, India you will find that politicians are dirty, unprincipled and corrupt. Those who venture into this poisonous game tend to be unscrupulous, according to the villagers, and in addition by merely engaging ‘anyone was bound to be tarnished by unsavoury decisions, shady actions and odorous alliances’ (2001: 117). But Michelutti found in North India that Yadav leaders see themselves as a martial race, with a historical link to Krishna fighting for social justice, born to be politicians acting for their caste when necessary in muscular ways (2008: 178-83). People locally support these allegedly criminal politicians because they defend the poor. Similarly the experience of women politicians being outsiders (Puwar 2004) and facing a backlash when their representation in parliament increases suddenly has similarities between Uganda (Tamale 1999) and the UK’s House of Commons, two countries not usually compared within political science, but contrasts markedly with the dominance of women within the less powerful upper house in the UK, the House of Lords (Crewe 2014a).

Since 2014 I have been supporting anthropologists in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Ethiopia to research the relationship between parliamentarians and individuals, groups and organisations in society. As an example, Ahmed has studied constituencies in Bangladesh, challenging pervasive assumptions about how acting as a representative is about the fulfilment of a role (2019).ⁱⁱⁱ Taking up my point that representation has to be performed in contradictory ways within relationships with diverse groups of constituents (Crewe 2014b), Ahmed looks at how MPs are involved in endless shape-shifting to build up their reputation and win support with very different groups of people. They do so selectively, influenced by the business of operating within a profoundly conflictual and distrustful contemporary Bangladeshi political world. When a particular MP colludes with a group of his own constituents to humiliate a religious minority teacher, an act that amounts to a violent abuse of power, the performance of representation breaks down. Young people across the country showed solidarity for the teacher on social media, clearly expressing their sympathy and even symbolically identifying with him by repeating the act of humiliation and posting it on Facebook and Twitter. So if an MP who may be dispensing patronage and favours to some constituents, and abusing others who are rescued symbolically by total strangers, it is clear that the process of ‘representation’ can no longer simply be described as a role. It is a complex, messy and dynamic process of relating, which can only be explained by thickly describing the history, politics, and social world of each place and seeing how it is different from other worlds. Further anthropological work on how constituencies are neglected or represented by politicians from multiple perspectives is ongoing in Tigray, Ethiopia by Mitiku Gabrehiwot, and in Kachin, Myanmar by Ja Htoi Pan.^{iv} Keenly aware of European anthropologists’ complicity with colonialism, and the persistence of post-colonial

hierarchies in international research, the ethical imperative of recognising the rights and expertise of anthropologists in the global south, as well as the diaspora, is urgent. It is only with their involvement that a theoretically and empirically rich comparative understanding of parliaments will be possible.

Ethnographic approaches to the study of parliament beyond anthropology

Few anthropologists have ventured into parliaments but politicians have also been at the centre of the gaze of other kinds of ethnographers working mainly, but not only, from within the discipline of political science. Ethnography usually means the study of a specific social world. If you take parliamentarians as the social world, then the first ethnography of parliamentarians was carried out by US political scientist Richard Fenno (1978). *Home Style, House Members in their Districts* is an extraordinarily innovative study of the relationship between elected representatives and their constituents. Departing from the traditions of political science, he embarked on his fieldwork with a profoundly anthropological question, 'What does an elected representative see when he or she sees a constituency' and he dived into it in an ethnographic way – looking over the shoulders of politicians in their constituencies, rather than from a distance (ibid: xiii). For seven years his main method was 'just hanging around', ready to find interesting questions as they emerged out of his experience (ibid xiv). He writes about relationships, a recurrent theme in the anthropology of parliament, and in their dealings with constituents US representatives told him that trust is the magic ingredient. 'If people like you and trust you as an individual, they will vote for you' (ibid: 56). Much conversation between politicians and their constituents is not so much about policy but about the representative and whether they can be trusted. It takes time to win the moral approval contained within trust and it means getting close to people or giving the illusion of closeness. One US representative told Fenno that no one will vote against you if you are on first names basis and if you chew their tobacco, then they will even fight for you. Another representative put it, 'the best way to win a vote is to shake hands with someone. You don't win votes by the thousands with a speech. You win votes by looking individuals in the eye, one at a time, and asking them. Very rarely will anyone ask you about how you stand on anything' (ibid: 64, 85).

Political communication, then, is not so much about finding out what constituents think so they can represent (or change) their views, but a more subtle process whereby US politicians spend time in their districts to measure and enhance their voting leeway. Representatives know that they will be required sometimes to vote against the wishes of their constituents. To do this without losing too many votes they have to be trusted; the more a politician is trusted, therefore, the more leeway she has (ibid: 140-151). However, Fenno found in the US that when people appraise their MP in glowing terms – 'She is a good MP for our area' or 'He does a really good job' – they are not usually referring to their policy positions or voting record. Most constituents don't even know how their MP votes. Their relationship with their MP is often not so much about the representation of their views, as the championing of their area and the people within it, thereby creating a feeling of belonging to one another. They continually talk about the shared streets, the characters, and the churches, stressing their commonality and

understanding. But Fenno does not seem entirely comfortable with the language of symbolism, falling back on an assumption that that the intensity of their relationships is about no more than winning electoral support. In the end he concludes, 'the main effect we wish to suggest is simply that the distribution and strength of commitments made at home can affect the legislative process in Washington' (ibid: 232). Still, *Home Style* raises questions about symbolic representation, and how trust in representatives by constituents is won by establishing a connection rather than sharing views, that remain highly relevant to contemporary US politics.

Ethnographic method and theory has been taken up in earnest with and by scholars in other disciplines too, also pointing out how important it is to look beyond rhetoric. A Swiss anthropologist, Kathrin Wesendorf, edited a volume bringing together the work of lawyers and historians, as well as other anthropologists to look at how indigenous peoples relate to parliaments (2005). In the Arctic region participation in democracy has not halted indigenous peoples' dispossession or marginalisation. Even in Scandinavian countries, famous for their recognition of citizens' rights, they face opposition from politicians and the public when discussing their collective rights including to land (ibid: 12-13). The experiences of indigenous peoples, and therefore strategies for strengthening their political clout whether in existing or their own alternatives devolved parliaments, are different in the seven nations they have studied (ibid: 20-21), but the generalisable argument is that parliaments in this whole region are failing to represent indigenous peoples.

Politics scholar Shirin Rai directed a research coalition that put anthropological concerns at the centre of research into gendered ceremony and ritual in the Indian, South African and UK Parliaments^v and her edited volumes have shaken up well-trodden political science orthodoxies in various ways (Rai 2010, Rai and Johnson 2014). The first is geopolitical. The majority of parliamentary studies by European, US and Australian academics tend to focus on those regions, portraying them as relatively 'developed' democracies, and since they dominate international journals research is skewed towards those areas. Global generalisations are even made on the basis of these studies, as if oblivious to historical diversity and postcolonial international power relations. The absence of theorising about democratic politics across the Global West/North and East/South implies that the differences are too huge to be accommodated (e.g., *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies*, Martin et al 2014). Rai's work provides further evidence to my argument that this default position is theoretically questionable. When encouraging scholars to compare politics in India, South Africa and the UK, Rai's colleagues have produced rich observations about disruption, for example. Disruptions reveal the rules and norms of an institution, and who polices them, but also how representatives relate to their speaker, their party and wider politics in society (Spary et al 2014). In all three cases you could either claim disruptions are a lively challenge to the dominance of the executive or the fragmentation of party and decline of Parliament – so some kind of power struggle must be involved (ibid: 196), but a persuasive theory can only emerge out of the specific history of each case. In South Africa the substance and motivation for disruption has even changed over time within the same Parliament, with a shift from establishing the boundaries for post-apartheid contestation (1994-1999) to the opposition negotiating for its legitimacy (ibid: 198-9). It is this kind of ethnographical work that could

challenge what Montsion has described as the racist tendencies found in the discipline of international relations but only if accompanied by debates about reflexivity (2018). A refusal to compare across the geo-political divides can be a symptom of such racism. The second shake-up that Rai inspired was by breaking away from the previous fixation on outputs and individual strategies, with her interest in history, performance and symbolism – that is, taking socio-political and cultural approaches to the study of politics (2014). These approaches constitute innovation for political science theory but also feminist research, encompassing as they do both feminist institutionalism, with its focus on rules and norms, and Rai's interest in power, performativity and post-structuralism. So Rai's third theoretical innovation was to pluralise feminist scholarship on political institutions, complementing the sizeable and valuable research that is driven directly by an agenda for change – understandably given the chronic under-representation of women in the vast majority of Parliaments around the world.

Political science ethnographers reveal much about the conventions of political science as a discipline by subverting the ways research is normally done. Let's consider how political science ethnographers understand this approach to research in contrast to anthropological scholars. Rhodes and Geddes have explained ethnography as an interpretive approach (2018). They summarise predominant approaches to research in the UK parliament as descriptive, reformist and framed in terms of (new) institutionalist theory, relying heavily on the study of texts, procedures and formal powers. Then they propose an interpretive approach to the study of legislatures influenced by their own experimentation with ethnographic methods in addition to my work in Parliament (Crewe 2005, 2015), and that of Rai (2010) and Leston-Bandeira (2016). Influenced by Bevir, they are anti-foundationalist – so all reality is social constructed which means that you have to take the views of those you are studying seriously – and argue that individuals have limits on their agency. Some beliefs are 'sticky' and change when people face dilemmas, so to understand the behaviour of politicians it is important to study how they interpret and create meaning through their actions. They recommend various tools for collecting narratives direct from the protagonists (observation, oral histories, interviews, informal conversations and so on) (Rhodes and Geddes 2018). This perspective is genuinely inter-disciplinary – meeting anthropology half-way by challenging positivist methodology – as compared to those ethnographers who conceive of it as merely a tool, to be supplemented with other methods to overcome bias and strengthen the capacity for rigour and generalisation (Bayard de Volo and Schatz 2004: 269-70). However, if Rhodes and Geddes are anti-foundational (offering rigour but not generalisations), and most political scientists are foundational (often providing generalisations only by abstracting away from reality), anthropology has the capacity to work towards a post-foundational approach that both attains rigour *and* proposes valid generalisations.

What does anthropology offer to the ethnographical study of parliaments?

To understand the basis of anthropological rigour you have to consider the epistemological underpinnings of its approach to method and theory. Anthropologists aim for a holistic study – inquiring into connections between different aspects of people's lives in context rather than

looking at one element or theme detached from context – but in practice it is impossible to be comprehensive so the limits to holism are acknowledged. Nonetheless, the commitment to depth persists as does the choice of doing ‘fieldwork’ – usually immersion in a particular place (or connected sites) to conduct ‘participant-observation’, guided by the assumption that you have to take enough time to compile a bigger picture of what a whole group does without them necessarily noticing the wider pattern themselves. The specific challenge in elite political institutions, including parliaments, is one of gaining access. Most parliaments tend to allow visitors into the areas of public debate, but keep them out of meeting places unless invited by politicians or officials partly on grounds of safety but also because spaces often become crowded. Since anthropology as a discipline prioritises the study of relationships, we tend to be skilled at persuading gatekeepers to allow us to gain special access. But it comes at a cost. As Bayard de Volo and Schatz (2004) point out, it is easy to ‘go native’ if developing close enough relationships to persuade gatekeepers to issue a parliamentary pass. It is for this reason that reflexivity becomes even more important when conducting ethnography, not just to understand your own understanding of your informants but to scrutinise how you developed it.

Positivist disciplines are concerned to produce an objective account, as if it were possible to remove the subjectivity of the researcher, but anthropology makes the history, identity and participation of the researcher part of the study. Such reflexivity entails ‘turning back on oneself’, as Davies puts it, reflecting on how the social interaction between ethnographer and informant reveals their respective assumptions and responses to each other and produces the theories that generate conclusions (1998: 4-5). Not only will the study of every Parliament be different (because each is embedded in different cultures and politics), but also studies of the same Parliament will vary because of the specific configuration of identities of different researchers. It is easiest to show how my own history and identity has influenced my research by giving an example. Within an ongoing multidisciplinary research coalition studying the relationship between Parliamentarians and civil society in Ethiopia one encounter illuminated the influence of the researchers’ identities on our interviews very clearly. When four of us interviewed women MPs we ran an experiment to test out how our own identities influenced the inquiry. Four researchers went into the interview: me (a white British woman), a white British man, an Ethiopian man and an Ethiopian woman scholar. By prior agreement we all agreed to stay in the interviews until the last few minutes when the two men would leave to see if this influenced how the women MPs spoke to us and what they said. While all the researchers were present, the MPs were determined to stress the strength of their party and government and their successful efforts at promoting gender equality. The impression given was that women politicians were tough, dynamic and invulnerable. When the two male researchers left, the conversation changed abruptly. The women MPs became far more candid about the hostility of some male MPs, quoted as typically saying: “Why do you always cry?” and “The constitution already reflects the interests of all. Women’s issues are already discussed so do not always talk about women”. One of them tellingly said when asked what it was like being a woman MP: “When a woman gets up to speak in the Parliament she is always fearful, thinking ‘can I do this?’ whereas a man never worries.” Whether this was true or not – perhaps men are just as nervous but refrain from saying so – it was clear that this would not have been said in front of the men. This encounter made it clear to us that women MPs struggle with confidence but are under

pressure to appear invulnerable in the presence of figures of authority or those they are competing against. Such a pattern may be generalizable as there is plenty of evidence to suggest similar dynamics elsewhere (Crewe 2014a). So gender, race / nationality and a history of hierarchy all played a part in shaping this encounter. This influence does not make the observations made during this encounter, or the interpretations made afterwards, less reliable than a neutral encounter: there is no such thing as a 'neutral' interview or meeting uninfluenced by people's history, emotions and identity. As long as the researchers reflect on how their research is produced by relationships and assumptions, and record this in as much detail as possible and write it into their account, then rigour is the direction of travel. So in this case rigour was developed not by feigning neutrality but by reflection on one's presuppositions and what impact they were having on the research, in short reflexivity.

Just as a research inquiry is a social, emotional, political and intellectual process, not merely a series of events, so the struggle for rigour is a process that runs throughout research. It means continually investigating the claims that informants' make with a respectful scepticism. To get beneath the surface, and make sense of multiple views, a researcher has to continually ask, "why is she saying that?", because like anyone else politicians' statements are produced by their specific social context and a mix of cultural values, pressures, ideologies, norms, emotions, and aspirations. This kind of open-ended inquiry means that ethnographers find out what they perceive to be of socio-political significance to their informants and can then more easily analyse why patterns such as gaps, connections and contradictions exist, persist or change. It is in the endless analysis of similarities and differences between different aspects of social worlds that patterns emerge. Gaps often appear between what people say about their work and what they actually do. If you listen to what MPs say about constituency work, and watch surgery meetings, it looks as if MPs are just obediently doing as they are told when dealing with constituents' grievances, writing letters on their behalf and never turning anyone away. However, if you look across many cases it is possible to see that MPs assess the merit of different cases and alter the way they deal with different people on the basis of weighing up the truth of what their constituents say (Crewe 2015: 95). Since most of them have to develop close relationships across their constituency with bureaucrats in all the major agencies, MPs don't want to annoy them by wasting their time with cases that are not worth troubling about. So they develop a subtle code for indicating the urgency (or lack of it) of the case in the letters or emails that convey the details of the problem.

Informants are not necessarily concealing information for malign reasons; they may simply be taking for granted their own history, values and cultural practices. To illustrate this I will explain how I found out about whips in the Westminster Parliament. I began my inquiry into Commons' whips, still influenced by assumptions developed while researching the House of Lords. By talking to whips and peers in the Lords, and sitting in on meetings between whips, I discovered that the 'usual channels' – that is, the whips and party managers across parties – negotiated deals that went unnoticed by the backbenchers. I watched to see how much peers obey their whips. Despite an ethos of independence articulated by almost all peers, and few bribes or threats at the whips' disposal, peers rarely vote against the instructions sent out by their parties (relative to my expectations and their claims). When I asked why they were so much more

obedient that their ethos of independence implied, they would explain that they did not have the time to find out about such a huge range of issues and trusted the judgement of their own side, felt strong party loyalty, or they couldn't face "voting with the enemy." Time and again members of the House of Lords voiced opinions that conveyed a strong solidarity within party in contrast to the idealised individualism of their ethos.

I expected fewer deals, harsher whipping and firmer government controls in the Commons, all achieved by promises, bribes and threats. Although trained to question the easy assumptions of rational choice theory – that individuals are motivated by a calculation of their interests – I slipped into assuming that MPs obey the whip to get re-elected, promoted or supported by their party. However, Commons whipping wasn't as I had anticipated. I read Phil Cowley's work on rebels; MPs obey the whip less and less and each Parliament since 1945 has become more rebellious (2005). I embarked on an inquiry by talking to whips, rebels and those close to them. They revealed that the nature of whipping was changing so that it was more about coaxing than bullying party members, relying on gathering intelligence, negotiation and discretion. The position of the whips was weakening in the UK House of Commons for various reasons: political parties (including their polarised ideologies) were in a decline, the demands of constituencies and local parties were becoming more vociferous, and reforms in 2010 gave more clout to backbenchers especially on select committees (Crewe 2015). How did I build up this more complex picture of the whipping in recent times? I investigated what happened and why on particular votes by observing and listening to MPs in the chamber and in the corridors, talking to MPs in different parties, their whips, the clerks, MPs staff – gossiping about what was going on and why. To theorise about how whipping is embedded in complex social relationships, I looked at it from multiple angles and at the gaps between perspectives.

Rigour is achieved by hard interactive work – with reflexivity, a sense of history and attention to plurality – but that is not sufficient for constructing generalisations. Anthropology can be seen as no more than butterfly collecting, merely classifying people or patterns in a specific moment and place without being able to theorise about wider processes, but I would argue to go beyond this we need to adopt a post-foundational approach. In philosophical terms, this means finding the place where the phenomenology of say, Merleau-Ponty, meets the US pragmatism of Mead and Dewey. As Bourgeois explains that both reject scientific objectivism and 'absolute ultimate categories of knowledge' (1996: 20) and, I would add, at the same time avoid the relativism of some post-modern theorists. They manage this by proposing that the scientific method is a creative experiment – the reality of others is not objectified, but discovered in the process in a collaborative way: 'what is known is seen to be a product in which the act of observation plays a necessary role. Knowing is seen to be a participant in what is finally known' (Dewey as quoted by Bourgeois 1996: 122). So generalising beyond the specific – the individual, the group, the parliament – is only possible if you take account of a plurality of views. You have to get alongside other peoples' everyday lived realities, later findings ways of discerning whether or not you are representing their views in a way that they recognise.

To give an example of generalising from specific history, I followed one clause of one bill for about two years with multiple methods – interviews, observation and tracking documents as

they change during law-making. This enabled me to observe the connections created or maintained between a huge range of different people involved in one particular issue. Just as Latour wrote about how French administrative law is produced through a network of connections in practice – so that uncertainties and ambiguities are translated into decisions (2010: 101) – I studied what happened when 250 words travelled through the law-making processes in Parliament. The issue concerned decisions made by judges when parents separate and go to court to settle children’s care and residential arrangements. A close study of the text of one clause and the authors of its amendments might lead a researcher to conclude that the government was persuaded to tone it down from a fathers’ rights to a children’s welfare perspective by a cross-political select committee and then a seemingly apolitical Cross-bench peer. However, the amendments were actually the result of a complex alliance that can only be understood if you investigate the connections between different people, events and private meetings (Crewe 2015). When I interviewed various protagonists they inevitably focused on their own role in the passage of the bill through their own lens, not always seeing the part played by others. By watching various meetings and contrasting different points of view, I came up with a version of connections and events that was a thicker description (Geertz 1973) than one insider’s account could ever be. By emailing my draft version to all the key protagonists and asking for their comments, and then adjusting the narrative to more faithfully and precisely reflect the multiple voices, and the contradictions between them, the research process continued – in the sense of finding out what happened – until I judged that a persuasive account had been reached and the final editing was complete.

But this went beyond mere description of a case. Looking at politics and evidence underneath the 250 words in this law illustrates how the two are entangled in complex ways that might imply the process of scrutiny needs to upgrade the politics and downgrade the idea of the purity of evidence (Crewe 2017). During the passage of the Bill various social scientific surveys, legal cases and personal testimonies were brought into debate to substantiate contradictory positions about what was in the interests of whom. Since what is good for some will be bad for others, reading the runes – imagining the future on the basis of the present – is fraught with danger for politicians. Their decisions will always be distasteful to some and in this sense we might even be grateful to politicians for courting inevitable unpopularity. So it is not impartiality we should demand of our politicians; it is honesty about their partiality – inevitably and continually privileging the interests of one group above another – that helps democracy. Politics can never *just* be the rational assessment of evidence; it would lack morality if it was or pretended to be so. So rather than assuming policy-makers should be ‘evidence-based’, surely they should make or scrutinise law and policy by intelligently investigating and debating different bodies of knowledge and contested claims?

I went further down the path of ethnographic collaboration in a recent study. I researched the UK expenses scandal with the parliamentary official in charge of finance during the crisis, that is, with my own main informant (Crewe and Walker 2019). Over two years we sought to draw out diverse views to tell a persuasive version of the sociopolitical and cultural history of the scandal, listening to a range of perspectives and drawing out their significance, but also by challenging ourselves to develop a new interpretation, under the influence of Hannah Arendt’s approach to

participating in the public realm. For Arendt, politics is about debating diverse opinions created by the plurality of humans in public spaces. Forming opinions is never a solitary activity; the more people standpoints you juggle in your mind, the 'greater capacity for representative thinking' (Arendt 1977). So this involves more than holding up a mirror to the world: an author (or two) has to form an opinion through an act of imagination rather than merely listing many views. Anthropological method always relies on this way of thinking about how to develop knowledge.

In making visible the invisible, we gave prominence to what we viewed as the key moments – a process of careful selection. We started with a sense that past commentary on the 2009 scandal had oversimplified the issues – that the public discourse ten years earlier had vilified Members of Parliament with too much zeal and not enough discernment, and that in turn may have damaged democracy. But that initial view of ours was itself unduly simplistic. We discovered that the scandal was less about financial crime and more about privacy, secrecy and entitlement – the dangers of both concealment and exposure. Obscuring the truth for private gain is wicked, of that we had no doubt (Crewe and Walker 2019: 199), but MPs were beyond foolish to try and keep information about their expenses private once they passed the Freedom of Information Act. At the same time, this doesn't mean transparency is always an unqualified good; the more information is mediated, the more its context and meaning has become distorted and the less we understand its complexity. The more information is put into the public domain without context or interpretation, or with malicious and disingenuous spin, the more distrust it generates. Since then, the information explosion has intensified and his cautionary words, if anything, ring more strongly. This may have been the case with the expenses scandal. But the message for society in the information age goes broader, so greater transparency is not automatically an unmixed blessing.

Conclusion

Anthropology offers both an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of parliament – working with a sense of history and geography to address philosophical questions – but also its own lens derived from discovering what is socially and culturally specific versus generalisable. In a given parliament, at a specific time, insights are easily mustered: whipping has collapsed in the UK House of Commons as a result of the decline in deference and the rise of public demands. The greater challenge is to find universal patterns in all parliaments. Learning from the anthropology of parliament over the last thirty years, I propose an anthropological theory of the work of politicians in democracies globally. Relationships are at the heart of politics. MPs in any parliamentary democracy are navigating many complex, dynamic socio-political processes each day, walking between friends and foes in the struggle to achieve public good. Their performances arise out of their identities, backgrounds and histories and they respond to the endlessly conflicting demands thrown at them by party, different groups of citizens and the media.

How do they develop the skill they require to adapt their performance to multiple sites,

audiences and demands? There three processes that provide some continuity for MPs between and across chaotic diversity and dynamism and maintain or rupture relationships, sustaining or breaking alliances. The first are the riffs that MPs develop to make sense of ideology and communicate as policies and arguments, each improvised for different audiences. The communication of these within many legislatures, and especially in the digital sphere, is becoming more antagonistic and distrustful. The second are rhythms that organise the work of MPs by creating repetition in time and space but allow for variation at the same time. The detail of these depend on the context but most parliamentarians visit not only the legislature but also media studios, lobbyists and their constituencies. The third are the rituals – as examples, debates in parliamentary chambers, press or party conferences, or more formal meetings – which punctuate the daily routine with riffs and rhythms of particular political, social and cultural significance (for details see Crewe 2015). Finally, the more events are significant, the more they tend to be ritualised. This usually means they will be charged with symbolic meaning, regulated by rules and involved in reproducing or challenging a socio-political hierarchy. The credibility and plausibility of politicians, and even the parliament as a whole is constructed through a variety of performative rituals, artefacts and settings with the aim that they will be taken seriously by the wider parliamentary community and the general public.

Democratically elected representatives have to be both ordinary and extraordinary. John Dunn writes, ‘in human political communities it ought to be ordinary people (the adult citizens) and not extra-ordinary people who rule’ (as quoted by Crewe and Walker 2019: 180). We no longer want to be ruled by super beings – deities, kings or leaders born to rule – we want to be governed by people who seem like ourselves. Stephen Coleman adds, ‘In an age where authenticity and ordinariness are valued more than prestige and expertise, the challenge for democratic politicians is to be seen as ordinary enough to be representative, while extraordinary enough to be representatives’ (ibid). Contradictorily, making democracy work in the face of change, difference and disagreement is such a struggle that exceptional qualities *are* required in our leaders. We want to trust them, look up to them and rely on them to make wise judgements, but the inevitable antagonism and confusion caused by the struggle for democracy have often exposed politicians’ weaknesses as a collective. Politics can be found in all organisations – in the sense of alliance-building, winning support, power struggling and battling over resources – but politicians do all these activities, and politics itself, in a more concentrated, shape-shifting and exposed way than any other group. We both love and hate them because they remind us of ourselves but in magnified forms.

Political work provokes conflict and emotion in the face of different interests and values, only outdone in its intensity by the failure of politics when conflicts descend into violence, and politicians are at in the centre of the maelstrom. Add to this the digital revolution and rise of populism, jointly exposing politicians to the vagaries of public opinion even more ferociously than before, and you find that the experience and performance of politicians has a magnified and magnifying effect. Not only do politicians seem larger than life, and astonishingly reckless at times, but they inspire amplified effects in others: emotion, judgement, blame and occasionally adoration. Anthropology has the potential to transform the study of parliament: at a time when collaborative research is urgently needed, they have the methods and theories to achieve it

with skill.

Reference

- Abélès, M. (2000), *Un ethnologue à l'Assemblée*, Paris: Odile Jacob.
- Abélès, M. (2004), *Identity and Borders: An Anthropological Approach to EU Institutions*, Twenty-First Century Papers, No. 4, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, accessed 31st January 2017 at <https://www4.uwm.edu/c21/pdfs/workingpapers/abeles.pdf>.
- Abélès, M. (2006), (ed.) Parliament, Politics and Ritual, in E. Crewe and M. G. Müller (eds.), *Rituals in Parliament*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Ahmed, Z. (2019), 'From Shape Shifting to Collusion in Violence: An Ethnography of Informal Relationships Between Bangladeshi Members of Parliament and Their Constituents', *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 42(1), 5-20.
- Ayeneu, M. with Wubie, N. and Mekonnen, T. (2019), *Parliament-Public Engagement in Ethiopia: Selected Notes and Case Studies on a Politically Fragile State*, Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies.
- Arendt, H. *Between Past and Future*, New York: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 241.
- Aronoff, M. (1989), *Israeli Visions and Divisions*, New Brunswick: Transaction.
- Bayard de Volo, L. and Schatz, E. (2004), From the Inside Out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research, *Political Science and Politics* 37(2), 267-271.
- Bellier, I. (2002), 'European identity, institutions and languages in the context of the enlargement', *Journal of Language and Politics* 1(1), 85-114.
- Bignell, J. (2018) Political Messaging, Parliament, and People. Or Why Politicians Say the Things They Do the Way They Do: The Parliamentary Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand in 2013, Unpublished Thesis at Massey University, Aotearoa, New Zealand.
- Busby, A. (2013a), 'Normal Parliament: Exploring the Organisation of Everyday Political Life in an MEP's office', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 9(1), 94-115.
- Busby, A. (2013b), *The Everyday Practice and Performance of European Politics: an Ethnography of the European Parliament*, Thesis submitted for the degree of doctor of philosophy in Contemporary European Studies, University of Sussex.
- Corbett, Jack (2015) *Being Political. Leadership and democracy in the Pacific Islands*, University of Hawaii Press: New Delhi.
- Cowley, P. (2005), *The Rebels: How Blair Mislaid His Majority*, London: Politico.
- Crewe, E. (2005), *The Lords of Parliament: manners, rituals and politics*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Crewe, E. (2014a), 'Ethnographic Research in Gendered Organizations: the Case of the Westminster Parliament', *Politics and Gender*, 10(4), 673-678.
- Crewe, E. (2014b), 'Westminster Parliamentarians: Performing Politics', in S. Rai and R. Johnson (eds.), *Democracy in Practice, Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 40-59.
- Crewe, E. (2015), *House of Commons, an anthropology of MPs at work*, London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

- Crewe, E. (2017), 'Reading the runes: conflict, culture and 'evidence' in law-making in the UK, redescriptions: political thought,' *Conceptual History and Feminist Theory*, 20(1), pp. 32-48.
- Crewe, E. and Walker, A. (2019), *An Extraordinary Scandal, the Westminster expenses crisis and why it still matters*, London: Haus Publishing.
- Davies, C. (1998), *Reflexive Ethnography, A guide to researching selves and others*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Faucher, F. (2005) *Changing Parties: An Anthology of British Political Conferences*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fenno, R. (1978), *Home Style, House Members in their Districts*, New York: Harper Collins.
- Geddes M., and Rhodes R.A.W. (2018) *Towards an Interpretive Parliamentary Studies*. In: Brichzin J., Krichewsky D., Ringel L., Schank J. (eds), *Soziologie der Parlamente*. Politische Soziologie: Springer VS, Wiesbaden.
- Geertz, C. (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures, Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books.
- Ingold, T. (2014), 'That's enough about ethnography', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 4 (1), 383-395
- Ingold, T. (2018), *Anthropology: Why it Matters*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Latour, B. (2010), *The Making of Law. An Ethnography of the Conseil d'Etat*, London: Polity.
- Laver, M. (2008), 'Legislatures and Parliaments in Comparative Context', in D. A. Wittman and B. Weingast (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 121-138.
- Leston-Bandeira C. (2016), *Why Symbolic Representation Frames Parliamentary Public Engagement*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 18 (2), 498-516.
- Martin, S. T. Saalfeld and K. Strøm (2014), *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies*, Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Michelutti, L. (2008), *The Vernacularisation of Democracy. Politics, Caste and Religion in India*, Routledge: New Delhi.
- Montsion, Jean Michel (2018), *Ethnography and international relations: situating recent trends, debates and limitations from an interdisciplinary perspective*, *Journal of Chinese Sociology*, 5(9), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-018-0079-4>.
- Paley, J. (2002), 'Towards an anthropology of democracy', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32, 469-496.
- Puwar, N. (2004), *Space Invaders: race, gender and bodies out of place*, Berg, London.
- Rai, and Johnson, R. (2014), *Democracy in Practice, Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rai, S. (2014), 'Political Performance: A Framework for Analysing Democratic Politics', *Political Studies*, 65(5), pp. 1179-1197
- Rai, S. (ed.) (2010), 'Special Issue Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament', *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 16 (3), pp 284-297.
- Salverda, T. and Abbink, J. (2013), *Introduction: An Anthropological Perspective on Elite Power and the Cultural Politics of Elites*, in T. Salverda and J. Abbink (eds.) *the Anthropology of Elites*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-28.
- Scheppele, K. L. (2004), 'Constitutional Ethnography: An Introduction', *Law and Society Review*, 38, (3), 389-406.

- Schumann, W. (2009), *Toward an Anthropology of Government, democratic transformations and nation building in Wales*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shore, C. (2000), *Building Europe: The cultural politics of European integration*, London: Routledge.
- Spary, C., Armitage, F. and Johnson, R .E. (2014), 'Disrupting Deliberation? Comparing Repertoires of Parliamentary Representation in India, the UK and South Africa', in S. Rai, and R. Johnson (eds), *Democracy in Practice, Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 182-210.
- Spencer, J. (1997), 'Post-colonialism and the Political Imagination'. In *JRAI* (N.S.) (3) 1-19.
- Spencer, J. (2007), *Anthropology, Politics, and the State. Democracy and Violence in South Asia*, Cambridge: University Cambridge Press.
- Tamale, Sylvia (1999), *When Hens Begin to Crow. Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*, Westview Press: Kampala.
- Weatherford, J. (1985), *Tribes on the Hill. The US Congress Rituals and Realities*, Westport: Bergin and Garvey.
- Wodak, R. (2003), 'Multiple identities: The role of Female Parliamentarians in the EU Parliament,' in J. Holmes and M. Meyerhoff (eds.), *The Handbook of Language and Gender*, London: Blackwell, pp. 671-698.

ⁱ I would like to express my gratitude to the Arts and Humanities Research Council and Global Challenges Research Fund AH/R005435/1 for supporting this research.

ⁱⁱ If being precise about language then parliaments and legislatures are different: although both parliaments and legislatures pass laws, in a UK-style parliamentary government the executive is constitutionally accountable to *parliament* whereas in a US-style presidential system there is a separation of powers between executive and *legislature* (Laver 2008). This is the ideal but in practice accountability or separation only work effectively in democracies with a functioning opposition. Some of what I write about may apply to regional level assemblies but far less work has been carried out on them by anthropologists. In this article I use 'parliaments' as the umbrella word, meaning any national body in which elected politicians sit and within which laws are made and/or government is held to account, and give details if I am referring to a special type or context.

ⁱⁱⁱ This research is part of a coalition directed by Emma Crewe and Ruth Fox and funded by the Department for International Development and the Economic and Social Research Council (2014-2017).

^{iv} Their research was funded by grants awarded by the Global Research Network on Parliaments and People, supported by the Global Challenges Research Fund and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (2017-2020), directed by Meheret Ayenew, Emma Crewe, Ruth Fox, Niraja

Gopal Jayal, Cristina Leston-Bandeira, and Myat Thet Thitsar and managed by Richard Axelby with Jas Kaur and Bethel Worku.

^v <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/cpd/gcrp/aboutgcrp>, accessed 1st February 2017.