



Dr Surya Monro
Department of Politics
University of Sheffield
s.monro@sheffield.ac.uk

Symbolising the Rainbow: Glimpses of South African Parliament

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'Perhaps South Africans think of the more sedate rows of Ministers in the front seats of the National Assembly that sometimes flash onto TV news screens. We may also remember occasional singing and even toyi-toying¹ in the House or the fistfight that once broke out between two members. Sometimes these images lead the public to wonder how (or whether) any business is done in Parliament' (Murray and Nizjink 2002: 59)

Ritual and ceremony may seem like strange fodder for political scientists, who are more usually concerned with issues of representation and accountability. Cultural aspects of parliament, such as language, dress and song can be seen as superfluous by-products of the more important 'business of parliament'. However, the soft aspects of parliamentary culture and institutional norms form an aspect of the processes by which parliamentary politics are constituted and signified to the public. Attention to manifestations of culture, such as ritual and ceremony, may provide a means of gaining insight into the ways in which parliament reflects and forms power relations, and the inclusion and exclusion of socially marginalised groups.

The paper addresses an area in which there has been a paucity of research: ceremony and ritual within parliament. By describing ceremony and ritual in South African parliament, the paper provides a foundation for addressing the hypothesis that *representative institutions operate through evolving repertoires of ritual and ceremony which control the members (performance) and signify their function to the public (audience)*². Ceremony and ritual can be seen to be both a manifestation of, and a means of perpetuating (or altering), particular parliamentary values and cultures, institutional processes, and relations of power³.

The field of parliamentary studies may be seen to overlook parliamentary ceremony and ritual, being mostly concerned with policy making and accountability issues (see for example Norton 1993, Rogers and Walters 1987,⁴ Brazier et al 2005, Cowley 2005). As Crewe and Muller state, *'Rituals, symbols, and relationships have been relatively ignored'* (2006: 7)⁵. The notion of ritual as central to the political process, rather than simply a dependent variable, was revived by Geertz ((1980), cited in Crewe and Muller 2006:11). There is now a small but growing body of research concerning the role of ceremony and ritual in shaping parliamentary processes and in socialising parliamentarians, including Crewe and Muller's (2006) collection on ritual within European and American parliaments. Some authors in the field address particular aspects of ritual within parliaments, for instance Olsen and Tremaine (2002) analyse maiden speeches given by non traditional parliamentarians in New Zealand and Patzelt (2006) usefully develops new institutionalist theory in relations to parliaments. Other scholarship concerns political ritual that is of relevance to the analysis of ritual and ceremony within parliament, although the events addressed take place outside of parliamentary space. Abeles' (1988) piece on the inauguration, by President Mitterand, of a new railway station and a pilgrimage to Solutre, provides a seminal example, whilst Bendix (1992) addresses processes of contestation concerning patriotism and political ritual in Switzerland. These contributions, whilst valid in their own right, are almost

¹ A form of dance associated with the resistance movement.

² Research proposal: Gendered Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament: Disciplining Representation.

³ It is important to point out, when discussing South African parliament, that it must be considered in the context of transnational capitalism and the power of the transnational state (the African union, World Bank and so on). The transnational ruling elite is elusive to the safeguards provided by national electoral politics (Calland and Graham 2005).

⁴ Although Rogers and Walters does provide a useful description of language and custom within Westminster parliament.

⁵ And, parliaments have tended not to be of central interest to political sociologists – see Crewe and Muller (2006:8).

invariably based on the legislatures of industrialised (mostly Northern) nations. There is of course a larger contemporary literature on South African politics generally (for instance Gutteridge 1995, Toase and Yorke 1998, Jacobs and Calland 2002, Murray and Nijzink 2002), a body of scholarship on gender and South African politics (for example Hassim 2006, Waylen 2007a,b), and relevant literature in the field of South African anthropology (see for instance Gluckman 1952, Kloppe (1996).

This paper will begin by providing definitions of ritual and ceremony, locating the subsequent discussion within political anthropology, but not attempting to provide any substantial insight into the relationship between anthropological approaches and others of pertinence, in particular poststructuralist accounts. I will then provide an historical overview of the development of parliamentary ritual and ceremony within South Africa. I conclude with tentative thoughts about possible directions for research concerning ritual and ceremony in South African parliament.

Ceremony and ritual

What are ritual and ceremony? What purpose do parliamentary ritual and ceremony serve? This section of the paper provides a brief overview of key definitions, and a snapshot of some of the different approaches regarding the purpose of ritual and ceremony within legislatures. It also provides some pointers regarding the conceptual frameworks that could be employed when developing an analysis of the relations between the 'softer', cultural aspects of parliamentary workings and the operation of power within parliaments.

Notions of ceremony and ritual can be traced to the classical sociologists, including Max Weber, who explored the way in which customs, conventions, social norms, religious and cultural beliefs, households, kinship, ethnic boundaries, organizations, community, class, status groups, markets, the law and the state formed institutional frameworks which shaped individual action (Nee, 1998, citing *Economy and Society*, p. 6). Lukes (1977: 54) provides a useful definition of ritual⁶, as a 'rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance'. Muller explains parliamentary rituals as 'procedures, or ways of organising social behaviour, that are necessary for conducting parliamentary business as much as they convey meaning both to parliamentary insiders and to the public outside the institution' (2006:185). Crewe and Muller suggest that:

Political ritual is largely created by symbolic means, whether through rituals, objects with symbolic meaning (flags, logos, uniforms) or words, music and so on. Ritualised action is the process through which actors make sense of the world, link the past to the present to the future, allow expression of powerful emotions, and order (reaffirm, contest or disguise) relationships within the social and political systems (2006:13)

Detailed discussion of the processes by which South African parliamentary rituals and ceremonies form, and are formed by, relations of power are beyond the remit of this piece⁷. However, indications of directions that analysis might take can be made, following Crewe and Muller (2006). Crewe suggests, in her analysis of the rituals of the British House of Lords, that 'The relationship between rituals and power may seem hazy and contradictory' (2006:107). She suggests that rituals both convey a sense of egalitarianism and mask the limitations to

⁶ For the purposes of this paper the term 'ceremony' will be subsumed under the umbrella term of 'ritual'.

⁷ In particular, poststructuralist accounts of power as multi-sited, the role of discourse in the constitution of power relations and so forth will have to be dealt with subsequently.

backbenchers' ability to exercise power, as proceedings are in fact substantially controlled via informal channels and the executive⁸.

The literature on ceremony and ritual begs a number of questions, about the forms of ritual and ceremony found in South African parliament, their historical development, and their construction and impact. What rituals and ceremonies exist regarding the spatial organisation of South African parliament, the procedures found within parliament, the symbolic presentation of parliament (for example the new emblem), the modes of interaction adopted by individual parliamentarians, and presentational forms (such as dress)? The following sections of the paper provide the groundwork for redressing the gap in the literature. The paper is divided into apartheid era, and transitional/post transition sections, and within these sections, I shall attempt to focus material around the themes of overarching norms, spatial organisation of South African parliament, the procedures found within parliament, parliamentary-specific ceremonies, norms regarding interaction, the symbolic presentation of parliament, and presentational forms (such as dress). The paper does not attempt to deal with issues concerning the recent wave of xenophobic violence (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7417590.stm>), recent events in Zimbabwe, or the vast inequalities in wealth distribution within South Africa (see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/indepth/africa/2004/south_africa_election/default.stm).

The historical development of ceremony and ritual in South African parliament before the transition to democracy

This section of the paper aims to provide historical contextualisation for the current parliament in South Africa, focusing on the ceremonies and rituals that developed within apartheid era and transitional parliament, the trajectories of which may now be witnessed in its daily operation. The section only traces developments since 1910; it goes without saying that dynamics previous to that centered around European land seizure and colonisation.

Overarching norms

The Union of South Africa came into being in 1910, as an amalgamation of what were at that time four colonies administered by British parliament, and South Africa became an independent sovereign state at that point. The national party victory in 1948 institutionalised racial discrimination on the basis of 'apartheid' – the policy of separation of the races (Gutteridge 1995) and the structural social exclusion of the black majority⁹. Both Senate and the House of Assembly excluded black and coloured people, although very limited representation was provided for coloured people¹⁰, until the Botha presidency established a tricameral parliament 1983, giving coloured people and Indians political representation subject to white veto (Benson 1986)¹¹. Needless to say apartheid era parliament was build on, and perpetuated, the extreme ethnic divisions that underpinned the state during that time. This section of the paper describes some of

⁸ Crewe utilises Luke's three faces of power, which for uninitiated readers can be summarised as follows:

1. The 'one-dimensional view', in which someone has power over someone else if they can get the other person to do something they would not otherwise do; 2. The power to determine the agenda; confining the decision-making process to relatively 'safe' issues; 3. Power to exercise influence over people's 'real' interests (which may be unconscious or undefined, for example the manipulation of party member's thought and wishes by their managers, the effect that symbolic capital has on backbench peer's self perceptions and therefore their agendas and so on).

⁹ A detailed and critical discussion of apartheid party politics is provided by Suzman (1993).

¹⁰ South African colonialism and the apartheid state used the term 'coloured' to mean mixed race.

¹¹ The apartheid era parliament appears to have been weak – for instance '*the State Security Council (SSC) often bypassed the cabinet or used it in practice as a rubber stamp*' (1995:147) Details regarding the political party make-up and machinations are provided by Gutteridge (1995)

the overarching norms found in apartheid era parliament, and pre-transition parliament. It also includes some material concerning ethnicity and politics that becomes important to parliamentary affairs during the transition and post transition period.

Corporate (1964) states that most of the traditions and customs observed by South African parliament originate in British parliament¹², although subsequently it was of course Afrikaner dominated (Gutteridge 1995). The Europeanisation of apartheid era South African parliament is also underlined by apartheid era commentators, such as Van Zyl Slabbert (1995), who explicitly discusses the way in which:

'Whites, being the dominant minority, used their position of power and privilege to create institutions which service a social, economic and political pecking order where a sense of self-importance is automatically reinforced. Many times I have gone to occasions where with great pomp and ceremony medals of merit are awarded, a boat is launched, an Honorary Doctorate is conferred, and when I look around at those assembled, I might as well be in a polite drawing room somewhere in Europe. The speeches almost invariably define a universe of discourse which is exclusively European in its references, arrogant and presumptuous, "the country is grateful"...' (1995:69)

South African parliamentary ritual and ceremony needs to be understood in the context of the ethnic identities that underpinned apartheid-era South Africa. There is a significant amount of literature available regarding Afrikaaner ethnicities and South African politics. For example, Hepple discusses Afrikaaner parties that challenged the National Party during the 1940s. These included the *Ossewa Brandwag* (Ox-Wagon Sentinal) which aimed to perpetuate 'the spirit of the ox-wagon' and foster Afrikaner patriotism by celebrating festivals etc – popular sentiment was aroused for the days of the voortrekkers which *'found expression in the wearing of beards, rough corduroys, jerkins and scarves by the men and ankle-length skirts and bonnets by the women'* (1967: 88). Hepple reports that Afrikaaner nostalgia (associated with patriotic festivals and so on) made political recruitment easy for the *Ossewa Brandwag*. The early splits in the Afrikaaner body politic manifested later when Afrikaans identity played an important role in developments running up the democratic transition in 1994. For example, when the dominant National Party split in 1982, right wing parties (mostly paramilitary) appealed to the *'chauvinist spirit of the Afrikaner volk'* (Gutteridge 1995: 162). Afrikaaner identities and rituals played out in specific ways for apartheid era parliamentarians. For instance, Van Zyl Slabbert emphasises the importance of certain Afrikaner cultural signifiers (for example a Stellenbosch University degree) in making him popular within the parliamentary arena¹³.

With the establishment of the tricameral parliament there was a rejection of the Westminster model (Suzman 1993: 238)¹⁴. Van Zyl Slabbert (1995)¹⁵ described the development of rules and rituals supporting the new system, and the establishment of a 'multiracial bonhomie', but without any real broadening of democracy. He discussed the way in which:

We were burying the last white Parliament on our own midst the familiar tinkling of our own medals and starched uniforms... 319 of us snuggled and squeezed into the old House

¹² Known as the Mother of Parliaments' (Corporate 1964: 27)

¹³ He also discusses the way in which sport (particularly rugby) was seen by Afrikaners as *'way of bringing the English in South Africa down a peg or two'* (1995:27).

¹⁴ Although according to Suzman the tricameral system retained the worst features of the Westminster model such as the high degree of centralised power

¹⁵ Van Zyl Slabbert was a vigorous opponent of the tricameral system which he saw as perpetuating divisions.

of Assembly of the old white Parliament to listen to the new State President make his first speech in the new 'non-white' Parliament. The most amusing thing for me was the obvious discomfort and disgust on the faces of the Conservative Party members and even a fair number of Nationalist MPs as well, when the Coloured and Asian MPs solemnly marched in and started taking their seats for the President's address. He read through an uninspiring speech...(1995: 123)

An understanding of Black African identities is also important in examining ritual and ceremony within South African parliament, because of the ways in which indigenous identities have been utilised and reshaped within parliament during and after transition (see below). It is impossible to do justice to the diversity of ethnic traditions which were present in apartheid era South Africa, but it is worth briefly noting that key figures such as Mandela draw on the cultural capital associated with their backgrounds in their role as activists and politicians. Mandela notes that his father was a Xhosa chief and describes the Xhosa as *'a proud and patrilineal people with an expressive and euphonious language and an abiding belief in the importance of laws, education and courtesy. Xhosa society was a balanced and harmonious social order in which every individual knew his or her place.'* (1994: 4). Similarly, Chief Buthalezi, who headed the Inkatha Freedom Party (IKP), was descended from the great Zulu king Cetyawayo (Mandela 1994: 688).



Mandela as a young man. Source: Mandela (2001)

Parliamentary space

Corporate (1964) details the origins of parliamentary space and the building process, as well as the appearance of the parliamentary buildings, including portraits of the Union Prime Ministers and so forth. There were other space-related rituals such as the ringing of the bells at a quarter past two every working day of South African Parliament (Suzman 1993).



Apartheid-era House of Assembly. Source: Corporate (1964)

There were a whole range of norms regarding space within apartheid-era parliament, including:

Immediately in front of the Speaker's Chair is the "Table" of the House at which the principle officers of the House sit ... (1964: 8-13)...The bar of the House in both Senate and in the House of Assembly is a horizontal sliding brass rod and is situated at a point beyond which persons other than members may not proceed when the House is in session...(1964:26)....members of the Government Party in the House of Assembly at present occupy the seats to the right of Mr. Speaker as well as the seats facing Mr Speaker known as the "cross-benches", while members of the Opposition parties occupy the seats to the left of Mr Speaker. Members are allocated seats in order of seniority by the Whips of the various parties. Cabinet Ministers occupy what are known as "Treasury benches". Members with the longest Parliamentary service usually occupy seats in the front rows and are known as "front benchers"...new members occupy the back rows and are known as "back benchers"...(1964: 24)

Parliamentary procedures, rituals and ceremonies

A detailed account of the rituals pertaining to the apartheid era republican parliament is provided by the parliamentary document Corporate (1964), which also provides an overview of the structures and functions of parliament at that time¹⁶. Specific norms and rituals include Bowing to the Chair, reference to other members via the Chair, procedures regarding Maiden Speeches, referring to the other house as 'another place'¹⁷ and restrictions on visitors (for example visitors remaining silent at all times).

¹⁶ Suzman's 1993 biography also provides quite a bit of material.

¹⁷ Corporation (1962) states that this commemorates the ill-feeling that existed between the House of Lords and the House of commons in Great Britain in antiquity.

Corporate (1964) describes rituals regarding roles and procedure, which included the following¹⁸:

'Parliament is formally opened each year by the State president on which occasion he (sic) delivers an opening address in the Senate Chamber to the members of the Senate and the House of Assembly...He [The speaker] decides the order in which members speak in debate, gives rulings on points of order and maintains order during debate...(1962: 8-13)...the Opposition plays a very important part in Parliament. Its functions are to criticize the Government, debate and analyse legislative proposals...(1962: 15)..before a bill becomes law it has to pass through certain recognised stages in the House of Assembly and the Senate' (1964:15)

Ceremonies and rituals that have a pseudo-sacred nature were very present within apartheid-era parliament, including for instance:

'At the commencement of every sitting of the House of Assembly, Mr [sic] Speaker reads the Prayer (1962:17) ..Almighty God, Who in Thy infinite wisdom and providential goodness, hast appointed the offices of Rulers and Parliaments for the Welfare of society and just government of men (sic)...' (1964: 26)

Norms regarding interaction

During apartheid era parliament there were rigid conventions regarding language – as Hibbert notes, before the ANC came into power, all recording, transcribing and editing of Hansard records was done in 'standard' types of English and Afrikaans (2003: 107) Parliamentarians of the apartheid era are quite forthcoming in their descriptions of the parliamentary debates (which can be seen as a key aspect of parliamentary ritual). Vivid accounts are provided, in particular, by opposition MPs Suzman (1993) and Van Zyl Slabbert (1995).¹⁹ For example:

'The irrepressible Harry Lawrence, the other great supporters of the liberal backbench both in and out of Parliament, had frequent sharp exchanges with Speaker Conradies (a highly irritable gent) which often resulted in his expulsion from the House, to the accompaniment of loud guffaws from Harry' Suzman 1993: 23)

'an able debater who can combine melodrama and demagoguery with devastating effect. Managed to load a private phone call of Eglin's to Don McHenry with such sinister significance that you could have sworn Eglin was up for high treason...' (Van Zyl Slabbert, 1995: 62, of Pik Botha)

'Few things can be more embarrassing to watch than Cabinet Ministers, as well as the State President, squirming and kicking for touch on straightforward constitutional questions...I must conclude that these public demonstrations of obscurity serve some purpose in the Government's constitutional approach (Van Zyl Slabbert, 1995: 164, of the tricameral parliamentary system)

Other aspects, including dress and symbols

¹⁸ The gendered nature of the apartheid era parliament is indicated by the masculine pronouns etc.

¹⁹ Slabbert also provides an entertainingly disparaging account as follows: *'I definitely did not want to spend the rest of my productive days in the South African Parliament. There cannot be many institutions that steal time so quietly and unobtrusively; that can drag you into a rhythm that has a sense of boring necessity; imposes a feeling of mindless obligation and keeps alive an indefinable but compelling esprit de corps towards your colleagues, both likeable and unlikeable. Half the year is gone in a flash. The rest is spent recovering and trying to catch up before you start again' (1995:53)*

There appears to be a gap in the literature regarding certain other aspects of South African parliamentary ritual and ceremony. For example, there is little written analysis of parliamentary dress forms, although some photographic records are available.



Mr C. R. Swart, The first State President of South Africa. Source: Corporate (1964)



Helen Suzman and the Speaker. Source: Suzman (1993)

There is some discussion of dress and other symbolic forms outside of parliament, which are pertinent because they reappear within parliament during the transition and post-transition period. For instance, Klopper (1996) provides an incisive account of the historical construction of 'Zulu' cultural symbols, including dress, buildings, flags, songs and so on. This includes the unveiling of the Shaka²⁰ memorial in 1954, with its pan-Africanist and separatist connotations, which set the stage for Buthelezi's attempts to control the meanings ascribed to certain 'Zulu' cultural symbols, and the reinvention of indigenous forms of dress. Klopper argues that Buthelezi's appeals for Zulu ethnic solidarity are based on a 'fictive idea of a common history'²¹ (as '*rural traditionalists who take pride in acquiring the kind of skin garments commonly worn on ceremonial occasions before the destruction of the Zulu kingdom*' (1996: 55).

Overall, therefore, there is a fair amount of material (most of it non-academic) available regarding the rituals and ceremonies of apartheid-era South African parliament. This is not the case for contemporary parliament, as I will demonstrate in the next section.

South African parliamentary ritual and ceremony – transitional and post transition

There is a growing body of literature concerning the new South African parliament (for instance Calland 1999, Murray and Nijzink 2002) and a related literature that focuses on the gendered aspects of this parliament (for instance Hassim 2006 and Waylen 2007a). However, this literature foregrounds issues of structure and representation, and there is a gap in the literature concerning the softer, cultural aspects of parliament (such as ritual and ceremony) that is only addressed in any depth by a handful of scholars, such as Britton (2005) and (in relation to language) Hibbert (2003).

This section of the paper aims to describe the literature that is available concerning ritual and ceremony in the new parliament (broken down into sections regarding overarching framework and norms, transition-specific ceremonies, parliamentary space, parliamentary procedures, rituals and ceremonies, and other aspects of parliamentary ceremony and ritual). The transition is described in detail by Mandela, who discusses the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), which provided the first formal forum for negotiations from December 1991 (1994).

²⁰ The Zulu kingdom's first ruler, Shaka kaSenzangakhona who became a crucial figure in the struggle against colonialism, not just in South Africa but across Africa (Klopper 1996: 57)

²¹ The Zulu kingdom was geographically smaller than the present Kwa-Zulu Natal

The section does not attempt to provide any analysis of the 1994 or subsequent elections, or of contemporary political issues, as space limitations are prohibitive.

Overarching norms and the transition to democracy

The South African transition to democracy was a pacted one, and as Marks notes, *'The ANC did not win in armed struggle, and much of the old state was left intact by the negotiated settlement, which envisaged power-sharing for five years (in the event this only lasted two years) and the continuation of the existing civil service'* (1998: 24). Ten new legislatures *'were designed as the centrepieces of South Africa's new system of representative democracy'*²² (Murray and Nijzink 2002: 1), and a new bicameral national parliament was created, with the National Council of Provinces replacing the old Senate. With the transition to democracy the Westminster model of parliament was reinstituted, although the new constitution envisaged a stronger role for the new legislatures than that of their Westminster counterparts (Murray and Nijzink 2002: 2).

The transition to democracy can be interpreted as a set of ceremonies of an extraordinary type, as is demonstrated by the following quote:

'the ceremony [The inauguration of Mandela as president and Mbeki and De Klerk as Vice-presidents] took place in the lovely sandstone amphitheatre formed by the Union Buildings in Pretoria. For decades this had been the seat of white supremacy, and now it was the site of a rainbow gathering of different colours and nations...I pledged to obey and uphold the constitution and to devote myself to the well-being of the republic and its people...a few moments later we all lifted our eyes in awe as a spectacular array of south African jets, helicopters and troop carriers roared in perfect formation over the Union buildings...Finally a chevron of Impala jets left a smoke trail of the black, red, green, blue and gold of the new South African flag. The day was symbolised for me by the playing of our two national anthems, and the vision of whites singing "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" and the blacks singing "Die Stem", the old anthem of the republic' (Mandela 1994: 747)

The influence of British parliament on recent and contemporary key parliamentarians is evident in the literature. For instance, Mandela stated that *'I regard the British parliament as the most democratic institution in the world'* (Crwys-Williams 1998: unpaginated)²³. Chothia and Jacobs state that *'We particularly point to parallels between the institutional restructuring surrounding the Mbeki presidency and those surrounding Tony Blair's prime ministership in the United Kingdom, which has served as a model for Mbeki's advisers'* (2002:146). Mbeki secretly sent his brother to observe the British Cabinet in 1998 – something that key officials in South Africa were very critical of (Hadland and Rantao 1999: 120). According to Chothia and Jacobs, Mbeki modelled his presidency on Blair's office as well as embracing the 'third way' (2002: 154).

The role of indigenous traditions, customs and ritual to South African politics is evident in literature regarding the democratic transition and subsequent developments. For instance, Hadland and Rantao provide an account of Mbeki's visit home Mbeki over Christmas 1998, and the event was celebrated in traditional African way (sic) – two bulls were slaughtered, locals sang and danced, the school supplied tables and chairs, a makeshift kraal was put up and:

²² The National Assembly and 9 Provincial legislatures, headed by the National Council of the Provinces.

²³ Although the importance of other states is also highlighted in Mandela's writing, for instance he states that *'I have enormous respect for the nations of Norway and Sweden'* (due to their apartheid era support for the ANC) (1994: 734).

‘..here, Thabo took his rightful place among the Mazizi clan. For his tribesmen and those who gathered to be with him and his family, there is nothing enigmatic about Thabo. He is their kin and their son, Son. For him they dance the traditional dance (Ukuxhentsa) , they shared a special piece of meat for piece for clan members only (Ushwama) and they washed it all down with African beer, brewed meticulously and proudly by the women (sic) of Ncingwana (Hadland and Rantao: 133).

The importance of Zulu ethnicities is quite apparent in the literature, and these have played out in particular ways within parliament. Although it is not possible to properly review Zulu politics here, it is worth pointing out that Marks (1998:24) describes the ways in which in Natal and Zululand chiefs retained power longer than elsewhere in South Africa, with continued control of access to land in rural areas. Despite the power of the Inkath Freedom Party (IFP), the ANC has successfully attempted to co-opted its support on a symbolic level²⁴. The ANC forged links with the Zulu kingship (which provides a potent focus for rural Zulu speaker’s loyalties) (Klopper 1996), and made several efforts to challenge the IFP’s attempts to control Zulu cultural capital, for example in 1993 the ANC organised a successful *Sonke* festival marking the 165th anniversary of king Shaka’s death.



The inauguration of Nelson Mandela. Source: Sparks (2003)

Parliamentary space

²⁴ In electoral terms, Buthelezi’s IFP agreed to participate in the first democratic election just before the event, following repeated efforts by local and international negotiators to secure his commitment to the process (Klopper 1996: 56).

The new South African parliament has utilised existing spaces, but there has been substantial reorganisation within these. Nijzink, in an informal discussion²⁵, described the Africanisation of parliament, including the development of the new emblem and the reorganisation of space within parliament. The NCOP has been designed with seating arrangements in a half-round with nine sets of benches to represent the provinces. The green room in the House of Assembly is now used by the ANC as a caucus room and the Chamber itself has been Africanised, with new carpets and seating again in a half-round²⁶.



House of the National Assembly. Source: Parliamentary website

²⁵ April 2008, Warwick University.

²⁶ Nijzink expressed scepticism regarding the extent to which symbolic changes manifest in real terms.



Inside the National Assembly. Source: Parliamentary website.

It is important to note that there have been controversies concerning the cultural reclamation of parliamentary space, for instance during the 1999 plans to drape statues outside the Union buildings that were connected with colonialism or apartheid were contested (Coombes 2003).

Parliamentary procedures, rituals and ceremonies

Changes to parliamentary rules (which can be seen as an aspect of ritual) were, as indicated above, instituted by the new government. Calland (1999) provides a description of the changes made to the Standing Rules for the Constitutional Assembly (transitional) and the National Assembly (which were revised versions of rules found in the previous parliament, made in the 1994-7 period) and the preliminary rules for the NCOP and subsequent Joint Rules (adopted in 1997). Some ceremonies have been adapted, for example the opening of parliament:



Ussher of the Black Rod in the opening ceremony (parliamentary website)

Norms regarding interaction

The changes to language within parliament are addressed in detail by Hibbert²⁷ who argues that the language of South African parliamentarians changed dramatically after the transition to democracy: *'Speeches and debates were no longer restricted to conservative varieties of English and Afrikaans, but were permitted in any one of the country's eleven official languages, nine of which are indigenous African languages'* (2003: 103). Although English has become the dominant language, the most prevalent version of English used in parliament is now Black South African English (BSAfE) which developed over several decades within the black South African communities. The transformation is evident in post-transition changes to the Hansard process, when the Hansard Unit included African language speakers, and a new transcribing and editing policy was brought in which did not permit reporters to alter the original words or style of the speaker:

'Just as we relaxed the dress code, we should also not force MPs into verbal suits and ties, or gloves and hats, which would be out of character. Hansard should reflect the full character of our debates, with the full range of South African idiom, and languages' (Ginwala 1996, cited in Hibbert 2003: 104)²⁸.

The literature indicates that aspects of pre-transition parliamentary norms were carried over into the new parliament, but with adaptations. For instance, in relation to language, Mbeki demonstrates the way in which all comments and questions made in plenary sessions are preceded by addressing 'Madame Speaker', and MPs are described as 'Honourable Members' (2004).

Other aspects, including dress and symbols

²⁷ Who conducted case study research in South African parliament Hansard reports

²⁸ Nizjink (as above) described the way in which parliament attempts to provide translations of Hansard on request, but that this is difficult due to resource constraints. She also described instances when African language has been used to make a point, for example discussion in Zulu at the beginning of an NCOP plenary.

The literature provides plenty of photos illustrating the adoption of dress forms that originated in the West by parliamentarians (and by senior ANC members prior to transition). There are also examples of Africanisation of dress within Parliament (see above), of hybrid dress forms.



Signing the constitution. Source: Mandela (2001)



'I am an African' President Mbeki, Lemon, The Star in Hadland and Rantao (1999)

Informal discussion with Nijzink²⁹ indicates that there has been substantial effort within the new South African parliament to transform the symbols and rituals of parliament. This assertion is substantiated by a cursory analysis of the website, which devotes a considerable amount of space to symbolism, including the new emblem. The new emblem, which was chosen after an open competition, has been chosen to represent 'Our South Africa' (represented by the sun), 'Our people' (represented by protea leaves), 'Our parliament' (represented by the drum, protea and triangles) and 'Our constitution' (The book). However, there does not appear to be much coverage of contemporary parliamentary symbolism in the academic literature.

Conclusion

Overall, therefore, whilst there is a need for further interrogation of the literature, it appears that there is a substantial dearth of research concerning ceremony and ritual within South African parliament. Although it is not possible to provide firm evidence of the importance of norms, ceremony and ritual to the ways in which parliamentary affairs are conducted in South Africa, this initial working paper has mapped out some of the territory. It is clear that battles concerning the cultural ownership of important symbols have taken (and are taking) place in South African parliament and party politics. Also evident are the substantial efforts that actors within the new South African parliament have made to reinvent the symbols, rituals and ceremonies of the apartheid-era regime, particularly in areas such as the use of space, dress, and language. It therefore appears that ceremony and ritual are important to the identity of South African parliament. One particularly interesting aspect of South African parliamentary ritual and ceremony concerns the hybridisation that appears to be taking place regarding dress, key symbols and space, as well as, to a degree, language. Further research will focus on revealing more about the norms, rituals and ceremonies found within parliament, and in particular the ways in which these relate to political processes and outcomes, as well as the ways in which 'race', ethnicity and gender are demonstrated and shaped by these facets of the institution of parliament.

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²⁹ May 2008, University of Warwick

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