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## ‘Symbolising the Rainbow: Glimpses of South African Parliament’

Working Paper: Surya Monro May 2008. Presented at Eighth Workshop of Parliamentary Scholars and Parliamentarians, 26-27 July, 2008, Wroxton College, Wroxton UK.

*‘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-toying<sup>1</sup> 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)*

*‘Fourteen years into "democratic" South Africa the Rainbow Nation is unravelling. We're back where we were in the 1980s, with people being "necklaced" (car tyres put around their neck and set alight), and the army is back in the townships. Where is Mandela's republic?’<sup>2</sup>*

Ritual and ceremony may seem like strange fodder for political scientists, who are more usually concerned with issues of representation and accountability. This is especially the case when, at the time of writing this paper, a wave of xenophobic violence has broken out across South Africa. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7417590.stm>). 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 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,<sup>3</sup> Brazier et al 2005, Cowley 2005). As Crewe and Muller state, ‘*Rituals, symbols, and relationships have been relatively ignored*’ (2006: 7)<sup>4</sup>. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> A form of dance associated with the resistance movement.

<sup>2</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking\\_point/7409315.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/7409315.stm) (last visited 27.05.08)

<sup>3</sup> Although Rogers and Walters does provide a useful description of language and custom within Westminster parliament.

<sup>4</sup> And, parliaments have tended not to be of central interest to political sociologists – see Crewe and Muller (2006:8).

The ethnocentrism of parliamentary studies overall is countered to a degree by contributions such as Rai's (1997) scholarship on women in Indian parliament, Puwar's (2004) work concerning gender and race in parliaments, Mbebe (2001)'s analysis of state ceremonialism and power in Africa, and Murray's (2005), Bauer and Britton's (2006), Hassim's (2006) and Waylen's (2007a,b) scholarship on women in African parliaments. Some additions to the literature concerning women and South African politics include discussion of parliamentary cultures, norms and rituals (see in particular Britton 2005).

There is of course a larger contemporary literature on South African politics generally, which can be divided into political analysis (for instance Gutteridge 1995, Toase and Yorke 1998, Jacobs and Calland 2002, Murray and Nijzink 2002), and journalistic and popular coverage (for example Sparks 2003). There are also a substantial number of biographies and autobiographies, by (or about) key parliamentarians, including those by Benson (1986), Breytenbach (1999), Du Preez Bezdob (2005), Gilbey (1994), Govender (2005), Hadland and Rantao (1999), Mandela (1994, 2001), Mbeki (2004), Suzman (1993), and Van Zyl Slabbert (1985). Another strand of literature concerns South African parliament itself; dating back to apartheid era pieces such as Stultz (1975), followed by more recent contributions such as Calland (1999). Lastly, there is a small amount of literature regarding the visual or linguistic aspects of South African politics, including Coombes (2003) and Hibbert (2003).

Although a comprehensive discussion of South African anthropologies is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth briefly mentioning the development of this field. Ceremony and ritual formed staple fare for early anthropologists working in Africa, for example Gluckman, who conducted research in Zululand between 1936 and 1938. Gluckman detailed ceremonies and ritual including for example *'the speeches and comments, the taking of tea – always drawing attention to the social allegiances of the actors, from the white magistrate and his entourage, to the chief and his followers, even the anthropologist himself'* (Kuper 1973: 138, see also Gluckman 1952). Subsequently, Sharp (1980) describes sharp divisions between Afrikaans University based cultural anthropologies which refused to move beyond Malinowskian anthropological approaches – and which served as academic justification for white domination in South Africa, and English-speaking approaches which engaged critically with more recent developments including structuralism and Marxism. Klopper (1996) provides an example of the latter, in an analysis of the power struggle concerning Zulu cultural symbols.

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. It then briefly discusses the influence that ceremony and ritual in informal spaces adjacent to parliament has had on parliamentary affairs. I will then provide an historical overview of the development of parliamentary ritual and ceremony within South Africa. The paper addresses some aspects of South African ethnicities in relation to parliament, as ethnic elements – and the processes of hybridisation and identity contestation that are currently taking place – are key themes in South African politics. I then conclude with tentative thoughts concerning the assimilation/transformation dialectic outlined above.

The paper draws substantially on autobiographical and biographical accounts, given a wish to adopt a standpoint methodology (Hartsock 1983, Harding 1987). Standpoint methodologies are also in keeping with the approaches suggested by authors in the field of parliamentary anthropology. Crewe and Muller argue for the adoption of an empirical, interpretive approach (2006:13) and Abeles who states that anthropologists *'focus on the point of view of*

*the actors'* (2006:19). In keeping with feminist standpoint methodologies, I identify myself as a female of white European origin and British nationality<sup>5</sup>.

### **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). Ceremony and ritual also fall under the umbrella term 'culture', the classic definition of which is provided by Tylor in 1871: '*Culture...taken in its wide ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [sic] as a member of society*' (Tylor 1958:1, cited in Peacock 1986: 3).

Lukes (1977: 54) provides a useful definition of ritual<sup>6</sup>, 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)

One important aspect of attempts to define ritual and ceremony within parliament concerns the religious, or supposedly sacred nature of some state ceremonies and rituals<sup>7</sup>. Crewe provides a cross-cultural analysis of 'holiness' within five parliaments, defining religion as a 'belief system' that '*does not necessitate the acknowledgement of a higher being*' (2006:185). Like the secularist French parliamentarians whom Crewe interviewed (2006:184), I rather balk at the association of sacredness with what for me are political processes. However, the ways in which parliamentary rituals are constructed with inbuilt appeals to 'the sacred' would certainly make for interesting analysis.

Crewe and Muller review functionalist interpretations of ritual within parliaments, in which rituals can be seen to affirm social solidarity, consolidate the position of elites, express rebellion (2006:11-12) or create shared common understandings (Muller 2006:183). Mbebe's (2001) analysis of state ceremonialism in Africa similarly addresses ceremonies as a means of demonstrating political authority. Another functionalist approach is demonstrated by Klopper, who takes the '*assumption that political groupings generally communicate important ideas about their perceptions of themselves through their use of cultural symbols*' (1996: 53).

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<sup>5</sup> Postmodern and post-colonial anthropologies also reject claims concerning the objective representations of the 'Other' (Kuper 1973).

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

<sup>7</sup> See also Muller (2006).

However, Crewe and Muller critique functionalist and rational choice interpretations of ritual, arguing that functionalism involves reductionist, post-hoc analysis, and that that unconscious motivations may play a role in ritual<sup>8</sup>. Authors such as Abeles (2006) also problematise functionalist interpretations; Abeles demonstrates a semiotic struggle within the French National Assembly that he interpreted as lacking instrumentalist purpose. Crewe and Muller point to the complex causative factors underpinning ritual, and the contested and situated nature of ritual within parliament. Whilst acknowledging the role that ritual and ceremony may serve within parliament, my position will be one of attention to these complex and contested processes of meaning construction.

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 piece<sup>9</sup>. 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 suggest that rituals both convey a sense of egalitarianism and mask the limitations to backbenchers' ability to exercise power, as proceedings are in fact substantially controlled via informal channels and the executive. 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).

The literature reveals, overall, a research gap concerning South African parliamentary ceremony and ritual, and the links between the soft, or cultural aspects of parliament and the operation of power, including the ways in which actors are assimilated into the institution of parliament and the ways in which assimilation is resisted or challenged. Political anthropologists have, as demonstrated above, provided accounts of a number of legislatures, but no such account exists regarding the South African legislature. The following sections of the paper provide the groundwork for redressing this gap, firstly by tracing the historical development of parliamentary ritual in South Africa, and then by beginning to look the cultural aspects of parliamentary structures and processes. The paper is divided into apartheid era and transitional/post transition sections.

### **Ritual outside of parliamentary space**

The importance of culture, ritual and ceremony adjacent to formal parliamentary spaces seems quite evident in the South African apartheid-era (and transitional) literature. Interestingly, informal discussion with Nijzink (May 2008) suggests that informality is now a feature of the new South African parliament, so it is worth examining the history of informal parliamentary practice, almost as a caveat to the following description of ceremony and ritual within parliament.

During the apartheid era, informality was demonstrated in terms of the workings of parliament itself. For example, Suzman's commented on the influence that key parliamentarians had behind the scenes (1993: 23), and Van Zyl Slabbert's (1995: 66) described the role of informal discussions during tea break. Suzman also relates the ways in which she was excluded from informal space due to her political stance, for example: *'Those*

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<sup>8</sup> Crewe and Muller note that these are hard to unravel.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

*turbulent years were very lonely. I did not once have a meal in the member's private dining room. Meals there tended to become informal caucus meetings, as, by custom, Members sat at tables with their party colleagues'* (1993: 113)

The informal negotiations which took place between the National Party and apartheid state representatives, and ANC representatives for some years prior to formal negotiations also took place firmly outside of the public sphere. Hadland and Rantao discussed the way in which over a dozen talks took place at hidden locations between 1987 and 1990, in which *'The meetings were left very unstructured and delegates were encouraged in the afternoons to stroll around the gardens and woods of the isolated estate, eat dinner together, then sit around the fire in the study drinking Glenfiddich whisky and talking into the early hours'* (1999: 59). These meetings had a particular flavour in terms of culture and norms; it seems from the literature that they rested on an appeal not only to a common humanity but to a particular type of masculine, Europeanised and internationalised humanity. For instance:

*'In late 1984 and early 1985 I had visits from two prominent Western statesmen including Lord Nicholas Bethell, a member of the British House of Lords and the European parliament – these were authorised by the new minister of justice of the government. I met Lord Bethel in the prison commander's office, which was dominated by a large photograph of a glowering President Botha. Bethel was a jovial, rotund man and when I first met him, I teased him about his stoutness. 'You look as though you are related to Winston Churchill,' I said as we shook hands, and he laughed'. (Mandela, 1994: 619)*

*'"I never had any problems with Thabo. He was soft-spoken, well-mannered and very sophisticated. He had been all over the world and had an excellent education. We found him very easy to speak to," recalls Louw. During that first meeting, Louw couldn't resist the opportunity of throwing in a few lines of poetry from "The Second Coming" by WB Yeats....Thabo, to Louw's amazement, completed the verse. ....As well as a love of poetry and a conviction that peaceful negotiation was the only route to peace, Louw discovered that Thabo had a special penchant for his own favourite liquor: whisky (Hadland and Rantao 1999: 65)*

The theme of ceremony and ritual in the informal spaces connected to parliament, and of informality more widely within parliament, may be one of interest in future research concerning ceremony and ritual in parliament. Research concerning gendered ritual and ceremony in South African parliament could usefully probe issues of informality, and the ways in which informal spaces within, and connected to, parliament may be gendered. Informality may be more permeable to marginalised groups, or less so. Accountability and transparency can be more easily fudged in informal spaces; power may be wielded in ways that are less connected to constitutional dictates, and some groups (such as women, who may be more subject to domestic demands) may find it harder to engage in informal spaces (see for instance Britton 2005).

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

There is, perhaps, a danger associated with tracing the genealogy of ceremony and ritual in South African parliament, given the central role that this institution played in the oppression of non-white South Africans over a lengthy period prior to the 1994 elections. A focus on traditions could reify parliamentary institutions. And, focusing on ceremony and ritual in contemporary South African parliament could perhaps contribute to a failure to deal with the elephant on the table – the impact that the vast material inequalities in contemporary South Africa are having in relation to community cohesion and democracy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Impressions gained from much of the contemporary literature.

The intention of this section is not to normalise oppressive state institutional forms, but rather to provide historical contextualisation for the current parliament. The section also seeks to describe 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.

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. 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 majority<sup>11</sup>. Both Senate and the House of Assembly excluded black and coloured people, although very limited representation was provided for coloured people<sup>12</sup>.

In 1961 the Constitution was altered from a monarchical to a republican one (Marquand 1962). The parliament had been bicameral, with a Senate and a House of Assembly, since its founding (Stulz 1975). However, the Botha presidency established a tricameral parliament in the 1980s, giving coloured people and Indians political representation subject to white veto (Benson 1986). 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)<sup>13</sup>.

A detailed account of the rituals and norms 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 time<sup>14</sup>. 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’<sup>15</sup> and restrictions on visitors (for example visitors remaining silent at all times).

Corporate (1964) describes rituals regarding roles and procedure, which included the following<sup>16</sup>:

*‘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)*

Certain ceremonial objects are discussed in Corporate (1964), including the mace and the Staff of the Office of the Senate, which is depicted as the symbol of the authority of the president, and which replaced the Black Rod in 1962.

*The mace, regarded as the traditional symbol of authority of Mr (sic) Speaker, always rests on the Table of the House when Mr Speaker is in the Chair...The heraldic devices used in the decoration of this mace are derived from the coat-of-arms of the*

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<sup>11</sup> A detailed and critical discussion of apartheid party politics is provided by Suzman (1993).

<sup>12</sup> South African colonialism and the apartheid state used the term ‘coloured’ to mean mixed race.

<sup>13</sup> Details regarding the political party make-up and machinations are provided by Gutteridge (1995)

<sup>14</sup> Suzman’s 1993 biography also provides quite a bit of material.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> The gendered nature of the apartheid era parliament is indicated by the masculine pronouns etc.

*Republic and those of the four provinces. The only flower in the coat of arms, the protea, is used in various motifs on the staff of the mace, A number of important events in the history of our country are also symbolised, e.g. the historical settlement at the Cape in 1652, the arrival of the 1820 settlers and the Great Trek in 1836...*

*'The Staff...is of ebony with a head-piece, central piece and base fashioned from moulded pieces of gold, and is 4 ft. 9 in. long. The head-piece consists of the crest of the coat-of-arms of the Republic, viz, the South African heraldic lion, one paw supporting four staves on a wreath of the colours with the motto of the Republic, "Ex unitate vires", below...(1964: 25)*

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)*

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). And, there were 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) Lastly, there were a whole range of rituals and norms regarding space within 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)*

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).<sup>17</sup> 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 Conradie (a highly irritable gent) which often resulted in his expulsion from the House, to the accompaniment of loud guffaws from Harry' Suzman 1993: 23)*

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<sup>17</sup> 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)*



*'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)

There were some changes to the culture and rituals of parliament after the introduction of the tricameral system. Van Zyl Slabbert (1995)<sup>18</sup> 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 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)

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 Govender 2005, 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). There is relevant material in the biographical and autobiographical literature, however (for instance Mandela 1994), and presidential speeches can be analysed for content relating to ritual and ceremony<sup>19</sup>.

This section of the paper aims to provide a snapshot of the changes to parliament that have taken place with the transition to democracy (and afterwards), before describing the material that is available concerning ritual and ceremony in the new parliament. 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). He also provides detail concerning the preparation of the new constitution and structures, which I will briefly address below. The section does not attempt to provide any analysis of the 1994 or subsequent elections, or the party politics surrounding them (in particular the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party -see for instance Jackson 1998 and recent party political developments see Mandela 1994, Jackson 1998, and Murray and Nijzink 2002) as space limitations are prohibitive.

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<sup>18</sup> Van Zyl Slabbert was a vigorous opponent of the tricameral system which he saw as perpetuating divisions.

<sup>19</sup> Although I will not do this here, due to space constraints

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). For the 1994 election, a system of proportional representation based on party lists was established (Murray and Nijzink 2002: 19). The ANC won almost 70% of the vote, winning in all 9 Provinces, with an absence of viable opposition. This landslide victory was followed by an enormous investment in new legislation, policy and institutions.

Calland (1999) documents the new parliamentary structures, describing the way in which during the May 1994-May 1996 period Constitutional Assembly<sup>20</sup> work took precedence over normal parliamentary work (1999: 10 (see also Chothia and Jacobs 2002)). Ten new legislatures *'were designed as the centrepieces of South Africa's new system of representative democracy'*<sup>21</sup> (Murray and Nijzink 2002: 1), and a new bicameral national parliament was created, with the National Council of Provinces replacing the old Senate. According to Calland (1999) the most important institutional change within parliament was the massively increased role of the committees – which were described by Calland as *'the engine room of Parliament'* (1999: 10). Murray and Nijzink provide a detailed description of the plenary and committee structure of the new South African parliament, noting that the South African legislature delegates responsibility to its committees, but keeps decision making in the plenary (where all members make decisions on legislation) (2002:59).<sup>22</sup> The government was restructured again by Mbeki after his election in 1999. Mbeki reorganised the presidency (which had previously had a president and 2 deputy presidents) into one presidency, reorganised the Cabinet (Pahad and Esterhuyse 2004: 10) and combined various areas including the Office for the Status of Women into a consolidated deputy presidential administration (Hadland and Rantao 1999: 96).

Goetz describe the ways in which women's caucuses worked across party lines in the run up to the transition and afterwards, establishing effective standing committees (2003: 64). A joint committee of the two Houses of the national Parliament was established in 1998 to monitor improvements regarding the quality of life and status of women and female politicians have established women's caucuses which are intended to lobby as women's groups, with variations in strength and effectiveness (Murray and Nijzink 2002: 21) (see Hassim 2006, Waylen 2007a for more detail of the new state machinery supporting women's equality).

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

*2 May 1994 FW Klerk conceded victory to Nelson Mandela and the ANC. 'After so many centuries,' he said, 'we will finally have a government which represents all South Africans.' ....At a victory celebration in Johannesburg Mandela thanked those who had worked so hard.... Mandela urged South Africans 'to join together to celebrate the birth of democracy'. At a minute after midnight on 4 May crowds in the nine new provincial capitals did just that. Cheering the raising of the new flag which boldly combined the ANC colours of black for the people, green for the land and yellow for the gold with red, white and blue. .. parliament had once consisted almost entirely of dour, ageing dark-suited white men, and Nationalist governments resembled a herd of bulls challenged by the tough and witty Helen Suzman, waving a red cape of devastating truths. For years Mrs Suzman was the sole woman MP but now, at the swearing in of MPs, the assembly was transformed, not only by the*

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<sup>20</sup> The New Constitution came into effect in 1997 (Calland 1999)

<sup>21</sup> The National Assembly and 9 Provincial legislatures, headed by the National Council of the Provinces.

<sup>22</sup> As in Britain

*preponderance of black faces but by the presence of 106 women in a striking assortment of garments and colours – from gorgeous saris and exotic tribal attire to outfits straight from Dynasty. Under the negotiated settlement parliament represented ‘national unity’ and all parties unanimously supported Frene Ginwala, who had been among the AN C’s ablest representatives abroad, as Speaker...’ (Hadland and Rantao 1999: 242-243).*

*‘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)*

Post-transition, there does not appear to be much literature available regarding ritual and ceremony in South African parliament. Changes to parliamentary rules (which can be seen as an aspect of ritual) were, as indicated above, instituted by the new government. For instance, 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). Fundamental changes were also made to parliamentary space and procedures for inclusion, including making the committees open to the public and press (Calland 1999: 29).

The changes to language within parliament are addressed in detail by Hibbert<sup>23</sup> 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)<sup>24</sup>.*

The literature indicates that aspects of pre-transition parliamentary ritual were carried over into the new parliament, but with adaptations. For instance, in relation to language, Mbeki

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<sup>23</sup> Who conducted case study research in South African parliament Hansard reports

<sup>24</sup> 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.

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).

Informal discussion with Nijzink<sup>25</sup> indicates that there has been substantial effort within the new South African parliament to transform the symbols and rituals of parliament. Nijzink 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-round<sup>26</sup>.

Overall, therefore, whilst there is a need for further interrogation of the literature (my search was not exhaustive), it appears that there is a research gap concerning ceremony and ritual within South African parliament.

### **The ethnic aspects**

Needless to say apartheid era parliament was build on, and perpetuated, the extreme ethnic divisions that underpinned the state during that time. The ethnicisation of apartheid era parliamentary norms and rituals will already be evident from the description provided above<sup>27</sup>. And, ethnic conflict, for example between the Inkatha Freedom Party and the ANC in the late 1980s (Tutu 1997), and currently between South African blacks and African immigrants<sup>28</sup> continues to be a major feature of South African politics. This section seeks to unpack this ethnicisation a little further in relation to the way ethnicity plays out in parliament, with a focus on ritual and ceremony.<sup>29</sup> It addresses, firstly, the influence of British parliament on South African parliament, before exploring some aspects of Afrikaaner and indigenous African ethnicities. The section does not attempt to address the issues of immigration that have been foregrounded by recent events in any depth.

Corporate (1964) states that most of the traditions and customs observed by South African parliament originate in British parliament<sup>30</sup>, although subsequently it was of course Afrikaaner dominated (Gutteridge 1995). The Europeanisation of apartheid era South African parliament is also underlined by apartheid era commentators, such as Zyl Van 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)

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<sup>25</sup> May 2008, University of Warwick

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

<sup>27</sup> Although, interestingly, there was already some Africanisation of symbols taking place, for instance the incorporation of the protea on the mace.

<sup>28</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7153378.stm> last visited 10.02.08.

<sup>29</sup> Of course, ‘necklace’ killings and the shooting of random innocent citizens can also be seen as forms of ritual, but I will not deal with these here.

<sup>30</sup> Known as the Mother of Parliaments’ (Corporate 1964: 27)

With the establishment of the tricameral parliament in 1983 there was a rejection of the Westminster model (Suzman 1993: 238)<sup>31</sup>, but with the transition to democracy the Westminster model was reinstated, although the new constitution envisaged a stronger role for the new legislatures than that of their Westminster counterparts (Murray and Nijzink 2002: 2). Murray and Nijzink critique the Westminster model and also argue that there is a negative legacy associated with the Western European associations with parliament, regarding perceptions of the decline of parliament: *'the persistence of this Western European notion of decline is reflected in the never-ending lamentations all around the world about the negative effects of party discipline within parliaments. Parties seem to be widely regarded as obstacles to legislatures performing their true democratic functions...'* (Murray and Nijzink 2003: 15).

The influence of British parliament more generally 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)<sup>32</sup>. 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). Critical commentators could unpick the parallels between the current demise of the Labour's Third Way and the current crisis in South Africa – in particular the failure of both regimes to redress social and economic inequalities – further, but this is outside of the remit of this piece.

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 Afrikaaner 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, jenkins 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 to 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, Zyl Van Slabbert emphasises the importance of certain Afrikaaner cultural signifiers (for example a Stellenbosch University degree) in making him popular within the parliamentary arena<sup>33</sup>. Slabbert also describes a fallout he had with P W Botha and their reconciliation: *'...out of the blue one Wednesday evening while I was listening to the MP for Rosettenville, who invariably fails to impress with the content of his speeches, but delivers them in delightful Afrikaans, the PM leant across and said to me 'Afrikaans is a beautiful*

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<sup>31</sup> Although according to Suzman the tricameral system retained the worst features of the Westminster model such as the high degree of centralised power

<sup>32</sup> 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).

<sup>33</sup> 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).

language, is it not? I said, 'It certainly is', and for the time being peace had broken out between us' (1995: 94). This quote demonstrates the way in which – despite contestation and divergence – Afrikaans cultural symbols served as a means of unifying apartheid era parliament.

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 reviewing key themes of pertinence to the subsequent development of ritual and ceremony within parliament. Firstly, it is noticeable 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).

Secondly, the importance of indigenous traditions, customs and ritual is evident in both activist literature (such as Mphahlele 2002) and in the democratic transition and subsequent developments. For instance, Mphahlele, an APLA commander, describes Zulu custom, and his attitude towards it, as follows:

*'the family had slaughtered a beast and brewed beer for the ancestors...the roasted meat was just the first course: it was followed by cooked meat at noon. Men with blankets around their waists emerged from the hut, singing and shuffling their feet graceful... as I watched the poetry unfolding in the drought-ravaged village of Hoita, the cynical atheist in me questioned the validity of African rituals in this age. Yet another part of me affirmed them. As long as we worship the god of our conquerors, so long will the contradictions between them and us be blurred. The debate inside me raged as the song and dance filled the afternoon. After the ceremony, Zulu called me. He was back in Western dress...'* (2002: 157)

Similarly, 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:

*'..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. In 1998 the IKP established an upper house of chiefs who at that time controlled local government election rolls and made up a third of local government membership in rural areas.

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 Shaka<sup>34</sup> memorial in 1954, with its pan-Africanist and separatist connotations, which set the

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<sup>34</sup> 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)

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'<sup>35</sup> (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)) has attracted opposition not only from the ANC but from Zulu-speakers as well.

Despite the power of the IFP, the ANC has successfully attempted to co-opted its support on a symbolic level<sup>36</sup>. 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 IKP's attempts to control Zulu cultural capital, for example in 1993 the ANC organised a successful *Sonke* festival marking the 165<sup>th</sup> anniversary of king Shaka's death.

Research on ceremony and ritual in South African parliament will necessarily address issues of ethnicity, although the focus may now – to an extent – have shifted away from concerns with black and white ethnicities towards a focus on South African and African immigrant ones. Debates concerning ethnicity continue to play out within parliament. 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). Also, Mbeki's notion of Africanism<sup>37</sup> is interpreted in various ways by different commentators (see Hadland and Rantao (1999)). The notion of Africanism is clearly quite problematic, given the South African populist shift towards xenophobia against other Africans.

Ethnicity in relation to gender will form a key theme for the research. Goetz and Hassim (2003:6) discuss the way in which womens' rights tend to run counter to traditional patriarchal authorities (for example land rights claims which disrupt tribe-based ownership patterns). With regards to individual politicians, Zuma provides a good discussion point. When (as ANC vice president) he was charged and then acquitted of rape, he took a line of defence that drew on notions of ethnicity – stating to the press that that he knew she wanted to have sex with him because she was wearing a short traditional wrap-around, and that it was against his Zulu culture to turn down a woman.<sup>38</sup>

Overall, ethnicity forms a complicated set of patterns in relation to gender and ceremony in South African parliament. As Coombes states:

*'the political and social legacies left by the complex layering of histories of colonization, settler colonization, totalitarianism, and organized resistance movements (both Boer and black) combine to produce a context where the effects of each of these historical conditions jostle against one another to produce significant tensions during periods of reconstruction'* (2003: 7).

### **Co-option and change**

As noted in the introduction, the paper will conclude with a tentative discussion regarding the debate set out at the beginning of the paper – that of the ways in which marginalised groups can be co-opted by the state via the institution of parliament, versus the possibility that

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<sup>35</sup> The Zulu kingdom was geographically smaller than the present Kwa-Zulu Natal

<sup>36</sup> 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).

<sup>37</sup> A concept which includes all Africans, which was introduced in his famous 'I am an African' speech (8 May 1996, Cape Town)

<sup>38</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7153378.stm> last visited 27.05.08

parliament may provide a forum for the inclusion of embattled groups and their engagement with the institution in ways that change it. The paper focuses on ritual and ceremony, and in doing so avoids direct discussion of more structural features of democracy, which I would argue are fundamental to the matter at hand. However, attention to the softer aspects of the institution or parliament does constitute one aspect of the above debate. I have demonstrated that there is a research gap concerning the culture of contemporary South African parliament. This section of the paper discusses the assimilation-change debate firstly in relation to apartheid era parliament, and then with reference to transition and contemporary parliament.

South African has a history of state co-option of oppositional forces, often in divisive ways. Mandela discusses the way in which the indigenous system of kings and chiefs survived to a degree following the 1910 Union, arguing that it was mostly amalgamated into the colonial and apartheid system and used by this system: *'the government promoted the power of traditional leaders as a counterpoint to the ANC'* (1994: 605). The processes of co-option were gendered; Govender (2005) argues that traditional black custom was used by apartheid to discriminate against black women. Processes of cooption can be seen to form a central tactic of the colonial and apartheid regimes<sup>39</sup>. As Zyl Van Slabbert said:

*'the Nationalist Government has tried various co-optive strategies with blacks, Coloureds and Asians over the years.....the rule had always been to co-opt other groups into separate/segregated/apart political structures away from the centre of power, and then to dominate from a distance by means of budgetary or coercive measures....'* (1995: 106)

Apartheid era parliament was effective in maintaining the exclusion and suppression of most marginalised groups. There is some description in the literature of occasions when parliamentary norms were breached, including, notably Suzman's description of the assassination of Verwoerd (1993: 69-70). Of course, Suzman and (later) other white liberal politicians did utilise parliament to voice dissent, with some positive effects, but without substantial change to the institution. As Suzman notes, *'It is perhaps ironic that a government as authoritarian as that of the National Party had a deeply rooted respect for the parliamentary system which provided me with a forum to challenge their policies and elicit information'* (1993: 2). Suzman describes, for example, how she used her maiden speech to focus on women's rights (or rather the lack of them – 1993: 27). However, Suzman's marginalisation and containment within parliament was also apparent, and was demonstrated in ritual terms, for example: *'I sat alone in a sea of empty green benches, while the whole of the official opposition crossed the floor and packed themselves in among the Nationalist MPs'* (1993: 92-93)<sup>40</sup>.

The transition to democracy changed South African fundamentally; universal franchise, the shift to a bicameral parliament with the NCOP replacing the senate, a new constitution, the high levels of female representation, the new committee system and state apparatus. However, these changes did not originate within parliament, but were rather the product of sustained international pressure and the organised resistance movement. Clearly, the organised opposition was not co-opted, growing in strength despite suppression, until a number of different forces combined to enable the transition to democracy. During the transition and afterwards, the ANC succeeded in co-opting various oppositional forces, including to an extent seizing the cultural capital the IKP had claimed (see above). Afrikaner cultural symbols have also been appropriated to a degree by the new parliamentarians, for example the leadership of the ANC apparently hailed Van Zyl Slabbert as *'a new Voortrekker'* when he

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<sup>39</sup> It is also related to the apartheid era government tactic of fomenting ethnic conflict between ANC and Inkatha Freedom Party supporters –see Mandela 1994: 704)

<sup>40</sup> Suzman also describes bullying (for example a Nat MP hissing 'neo-communist' every time she spoke in the house (1993: 115)).



resigned leadership of the Progressive Federal Party in protest against the tricameral parliament (Hadland and Rantao 1999: 159-60).

Processes of contestation within parliament were perhaps particularly evident during the transition to democracy, including in particular the battles between the ANC and the IKP, and also tense negotiations regarding women's representation and interests (see my subsequent working paper). As I have indicated above, the ANC built alliances with, and indeed largely co-opted, the IKP, but this has not prevented the manifestation of conflict on the ground and within the ANC itself (witness recent political battles between Mbeki and the Zulu politician Zuma).<sup>41</sup> During the transition, there was cynicism amongst the organised opposition regarding the extent to which progressive change was possible via political means. For example Mphahlele says '*Do you think that the whites will give up without a fight? Yes, they can accommodate some of us in Parliament. They can even allow an African government to run the country so long as it doesn't interfere with their grip on the land*' (2002:201). Critical elements were mostly subsumed within the ANC but cynicism may have remained, especially amongst those who are most disenfranchised.

The new South African parliament provides democratic representation for the whole population, and as such it is easy to argue that it has not co-opted all dissident or marginalised elements. In terms of cultural aspects, including ritual and ceremony, the changes have been marked, although whether these perform a rhetorical function, defusing or channelling the interests of marginalised or less powerful groups away from political opportunities remains to be seen. Contemporary parliament is certainly an arena in which progressive change can be played out, although the converse is also true. Because the power base has shifted, the patterns of co-option have changed, so that it might be possible to argue that dissident minorities such as racist poor whites are co-opted via the notion and practice of Africanism, which subsumes them in an uneasy alliance with middle class blacks and whites. The strength of parliament is also an issue; a figurehead parliament which lacks strong connections to the executive and state apparatus may in effect strengthen the hold of the elite groups by default, rather than by cultural processes taking place within parliament itself. Overall, the shift appears to be towards a complex pattern of contestation; impressions are that political and personal alliances may override ethnic or gender ones, and that disjunctures relating to material conditions are of paramount importance.

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<sup>41</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4615019.stm> last visited 27.05.08

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