Reimagining rhythms, rituals, and symbols

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Abstract

This chapter identifies problems found within Westminster that exacerbate inequality, exclusion, unwellness and a shallow ethics. Four principles are proposed to guide thinking about how to reimagine Parliament: (a) a more inclusive approach to knowledge; (b) promoting diversity, equity and the right to participate in democracy for all; (c) enhancing wellness; and (d) restoring standards and ethics. Rather than disciplining individuals, restructuring the system or changing the culture, all of which are only partial remedies, a reimagining of *relationships* in the Westminster Parliament is called for. The chapter proposes reform of the rituals and symbols that exclude people and strengthen those that hold politicians more accountable; decelerate the rhythms of work and encourage prioritisation; challenge hierarchies of knowledge; and promote education on higher standards and ethics in political work for all.

Keywords

Parliamentary rituals

Parliamentary symbols

Knowledge

Inclusivity

Ethics

Introduction

Democracy is a work in progress around the world and one of the key sites offering opportunities for a transformation of our political processes can be found within parliaments. Focusing on one aspect of these processes, the organisation of political interaction at the heart of our democracies deserves our attention. Political work is made up of endless encounters between politicians, and between them and others in society, in both face-to-face and digital interaction, navigating both time and space. Some of these encounters are ritualised – replete with rules, symbols of power and performances that aim to demonstrate various formal and informal hierarchies – while others are informal and spontaneous. These include and exclude different groups in various ways depending on their rules,

habits and rhythms. Some of the problems that emerge within these encounters, as seen from different perspectives, are discussed in this chapter and then suggestions made as to what we might do about them. Guided by the principles of recognising the complexity and value of different kinds of knowledge; promoting diversity, equity and inclusion; enhancing wellness; and restoring ethics and standards, the argument is advanced for rethinking the way interaction is organised in parliament. More specifically, recommendations are made for changing the rhythms, rituals and symbols as part of a reimagining of Westminster.

Challenges

The critiques of our parliamentary system tend to highlight constitutional, structural and individual problems, requiring an oscillation between abstract discussion and idiosyncratic situations that defy generalisation. In contrast, this chapter focuses more on challenges that arise out of four main social challenges: hierarchies of knowledge, inequality and exclusion, unwellness and shallow ethics. These problems are clearly inter-related. The inequalities found in wider society unsurprisingly appear in parliament and one example of this is observed in attitudes to knowledge, evidence and testimony. After observing debates in Westminster since 1998, and tracking both the making of laws and select committee inquiries, I have observed various patterns in the way knowledge is treated. It tends to be the case that those professions that are seen as producing 'gold standard' evidence, especially scientists and lawyers, tend to get taken more seriously than those relying more on arts, humanities, social science and personal testimony. MPs and peers tend to make assumptions about 'evidence', rather than investigating how it was produced. As Latour (2010:229-43) explains, lawyers and scientists produce evidence in completely different ways, through legal process on the one hand and experimentation on the other, so the rigour of their knowledge is not directly comparable. Social scientists conceive of rigour differently depending on whether they have been more influenced by science or humanities, relying differentially on imagination, comparative analysis, logic or replicable tests and surveys. Practitioners gather knowledge though their personal experience and whether this is taken seriously, and whether they are seen as 'experts' communicating expertise, depends on their status. Whether considering the interaction between MPs, or between parliamentarians and others in society, inequalities based on gender, class, and race re-emerge with depressing regularity.

Hierarchies are not only created by assumptions about knowledge. The rituals, rules and processes that govern the conduct of ceremony, debate and discussion can exclude or include different people. The ceremonies that mark the opening and closing of parliament, or introduce new members, reveal who the central players are in the theatre of democracy and how they are hierarchically organised. To

take one example in the State Opening of Westminster, the procession from Buckingham Palace down Pall Mall and into Parliament, to finally get to the House of Lords chamber, reveals the status of all those involved. The order of people in the procession, the seating and the uniforms all indicate the status of participants, from the pinnacle of the social pyramid with the Monarch down to the Lords, MPs and finally those they rule over. The pomp and traditional clothes, especially those worn by the people more prominent in the procession, reek of alienating privilege for some, while they confer dignity and stability on the proceedings for others. The complex series of rituals evokes different meanings according to the perspective of the observer (Crewe and Evans, 2018; see below).

Those ceremonial rituals that punctuate daily business are in contrast to the everyday rituals you find in Parliament that are needed to make laws, scrutinise government or conduct inquiries and, more informally, engage with stakeholders. Conversations in Westminster takes place across the Palace and outbuildings in many forms ranging from the most strictly ritualised events (discussion of bills on the floor of the chamber of the House of Lords or House of Commons, questioning ministers at Question Time, votes in their respective division lobbies, public bill committees considering bills) to the least regulatory (meetings in a café) to the many lightly ritualised encounters in between the two extremes (meetings in offices, outreach or private discussion by select committees). The more that is at stake – because the decision will have impact and there are seriously different views about what to do to improve society and the administration of the state – the more the encounter tends to be ritualised. The problems with these rituals are once again in the eye of the beholder. It is only small irritations with procedure that irk some MPs. Some think more expansively and see in parliament mechanisms of exclusion, whether it is the government dominating the rituals and restricting the potential for democratic scrutiny by parliament or citizens being unable to voice their opinions on proposals. Others perceive the more gladiatorial performances of hostility during Question Time as counter to deliberative process and off-putting for citizens, adding to the disillusionment that many feel with 'tribalism' in politics.

The unwellness of the world shows up in Westminster within relationships between people in various ways, whether as conflict, hostility or abuse. A 24/7 digital revolution, and new culture of leaking, means that government takes place in the public realm to a far greater extent than ever before. Scrutiny and accountability become more intense, but so do the possibilities of undermining your opponents with malicious attacks and allegations. New forms of communications are creating intolerable pressures within Parliament. There is an explosion of judgement, especially of those in positions of power with certain groups being attacked more ferociously than others. If you are not white, male and of a certain age, and therefore not seen as a 'natural' leader, then you tend to receive

more violent communication, as a politician especially. For example, ethnic minority and government MPs receive more hate on Twitter than others (Agarwal et al, 2021). Another study found that more general and political abuse was directed at men, while women received more sexist abuse (Gorrell et al, 2020). Women are the targets of more toxic attacks, with the risk that this mix of inequality and conflict is leading to a decline in interest in standing as political candidates (Harmar and Southern, 2021) and the possibility that it makes it harder to win a seat (Collignon and Rüdig, 2021). Hate speech arises in part out of, and contributes to, confusion about knowledge. We are not in a post-Truth world, I would argue, but living with chronic levels of contestation that work at cross-purposes, leaving people not knowing who to believe or even where to turn to for guidance. Experts are portrayed as unreliable if ideologically unsound. Within Parliament we see conflicts of interests and a multitude of different perspectives represented and we need politicians to listen and deliberate on this messy cacophony when deciding what is for the best. When they don't achieve the results they promise, or that we want, we citizens attack them all as an undifferentiated group – sometimes in ways that are abusive, whether or not they were personally responsible for the action.

Arguably this partly explains why many MPs retreat to their constituencies and hold surgeries with individuals who have severe challenges and go to their MP for help. Just as unwellness shows up in Westminster, neglected problems become evident through these encounters between citizens and their MPs (or MPs' staff) and so within relationships but also for individuals and families. While better off people buy the services of lawyers, doctors or accountants to solve problems, for those who are multiply failed by the state, the last resort is your MP. They often see constituents with multiple, complex and inter-related challenges – related to housing, benefits, stress, debt – and MPs and their staff develop both an encyclopaedic knowledge of services provided in their area and plenty of contacts across local government who might assist. The MPs and staff who seem more comfortable doing this mix of social work and citizens advice tend to be women, taking time and energy away from their other responsibilities and arguably promotion opportunities (Crewe, 2015). While this aspect of MPs' work grounds them in the everyday realities of their constituents, so that they deepen their understanding of the problems caused by bad government policy and law, they are not always that well equipped to address the more complex problems – especially when mental illness is involved.

Westminster has a few more of its own forms of more institutional unwellness in the realm of ethics. In the last few years, we have witnessed a more casual attitude to laws, rules and norms within Westminster, culminating in former Prime Minister Boris Johnson resigning his premiership in 2022 because his own MPs no longer trusted him. Where have the ethics deficits emerged from, to take

one example? Before postmodern attacks on truth, the digital revolution with its 24/7 news cycle, and the acceleration of change that globalisation has brought with it, the political world was relatively well-ordered. In the House of Lords parliamentarians used to tell me that all new peers 'go native' within six months, or stay away, which usually meant that they complied with the rules and courtly codes of behaviour (Crewe, 2005). In the House of Commons, MPs were once surprisingly obedient to leaders. A decline in deference to party leadership since the 1950s, with MPs increasingly voting against the instructions of their leaders, might be seen as somewhat refreshing. But more recently, it has been Ministers who have broken the rules, challenging the conventions of the House in profound and even destructive ways. Prime Minister Johnson was especially inclined to ignore laws and rules, as detailed by White (2022) and Thévoz (2022). To reverse this decline in standards, we have to understand how it has come about, distinguishing between political attacks and impartial accusations. However, the rhythms of parliamentary work are too frenetic and competitive to allow for the level of reflection and debate that is needed to improve understanding of the relationships and ethics that underlie standards.

When people find problems in organisations, including Parliament, they often resolve that the *culture* needs to be changed. However, there is a lack of clarity about what this means or entails. Culture tends to be treated as if it was a residual category by scholars and practitioners alike – viewed as either a set of traditions with valuable functions or a pattern of dysfunctional behaviour that needs to be transformed, depending upon their political ideology. Brian Street (1993) has pointed out that culture can be more usefully conceived of as something people do rather than have – a verb not a noun – and yet many still conceive of it as something outside the everyday interaction between people, akin to the way we think of and idealise 'systems'. If you think of culture as separate from everyday practice, then you are looking in the wrong place and might formulate the wrong recipes. If you see it as a process that arises between people when they negotiate over meaning, symbolism and ritual, rather than as dysfunctional behaviour that can be changed with a new code of practice, then you will turn your attention to the way people communicate, ritualise interaction and organise themselves. However, culture is less malleable than people assume, with ritual being just one example of this: 'We can't do without rituals in politics, any more than we can dispense with language, but you can't make them do what you want either. They can, but do not necessarily, resolve contradictions, create consensus, mobilise consent, shore up existing hierarchies or include/exclude groups' (Crewe, 2021:171). We should not get rid of rituals and symbols, because we cannot do politics without them, but we can review and reimagine them with certain principles to guide us.

Principles and opportunities for reimagining interaction in Westminster

If thinking about a reimagination of three important social processes in interaction – rhythms, rituals, and symbolism – then it is important to consider what principles might guide this transformation. Taking the key problematic areas and reimagining them into aspirations, I will focus on these principles when considering how to change rhythms, rituals and symbols:

1. *A more inclusive approach to knowledge*: a commitment should be made to judging the value and utility of knowledge with open-mindedness. This assumes that more attention, and sometimes research, would be needed to evaluate the rigour of knowledge rather than assuming that particular sources, methods or types of experts are intrinsically more reliable.

2. *Promoting diversity, equity and the right to participate in democracy for all*: others are thinking about how to improve the representation of all groups in parliament. The focus here is on changing processes so that they offer greater equality of opportunity for all politicians, citizens and others in society to engage meaningfully in democratic processes, whereby their voices are heard, and their interests considered. This would mean that encounters were more inclusive, less alienating for minorities and able to negotiate through difference with fairness.

3. *Enhancing wellness*: promoting better mental and physical health, as well as relationships between people, within any parliament is not only important for making it work more effectively. It matters because people will stay away if they perceive political work to be disturbing, discriminatory or harmful. Both face-to-face encounters, and interaction on social media, would enable respectful discussion, debate, and difficult negotiations between politicians and others they engage with.

4. *Restoring standards and ethics*: a sense of integrity, trustworthiness and honesty needs to be restored in Westminster so that they became social norms (as they often have been) rather than the exceptions. While the abuse of power appears to be a perpetual feature of all political systems, Westminster can only function properly if this becomes a relatively rare event once again.

How do we promote these principles within a broad agenda of change? According to the sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2020), the contemporary pervasive frustration with politics arises in part out of our conviction that we can predict and control the world around us when clearly, we can't. Once we recognise that reimagining Westminster is not about redesigning its structure, but about creating

different potentials and possibilities and learning to think, be and act differently, then we can cope better with feeling (and often being) being somewhat out of control. However, there are significant interests marshalled against thinking, being and acting differently within interaction, which I explore in relation to three areas of potential: rhythms, rituals and symbols.

Rhythms

When understanding but also reimagining parliament you need to look at politicians' work. Parliamentary scholars tend to classify their work into roles and measure their activities, votes and outputs, thereby missing some the contradictory and ambivalent processes in politics. Influenced by Goffman's (1959) theatrical analogy in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, elsewhere I have tried to shift attention towards performance and relationships in MPs' political work. These are so changeable and complex we need a systematic way to study this, and I propose two good sources of inspiration. First, Lefebvre's (2013) rhythmanalysis, offers a systematic way to research the diversity of MPs' work by looking at the rhythms of performance through time and space. Secondly, turning to philosopher Stephen Lukes' (1975) analysis of power allows us to think about the impact of rhythms in terms of inclusion and exclusion, highly significant for fathoming who has access to decision-making agendas, places and moments in time.

The rhythms created by people moving their bodies through time and space can be sequential, where people follow each other in concert; have a beginning, a peak and a decline; and be in or out of sync (Lefebvre, 2013:25). These patterns reveal who is meeting who, how often and for what time period and how it changes over time through different seasons, allowing for comparison across sites (including parliaments). You can see who gets included and excluded in their encounters and whose voice gets prioritised in both the performance and the impact. An abrupt change to rhythms, such as a special sitting, might tell us that Parliament is facing a critical event. In a new place of work part of what you have to learn is how to move around different spaces at what time and with whom. In Westminster you have to watch hundreds of rooms, corridors, bars and speaking chambers, and the routes between them, as well as study the rules about where and when people are expected to gather, sit, stand, speak or walk. You have to work out which rhythms are shared with others (e.g., in the same party, on the same committee, if voting in the same lobby, all MPs use Portcullis House Atrium to meet certain visitors) and which are idiosyncratic (e.g., every MP has their own constituency, every peer has their own network of contacts), so that you know which bodies join at what point, whether in person or virtually.

If you compare MPs' and peers' rhythms of work, and who they share space with for different tasks, much is revealed about their different networks. MPs are elected so travel weekly, or at least fortnightly, to their constituencies; peers are appointed and conceive of themselves as 'experts' to revise law, so meet up with specialists to discuss the latest developments in their area of interest. We could then develop this potentially more systematic way of studying interaction with a view to compiling a picture of who is included and excluded more accurately. In all cases politicians tend to be more responsive than pro-active in choosing who to interact with. In constituencies they tend to meet individuals and families who come to them with grievances or problems, or activists whether on their own or as part of organisations, and in both cases, MPs are not usually seeking them out. On the other hand, select committees in both Houses invite witnesses to give evidence – government Ministers, civil servants but also 'friendly witnesses'. But we don't yet know the patterns of structural exclusion based on gender, race, income or disability in either constituencies or Parliament, even if we do know that select committees hear from far more male than female witnesses. The House of Commons reported that in the 2021-2022 session select committees heard from 600 men and 346 women (HC 1, 2022:93). But it is a very positive step that they monitor participation by gender. We could address some of the inequalities in political participation if we had more data on these rhythms of interaction.

Let's shift our attention from quantity to quality of participation. In a general sense it is clear that we are facing an acceleration of rhythms in political workplaces. Rosa (2013) writes about huge sweeping change in contemporary societies, about how change is accelerating as the social bonds and resonant connections that hold us together are loosening, with the result that rigid relationships and alienation are becoming endemic. The representative relationship between politician and citizens is too rigid and hardened; we need a more fluid way of being in the world where 'resonant relationships are an expression of the successful adaptive transformation of the world, not of its appropriation in the sense of expanding one's resources' (Rosa, 2019:216, 185). When citizens resort to merely laughing with cynicism or shouting with fury and outrage at politicians as a whole, both non-democratic forms of expression he points out, then the potential for resonance is reduced. To understand this political alienation, Rosa invites us to consider how the liberal individualistic way of experiencing politics creates a rhythm that is inherently dissatisfying. 'Modern democracy is rather fundamentally based on the idea that its form of politics gives every individual a voice and allows that voice to be heard, such that the politically shaped world thus becomes an expression of this productive polyphony' (Rosa, 2019:217). Even voting is the expression of an individual preference. When we debate, we do so in a way that removes the emotion, aesthetics and embodiment of politics. What we need is to change democracy, or to be specific in the way we think about it, so that it is no longer the 'negotiation and

settlement of legal claims and conflicts of interests, but rather refers to an ongoing process of becoming more sensitive to a variety of voices in the sense of perspectives, modes of existence, and relationships to the world' (Rosa, 2019:218). We need to rethink political participation.

The more diverse we are, the more time we need to give to political participation to prevent the exclusion of sectors of the population or even the alienation of the public as a whole. When politicians don't keep up with the pace and substance of change, then politics lags behind social developments and people feel unheard (Rosa, 2019:223). So, we need to think carefully about how to improve the rhythms of political work, that is how politicians and citizens navigate time and space when encountering each other. The main public space for political encounters is the Palace of Westminster with its debating chambers, committee rooms and meeting spaces: some love it for its surreal fairy-tale gothic splendour while others hate its pomposity, inaccessibility and state of disrepair (or a mixture of the two sensibilities). But there are other spaces too. MPs also meet people online, occasionally during trips arranged by committees, and in a range of places in their constituencies: businesses, hospitals, schools, supermarkets, council buildings, and so on (Crewe, 2021:109). But we don't really know who they meet and what they talk about when they get there. This matters because these rhythms effectively constitute the substance of their representation of a locality.

If we think of this representation work in terms of rhythms, we can more fully understand the nature of representative politics and make informed suggestions for change. As the French anthropologist Bruno Latour (2003:147) encourages, it is worth rethinking this claim of representation in terms of truth because we shouldn't judge political discourses as we would judge scientific truth: 'political discourse appears to be untruthful only in contrast with other forms of truth'. An elected politician can't reproduce the views or promote the interests of all their constituents because they are diverse and changeable so unknowable in all their richness. She/he can only inquire into a partial selection and convert multiple interests and views into a few, or sometimes one, and put it through the filter of their own understanding and the party manifesto. In that conversion process the representative inevitably mediates between individual differences and shared interests within a community. This means that who they speak to, in which spaces, for how long, and what they speak about reveals much about the content of representation of a locality. Conversely it would be as revealing to know who is ignored and invisible. If MPs revealed information about these interactive encounters, or lack of them, for example in the annual reports that some produce or on their website, then this would make them more accountable to those they claim to represent.

The risk of demanding more information about who MPs interact with could be an unintended perverse incentive for elected representatives to schedule still more encounters just to reassure constituents that they are working hard, and everyone is being represented. One of the major challenges of democracies is that both MPs, and the governments they form in parliamentary systems, over-promise and under-deliver. They make impossible promises, especially when campaigning before an election, that can't be fulfilled, leading to the inevitability of disappointment. Campaigning stretches further and further back into people's terms of office as seats become more marginal. Over-promising is a habit in other organisations too that depend on public support, such as charities and trade unions or even churches, but it has more serious consequences when this happens in political world. So, a reimagined Westminster (and Whitehall for that matter) would have Parliament (and government) doing less but doing it better. What should politicians stop doing to enable them to represent their constituents more inclusively and govern the country more effectively? That is a question that politicians should ask themselves, in consultation with constituents, their party and those they work with, with an awareness that prioritising time and the direction of their attention requires making difficult political decisions. It is at the core of the work of representation. MPs might consider fewer automatic meetings: prioritising advocacy groups that relate to upcoming policies or bills; more irregular visits to institutions in their constituency and choosing those with the greatest challenges; and attending fewer surgery meetings on the basis of urgency or complexity, as examples. They might spend more or less time in the constituency vs media studios vs parliament at certain times of year. They could ration the amount of time they spend on social media. A more effective parliament is only possible if processes of prioritisation, and switching towards quality rather than quantity, become seen as mandatory.

Rituals and symbols

No parliament can function without rituals. They are events of significance that are always reliant on rules, making or remaking meaning, and creating opportunities for demonstrating or contesting hierarchy. Democratic politics in particular needs to ensure that the performance of political debate is free enough for the expression of different opinions and constrained enough for government to get its laws, policies and motions approved eventually, to enable the implementation of the promises made at elections as well as a smooth administration. Five distinct kinds of ritual tend to be required to make politics work and legitimise power in the Westminster Parliament: elections, conferences, formal meetings, decision-making and ceremonies of state. They contrast with the very informal meetings, conversations and gossip in the spaces between ritualised encounters that tend to be unregulated, spontaneous, away from public view and less clear in terms of performing hierarchy.

Ritualised processes are continually evolving or sometimes quite abruptly transformed. They are embedded within wider cultural practices found within Westminster, which are created, reproduced and evaluated by different groups, resulting in a huge range of reactions to the way they are at present and how they should evolve. These reactions are partly shaped by ambition. Peers realise that their House of Lords is the secondary revising chamber, while the Commons is primary with more power to dominate the executive, and for some this limit to their power is compensated for by social status. It is as if the symbolic capital of a peerage, a gilded chamber and deferential treatment compensate peers for the restrictions to their political clout and this suits those who are at the end of an illustrious career with far fewer ambitions than MPs. In the House of Commons, where ambition to govern is far more widespread, status is founded on a completely different premise. The symbolism of being referred in the chamber by your constituency (the Honourable Member for Hammersmith, for example) is a continual reminder of an MP's job of representing a locality while depersonalising conflict during debates within the chamber. The endless confusing rules of procedure and conventions that govern the way politics is ritualised both regulate the hierarchies between politicians but also make sure decisions can be made and stuck to in an orderly way. My point here is that rituals and symbols are vitally important in politics but deserve a rethink in any redesign of parliament.

Before redesigning them, once again they have to be understood. Rituals convey clear even if multiple messages but also ambiguity, as mentioned above. The State Opening of Parliament looks like a completely different ritual depending on whether you are watching from the street, participating in a procession, sitting in the House of Commons listening to Black Rod summoning you to the House of Lords, or a peer dressed in ermine in close proximity to the Monarch when they read out the government's programme:

> Parliamentary rituals remind us where protagonists are supposed to be in formal hierarchies, even if the practice of politics entails endless power struggles over these hierarchies. They are also the processes by which moral values, ideas, and relations between people can be performed and contested in ways that avoid violence. But rituals designed to demonstrate solidarity, unity, or common values inevitably carry with them a risk of excluding rather than including – indeed that must be an inevitable part of their purpose. Rituals designed to cement authority carry the risk of appearing to deny dissent. (Crewe and Evans, 2018:46)

We may need rituals and symbols but that doesn't mean we should attempt to preserve them in aspic, as if such an aim was possible. They can be a way of galvanising people that distracts from repulsive forms of politics, but they can also exclude people by both subtle and unsubtle means. So, a key question is how to change the rituals and symbolism in Parliament for deeper inclusion.

We might take more seriously those symbols that alienate on grounds of privilege. In the current House of Lords, the symbols of class status – a name based on a ranked peerage (baron, earl, marquis, duke), ermine robes for ceremonies and habits of deference towards titles – set these parliamentarians above the rest of the population. The UK class system works to make certain groups – notable white men educated in public schools who would have once dominated Parliament exclusively – feel that it is natural to inherit or gain these titles of nobility. For others, the experience ranges from acute imposter syndrome, feeling almost like space invaders (Puwar, 2004), to an appreciation at the meritocratic ways that any Britisher can become a peer at least in theory irrespective of gender, class and race. For all it means getting accustomed to being treated as superior to commoners. The abolition of titles and robes would signal a rejection of this hierarchy, while using a designation like 'Senator' or the equivalent might convey a sense of being more like other countries – gaining inclusion but losing distinctiveness. The peers themselves worry that if they lost this form of symbolic reward for political work then they might attract less talented politicians to join the House of Lords. But that view seems outmoded, and it might work the other way: if the House of Lords became a Senate and peers were treated as experts rather than social superiors, then it might be easier to attract those with specialist knowledge. It would also mean that the other House – the House of Commons –needs to change their name too, depending on what other reforms are brought in. On balance, abolishing the symbols of social superiority (rather than political authority) to promote our aspiration of inclusion outweighs the disadvantages, such as loss of formal sense of dignity. Peers should become Senators, and MPs could be Representatives or the equivalent, to emphasise their political rather than social status.

Improving other aspects of equality in the two Houses could also be partly achieved through symbolic means. Sarah Childs' (2016) recommendations for making the House of Commons more equitable in terms of gender are comprehensive, persuasive and practical, suggesting an impressive range of ways to improve representation, infrastructure, communication and accessibility. Influenced by these ideas, Verge (2022) focused in on the symbolic changes needed to make progress on gender equality: challenging masculine social scripts, women's socially assigned roles as caregivers, and harassment by men, while promoting women's spaces and groups while recognising their caring responsibilities. If we summarise Childs' and Verge's recommendations, then a gender sensitive parliament would need at least the following symbolic shifts: (a) redesigning parliamentary space so that women feel more welcome along with their dependents, whether spaces used by all (e.g., allowing breast-feeding in the Chamber) or by designating women-only rooms, (b) parliament recognises the achievements of

women as much as men in symbolic ways (e.g., rooms named, paintings hung, sculptures and busts put up and exhibitions or events held), (c) gender neutral language is used (not 'lords' or 'chairmen'), (d) prioritising gender equality and anti-harassment strategies and messages in communications, (e) discouraging or even banning all-male panels, and (f) women MPs, but also potential candidates, are offered mentoring, space for peer-to-peer solidarity, and other forms of tailored support.

Parallel arguments could be made about equality and inclusion in relation to other disadvantaged groups. Symbolic recognition of the achievements of minority groups who face inequality in British society, and our parliament, would have value for all. Paintings, room names, busts or exhibitions about politicians of colour, or who are young, disabled and/or LGBTQ+, could act as a challenge to prevailing hierarchies of value. This is important as an act of recognition but also to make those who belong to disadvantaged groups feel that they too can enter the corridors of power and do well when they get there. Exhibitions about how the UK parliament has been historically involved in creating a modern world fraught with global inequalities could be symbolically significant. What was parliament's role in slavery and colonialism, whether active or through negligence? A permanent exhibition about the UK's impact on the world could emphasise our capacity for self-critical learning, an antidote to the populist nationalism that seems to be having a resurgence.

Knowledge could be handled differently within the ritualised encounters in Parliament. The negotiation of narratives between politicians but also between them and others in society deserves far more attention as a process. If politicians debated the narratives, knowledge and evidence that emanate from different sources, settings and disciplines, the difference between them and how they should be handled, then they'd be better equipped to make decisions. There is clearly interest within Parliament to think more about how knowledge is produced, and progress has already been made, notably in the handling of 'evidence' by committees. The barrier here is that parliamentarians know that knowledge is contested, and that it can be used to win against their opponents, so the politics of the use of evidence in policymaking can create incentives to close-down such discussions. Similarly, the debates about freedom of speech can sometimes lead to a constraint on academic integrity that would impoverish debate. There is an important role for academics here to keep opening-up spaces for discussion about narratives, knowledge and evidence that enable freedom, integrity but also protection from harm.

Finally, in the arena of standards and ethics, once again the rituals deserve our attention. Proposals for the reform of Parliament tend to focus on either individuals or wholes (cultures, structures,

institutions) while neglecting relationships, including those created within rituals. While I admit that enhancing the capacity of individuals to be ethical, wise and competent is a worthy goal and developing better cultures or structures can be useful, I still hold that the dual obsession with individualism versus institutionalism has its problems, including unintended consequences and missed opportunities. For example, providing support to individual MPs to deal with the increasingly confusing difficult hate-filled world to the exclusion of other processes can leave them feeling they are on their own. Measures to hold individuals more accountable for their actions and to a higher standards of ethics, as the Committees on Standards and Privileges are doing, are extremely worthwhile. It might be worth strengthening the ritualised processes of accountability on finding wrong-doing, whether it is being reprimanded by the Speaker, or even giving an apology at the bar of either House, or circulating Committee findings on breaches far more widely.

However, ethics is often reduced to policy and legal compliance; we need to consider cultural norms as well. We used to take it for granted that politicians generally like to look as if they are obeying the law. But a new attitude prizing disruption has encouraged a casual attitude towards customs, rules and even laws. Disruption as a valued process for its own sake is evident, for example, in the corporate philosophy of many technology companies. The narrative is to make companies, and by analogy governments, so innovative and fast-moving with new disruptive rhythms that they leap ahead of competitors. Disruption is symbolically conveyed through violent language, casting off older symbols and displaying new ones, preferably relying on what we see as the closest thing to magic in the modern world: technology. However, encouraging politicians to be in competition with each other is counterproductive. Rather than pitting politicians against each other – by leaders making promises or threats about their future prospects in return for support or citizens rewarding them for intensifying blame-filled attacks – political parties and citizens should exert pressure on their members and representatives to aspire to a higher standard of ethics through education.

A renewal of ethics implies a process of education for all of us. Dewey's thinking about how democracy and education rely on each other remains pertinent today. To make democracy work properly you need an educated citizenry: 'a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education' (Dewey, 1916 [2008]). He does not mean this in the technical sense of knowing how to participate; it is not just about an accumulation of information about politics. Rather, education enables processes of communication between groups to ensure we can get beyond

individual and stratified interests. This means thinking and reimagining for ourselves as individuals but also in different configurations of social networks, encountering each other through rituals. It is in that process of inquiry, deliberation and debate, informed by what Dewey calls practical judgement, that the substance of a reimagined Westminster can be found. Most seem to find political speechifying dull, especially since politicians have been controlled and trained to be on message by spin doctors who have taken charge of communications. Often former journalists, these political communications strategists teach politicians how to handle the media and the result is repetitive and cautious; the flattening out of political talk has made it boring.

Gaffes, jokes, idiosyncratic utterances and vicious personal insults by politicians can inject emotional drama back into political speech, and those politicians who have recently indulged in it – Boris Johnson, Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro as examples – are seen by their supporters as authentic, entertaining and relatable. However, it is their disinterest in striving for truth that is in part having a corrupting influence on narratives within our political rituals. Their supporters do not think this is unusual – they believe that all politicians lie so they may as well support one who creates resonance and does not patronise them. However, we need to recover our expectations of integrity. Tolerating some spin – or a 'mask of virtue' as Runciman (2008) puts it – is necessary in any democracy because it is a competitive form of politics within which political parties, smaller groups and individuals are all trying to win support and promote their causes. Those who pretend it is possible to do politics without creating rosy narratives are lying and it is this form of political hypocrisy, lying about lying, that can have a corrosive effect on democracy itself. What we need is more honest narratives about what politics involves as well as fuller accountability for the actions of government in our political rituals.

Conclusion: relationships in a reimagined Westminster

In this chapter I have set out some of the problems within the Westminster Parliament that lead to inequality, exclusion, unwellness and a shallow ethics. I have proposed four principles to guide us when thinking about how to reimagine Parliament: (a) *a more inclusive approach to knowledge*; (b) *promoting diversity, equity and the right to participate in democracy for all*; (c) *enhancing wellness*; and finally (d) r*estoring standards and ethics*. All these aspirations get away from the pervasive fixation on disciplining individuals – with codes of conduct, training or leadership ideas – or restructuring the system – whether changing rules, membership or powers, and focus on relationships that emerge in socio-political processes. Individuals and systems may need improvement too, but without addressing the connections between them, it will amount to nothing. This is because centrality of relationships in political work is universal.

It is within the rhythms, rituals and symbolism of encounters between parliamentarians, and between MPs/peers and others in society, that I have recommended proposals for reimagining. First, I propose that the House of Commons and parliamentary scholars expand the collection of data on the rhythms of who parliaments and parliamentarians interact with and analyse the quality of the interaction, asking who is included and excluded and how might these processes of exclusion be challenged. Secondly, I recommend a deacceleration of the rhythms of political work to allow parliaments to prioritise. If parliaments and parliamentarians slowed down their rhythms, tackling fewer more urgent global and national challenges rather than rushing around, giving the appearance of busyness, while focusing on the relatively less vital challenges, then both Westminster and society would benefit significantly. Thirdly, I suggest that the symbols of social status in the House of Lords are counterproductive. If social titles were abolished and replaced with political ones, the advantages would outweigh the disadvantages. Senators wearing formal modern dress, but not the uniforms associated with historical privilege, would be taken more seriously as political actors. Fourthly, the cultural changes proposed to make Westminster a more gender friendly workplace could be complemented by measures to make other groups feel welcome, for example, by recognising their political contributions. Fifthly, a review of how knowledge is valued by Parliament and parliamentarians could helpfully lead to a reconsideration of the unequal treatment of 'evidence.' Those people not usually seen as experts, and disciplines with methods of rigour less well understood, might be taken more seriously as a consequence.

Finally, and most importantly, I have argued that ethics and standards need urgent renewal. This is the most complex and delicate area and although it is only the parliamentarians themselves who can demand higher standards of integrity of each other, so that scandals return to their rare occurrence, citizens and commentators can make it plain if they agree that it matters to more effective functioning of democracy. Such changes would complement the others outlined in this book but also enhance their impact and make it more likely that a reimagined Westminster was sustained in the longer-term.

For references see the edited volume: https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/reimagining-parliament