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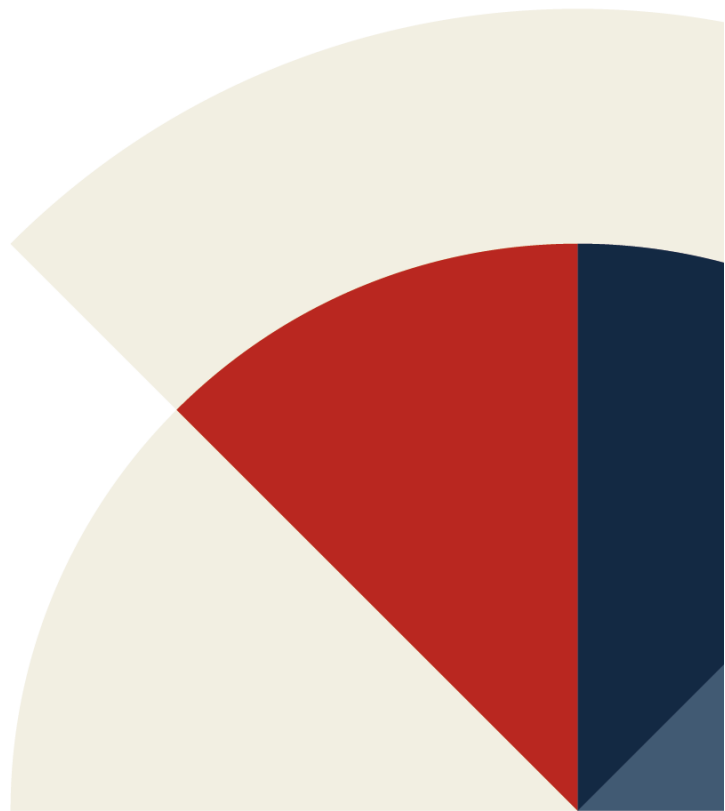
**Keynote speech, response and discussion –
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Keynote speech by Emma Crewe (SOAS University of London): What are parliaments for and how do they perform?

Thank you so much for that fabulous welcome. Thank you for inviting me; I'm absolutely delighted to be here.

So, today we are interested in how parliaments perform – not an easy question. I'd like to try and approach this in a way that departs from the customary approach of evaluation of parliaments or the evaluation of any organizations.

My first point is: To evaluate, we can't isolate parliaments from wider society, from democracy and the intentions of democracy. So, we can't lose sight of the fact that parliaments are always at the fulcrum of something much, much bigger.

The second thing I want to talk about today is performance and the many meanings of performance that we need to think about before we make judgements.

Thirdly, I'll make an argument for thinking in a more open-minded way about methodology and what anthropologists might have to offer.

I'm an anthropologist. What does that mean? The shortest version I can think of is borrowed from Tim Ingold, a British anthropologist at St Andrews, who says: It's like philosophy, but the people always stay in. So, you don't really get lost in abstractions if you are an anthropologist because it's an empirical discipline in its research approach. The people always have to be in your analysis – you don't lose sight of them – and what they are actually doing in an everyday (the fashionable way of putting it is lived) experience, but in a very practical way: What are they doing when they are at work or at home?

In my case, I'm fascinated by parliaments. To do this evaluation, as I was saying, I think you need to look at the much wider context that parliaments are in, but you also need to be more sustained and in-depth with your studies than journalists can afford to be.



So, I'm not that proud of much of our tabloid press in the UK, sadly. When they depict politics, as you know, they tend to go for the drama; they are obsessed about individual personalities; they want to catch attention, but they don't really want to sustain attention.

But they also get involved in politics themselves; there's a lot of collusion between politicians and journalists. They are constantly on the phone to each other. Journalists get involved in attacking their own opponents and writing favourable articles about those that they prefer.

So, I think we do need researchers as a function of democracy to have a really close-up look and be as impartial as they can. If they can't be completely impartial – because it's very difficult to be impartial about politics; we all have our own politics –, then we should be honest about our own partiality. We need journalists, but, exactly as you both said, we also need researchers to have a really close look at what goes on in parliaments.

This is how I've been having a very close look. I started off in in the House of Lords. This was after a career in international development. I used to study international non-governmental organisations, particularly in East Africa and South Asia, but then I saw that the likely incoming Labour government in 1997 was planning to reform the House of Lords. I thought: Well, I'm interested in change. I'll go and watch and see what happens.

I was shocked to find that in the House of Lords peers are the happiest people I've ever met. I can't scientifically prove that, but they were so engaged and so relaxed in comparison with the House of Commons, which is like a crazy city connected to the whole nation – very competitive and a much unhappier place, but also very exciting.

I couldn't completely lose my connection with the other parts of the world that I love, so I then raised funding to commission and sometimes give grants to scholars in South Asia, South-East Asia and Eastern Africa, particularly Ethiopia, with my colleague Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira.



So we did that, but we are now, as Christoph mentioned, working on a kind of global comparative ethnographic approach to studying parliaments in six countries. My particular ethnography has been focused on the Texas State Legislature, which is truly wild. I'll tell you some stories about that in the second half of this talk.

If you want to see what we've been doing, we have a treasure trove of books, articles, blogs or whatever, which you can find on our website [Output library - GRNPP](#), but we have also got a virtual exhibition of painting, photographs, films and installations and innovative ways of trying to explain what goes on in parliament (see: [Virtual exhibition – exhibition.grnpp.org](#)).

How do anthropologists study parliaments? What they do is that they go and get very close up and see what people actually do when they are working, by following them around, interviewing them, joining in, working for politicians where they can. In the House of Commons – my second study – I got very interested in the nature of work. The best way to try and explain how I studied is to give you an example of what I found.

When political scientists or political sociologists look at political work, two things happen. One is that they tend to be quite negative about politics, like wider public discourse, but the other thing is that they tend to see political work in terms of separable roles. But when I actually watched politicians, I realized that it's very difficult to separate these roles in the everyday work that they do. MPs are doing a whole mass of different things: whether they are representing their constituents or, in the same day, rushing to the chamber to go and speak on a particular bill; or later the same day, they might be going to a select committee where they scrutinize government.

These familiar roles of representation, scrutiny, party political work, etc. – don't happen in a disconnected way: they're deeply entangled. So, I got interested in the skill that is involved with that. I think politicians, like all of us, have to be shapeshifters, constantly reading the audiences in front of them and communicating appropriately, but they do need to have some authenticity as they do this.



Changeability is not complete, but they are jumping to different audiences, even in one day, or sometimes they are even performing all these different roles at the same time.

This was said by a former minister, Rory Stewart, last week, that he had to do “at least three different things, in three places, at one time. I was an MP serving constituents in the Cumbrian-Scottish border; I was also paid to be a parliamentarian, voting 350 miles south in Westminster; and also a minister, often abroad, moving through five different positions in four years. How do you balance” all these different roles?

Next I asked, so with all this dynamism what are the continuities? This shapeshifting is looking at politicians as if they are individuals, but we know that politics happens in groups. So, what are the patterns that are created by MPs as collectives? We can’t just think of them as an aggregate of individuals. That would be too an individualistic approach; and after all, I am an anthropologist, which is similar to a sociologist and, therefore, obsessed about social relationships, processes and patterns.

I tried to think of a way that recognizes the messiness of politics so I got interested in musical analogies to describe the continuities. I was thinking about how to systematically study what different groups of MPs were actually doing in everyday practice, which is why I came up with this idea of riffs, rhythms and rituals.

Rhythms of performance is actually the more unusual one because usually social scientists, when they think about politics, think about ideology. But what about thinking about politics in an embodied way? This is influenced the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre. (By the way, British anthropologists have a slight inferiority complex because the French anthropologists are just better. I’ve been very influenced by French anthropology and sociology.)

Lefebvre points out that we really need to understand what bodies are doing: where are they moving around as individuals, but also as groups? If you study that in parliament, it’s extremely revealing. Where are these bodies going? They are not just in the plenary; they are not just in the obvious sites, which are depicted on the



television. They are in the corridors; they are in private meetings; they are in their constituency, having meetings which are often called surgery meetings, as if they are like doctors. Who politicians choose to meet – which other bodies, if you like – is incredibly revealing, as well as who they ignore and exclude. So, the rhythms are very important.

The riffs of meaning are much more obvious. We all know about riffs: the ideology that can be expanded if you need to give a long speech, or contracted if you need to give a short one, and adjusted like a kind of musical melody – adjusted for different audiences.

But the more complex task for an anthropologist is to try and understand the rituals. We think of rituals as something that happens in religion, but you cannot have politics without rituals. You could not have the passing of a law without a ritual because people wouldn't agree to it. You have to have clear hierarchy, clear rules, a clear understanding of who speaks and votes when. These can very often be contested in a parliament, which shows how incredibly important they are, which is why we have the possibility of points of order.

It's not a coincidence that the most important events are more heavily ritualized, like a court of law. When you are sending someone to jail, you couldn't do that without a ritual. People wouldn't accept it; you would have a kind of anarchy. That's the kind of thing I was trying to study when I was doing anthropology of Westminster.

I want to come on now to this tricky business of measuring performance. I think performance tends to be thought about in three main ways – in both political science and also influenced by management studies (I teach management at a business school).

I think the first meaning is the most unusual and has been brilliantly explored by the political scientist Professor Shirin Rai and her colleagues. That is to think about performance in politics as performativity, a concept made famous by the philosopher Judith Butler. We need to think about performativity in the sense of people not just



communicating with each other but making the world through language but also through gestures.

These are Brazilian politicians in this collection of photographs. The artist is the brilliant Brazilian political scientist, Telma Hoyler, who was studying the way people make politics including through hand gestures. There are all kinds of bodily gestures and symbols, which are important in the way that people make politics and express antagonism or create alliances.

The second kind of performance is about whether or not individuals are doing well. If we think about performance management within organizations, we are often doing things like filling out forms, saying whether or not we have met our objectives as if it could just be attributed to us. From my point of view, it's a very problematic way of judging whether or not people are effective because people's performance is intimately connected with what other people are doing around them. So, there is a real problem with attribution in performance measurement and management.

But of course, it's different for politicians because they usually don't have one boss – they have 50,000 bosses (or more or less): the people elected them. So, how do they perform to these 'bosses', if you like? To impress and perform well they get on digital platforms. As they often tell me in Westminster, you have to look busy above all. How can they be other than that? I think we have to have some sympathy for this pressure to look as if they are achieving things, as well actually achieving things, because it's not just looking good and winning support; it's also about avoiding attack.

Increasingly, our politicians in Britain are intimidated. We have even had two MPs murdered in the last five years. Actually, this way of trying to win support from your bosses, from those who elected you, is a very serious business, which, of course, Goffman has written about brilliantly. I think this allows us to think somewhat sympathetically about the business of how politicians perform – because actually all of us, when we are working in organizations, have to perform to win support from others, both on the front stage and the backstage.



Finally, the last kind of performance that I think is commonly written about is more of a systemic performance: How is a whole institution like parliament or government faring? How effective are they? In our project, the global ethnographic comparison in six countries, such questions focused our attention in a very painful way on failure when Ethiopia descended into war, after Tigray, against the instructions of the federal government, held an election.

These are two paintings that were part of our online and physical exhibition. On the right, you can see the National Parliament in Ethiopia ignoring the war in Tigray, as it was by most of the world, despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of people died and millions were displaced and continue to be in various regions of Ethiopia.

This is really the ultimate failure of a political system: when you go to war. We have common, less dramatic failures: for instance, the paralysis we saw in the UK with Brexit, which I think partly came about because the people who wanted Brexit cleverly treated the referendum as if it was an election. In fact, it was only advisory. But once that vote happened, even though it was so marginal, people treated it as if it was an election. The public thought it was election-like due to canvassing, promises and leaders championing both sides. Then the politicians didn't have the courage to say: Okay, you voted for that; let's spend ten years really assessing whether this is wise.

In a way, again, I think that's low performance, but that is, of course, a very partial view. You can guess where I stand.

These three ways of thinking about performance are extremely common, but I want to introduce a fourth way of thinking about performance. I'm going to do this, finally, by explaining to you what I researched in Texas.

The fourth way of thinking about performance, I hope, takes into account that you can't just think about what individuals are doing or the whole of parliament or government (or the whole of a system), because the missing link here is that we need to see what's happening in relationships between people. We need to see the



processes created by these relationships – the everyday immediate processes, but cumulatively, in the longer term too – the processes of democracy and whether or not they are working.

That's what I want to talk about – not because I think it's the only way of studying performance, but because I think it's the one that's most neglected. To try and explain this, I'm going to tell you about Texas. I arrived on the 10th of January into the State Legislature in Texas. To my slight surprise, I had to go in the slow queue because I didn't have a gun. If you really want to get in fast, then you can go into the 'carrying' queue because then you will have had an FBI check already, so they don't need to check you so carefully, apparently. So, I went in the slow queue and went to my contact who then kindly put me in the gallery. From then on, I found that Texans are the most friendly, hospitable, and kind people I've ever encountered in my life.

I'm sitting in the gallery in a legislature that only meets once every two years, realising that it's important to take into account that everything has to happen in an incredibly short amount of time. Not much happens for the first month or two because there are endless recognition rituals, acknowledging people visiting the Capitol from around the state, while Senators and Representatives are busy drafting bills and forming committees.

Then they get intensely into debating bills towards the end of March, so the rhythm of law-making starts to become intense. Mostly bills are killed between the end of March and the end of May, but a few pass. Of course, it's all about law-making because this is the US, so the executive is not in the legislature.

I talked to people in the gallery continually. The surprising thing about Texas is that in terms of public engagement – which is Cristina Leston-Bandiera's speciality; she is the real expert – it's extraordinarily impressive. If one measures the performance of the Texas State Legislature in terms of the opportunity to give evidence to any of the committees, and even in the Chamber of the Senate, and also to walk into any office in the Capitol building and go and talk to a politician about the matter that you mind about, then it is extraordinary. I've never encountered so much public engagement.



However, there is a real unevenness in the effectiveness of law-making between the hot-button issues and the more ordinary issues. The hot-button issue in the 88th session of the Texas Legislature was about trans. In the session before, they banned abortion, but in this session, the really fervent culture war was about stopping gender-affirming care for young trans people.

I talked to both sides. Of course, they are symbolically represented: Some people are wearing red T-shirts saying “Save Texas Kids”; they are anti-trans activists. Then, there are other people who are dressed more colourfully and often in rainbow and trans colours to indicate where they stand politically. Pro-trans activists told me stories about lived experience. They are believers of the importance of subjectivity and the need to protect individual and group rights.

Here, they are holding protests, as they were during any event that had to do with trans. There were large numbers of pro-trans activists in the Rotunda and all over the Capitol.

Here, in contrast, are some anti-trans activists who have become part of a state-level but also national-level ultraconservative movement, which is very generously funded, including by some Texas oilmen, but also well-organized by certain civil society organizations. They would continually pop up in the Texas State Legislature. The ultraconservative movement bused people from all over the state and even from out of state. Again, during the critical moments and the critical events, you would have hundreds and hundreds of people arriving in buses to perform their ideology in the Capitol in Austin.

The thing that was really striking about people performing their respective ideologies was how extraordinarily repetitive they were. So obviously, for the anti-trans activists, it's informed by the Bible. It had a kind of scriptural quality to it. The pro-trans activists also tended to repeat the same ideological framing.

This constituted a huge amount of political engagement, but it was at the same time deeply, deeply divisive. It's accentuating a polarization within Texan society that is



becoming so pronounced that people are moving to residential areas where they will find others who will agree with them. How do we read that in terms of performance when we see what's happening in wider society?

The second important aspect of performance to tell you about is that the legislature, like most legislatures and parliaments, is not that representative. Hispanics, in particular, are chronically underrepresented. You can see the entire legislature – this is the House of Representatives and the Senate –: At the top of the slide, that's the representation of the different groups currently sitting in the legislature. At the bottom is what it would look like if there was proportionate representation of society in the legislature.

I'm not saying that you can have a precise representation of all groups because, of course, no person is only one identity; we are all many, many identities. Furthermore, you can't guarantee that all Hispanics, for example, are going to agree with each other, of course. So, representation is extremely complicated.

But what I think we can say is that, when people look at a legislature and they don't see their own group there adequately represented, this is extremely problematic. Their interests can often get overlooked if they are underrepresented.

The last thing I want to tell you about performance – and the most surprising aspect of the Texas Legislature – is that it's incredibly cooperative amongst the politicians across parties. There's a long tradition of bipartisan collaboration between the Democrats and the Republicans. The Republicans have a majority, but not enough to just do whatever they want. But there is also an ethos which most Representatives tell you about with pride – with the exception of some people on the extreme ends of the political spectrum. But the vast majority of them tell you with pride: We are not like the rest of the US; we are not like Congress; we are not like most parliaments. We work together all the time.

What the people in society don't see, is that 90 per cent of the bills or so – that's not a precise figure – are passed in a bipartisan fashion. This partly happens because there



are long pause during proceedings. In the House of Commons, for some reason, you ritually cannot have a pause, in contrast. If you are not there to present your private members' bill or whatever, if you are not there at the right second, literally, if you are seconds late, it gets cut. You cannot have a pause in the House of Commons.

In the Texas House of Representatives, it is different. The speaker will frequently say: Okay, we'll have a recess now! – often in a rather informal fashion. It's in those recesses, it's in those gaps between business that people chat to each other. The Republicans and the Democrats, as you can see depicted here with their respective colours, sit next to each other; they choose to do this. They choose by seniority; they come in and choose their desk and very often they are advised: "sit next to somebody from the other party because you are going to need them to get your bills passed!"

I'm an anthropologist, trying not to be defensive about the fact that some people say, all we are doing is producing stories. This is not true, we are doing so much more, but even so I often work with political scientists to combine different methodologies as a way of making sure findings are reliable. Politicians make all kinds of claims, like the rest of us when we are trying to get something done, when we are trying to do something that we are passionate about. So, you can't always take those claims as perfect depictions of reality. That is why endless checking of data is necessary.

I worked with Professor Michelle Taylor-Robinson, at Texas A&M University. She input data from all the bills in the 88th session so we could look at who was joint-authoring and who was co-sponsoring. The interesting thing was that on nearly all the bills, except for the really hot-button ones – the very controversial polarizing ones –, they nearly always had both parties at least co-sponsoring if not joint-authoring.

You can see here the connections between them; these are representatives. You can see in the middle that those people are constantly cooperating with each other. There are some outliers who don't cooperate with the other party, but you can see here how a few, like Representative Raymond in the top right quadrant, are cooperating more with the other party than with their own side. It's true for some Republicans, but much, much less. Of course, the Democrats need to cooperate with the Republicans



because the Republicans have a larger number of seats.

On the whole, this is the norm in the Texas Legislature. This partly happens because it's sustained, as I say, by the ethos, but also by an important key figure: Speaker Dade Phelan. He really minds about bipartisanship. They put him in, knowing that he would do what they had been doing for decades, which is putting the other party in as chairs of the committees. The committees have a big influence on which bill goes forward.

But Speaker Phelan also did something which you could describe as politically impartial in party terms, which was to back the attempt to impeach the Attorney General for corruption, despite coming from the same party. Last month there was a primary. The ultraconservatives tried to get Phelan out. There was a runoff; and he only narrowly managed to get back in. But, whether or not he'll remain speaker is unknown.

The point about him is that he is a really important part of the story of why this bipartisan cooperation continues, but only because he has got a lot of moderate Republicans and Democrats supporting him. That is under threat because the ultraconservatives are incredibly well organized.

To conclude, let me end on a note of collaboration. I'm a great believer in collaboration in politics, but also in research. Of course, ethnography is always collaborative. You can't do it on your own; you have to get in there and talk to people. It does bring a different way of looking at politics. But I actually think it's more interesting to do interdisciplinary ethnography. Ethnography is not a method; it's an approach to studying things within which you can have qualitative and quantitative methods.

Working with quantitative researchers, from my point of view as a qualitative researcher, is much more powerful than working on my own. So, the judgement of parliaments in terms of their performance, I've tried to argue, should only be done by taking one's time. I'm in favour of not rushing to judge, as another French anthropologist, Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, advised in the context of international



development. One should take one's time; one shouldn't isolate variables without seeing them in the wider context.

I think you get a richer picture of politics and more capacity for making these judgements if you bear in mind three entanglements. The first one I've talked about is the relationship between individuals, the wider system, but also the relationship between different components and different people.

The second entanglement is to understand parliament and how it relates to the outside world, not thinking of it in isolation.

The third one is seeing how the different kinds of political work that politicians do are entangled and sustained through relationships with each other.

I think my key take-home message is: Let's cooperate! – Thank you.

Response to keynote speech by Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik (University of Vienna)

Dear Emma Crewe, thank you so much! Dear colleagues, dear members of this House, Members of the Austrian Parliament, members of the Parliamentary Administration! Dear colleagues, scientists, academics, scholars and visitors!

Thanks for the opportunity to respond to this very, very insightful keynote speech by Professor Emma Crewe.

I should start my remarks by saying, or maybe reiterating what was already said, that I have probably been invited to do this response because I typically use a very different approach of looking at things, of studying parliaments and political institutions. The world that I usually inhabit is the world of large-scale quantitative data. It's a world where there is typically a very large distance between the researcher and the object of study, a world in which we assume that politicians, political actors behave strategically and rationally, and a world where we try to generalize from individual instances and cases and individuals to broadly applicable conclusions.



So, in response to this keynote speech, I asked myself: What can people like me learn from the approach that we just heard so eloquently presented? – To me, the obvious lesson, the most obvious lesson that we can take is: It becomes very clear, listening to this presentation, that we simply miss a lot. There's so much stuff that's going on. And even though the parliaments that we study are very formalized political settings, strongly rule-bound institutions where behaviour follows procedures and norms and rules to a large extent, there's still so much activity that's happening that is simply not amenable to standardization and quantification that we usually rely on in the world that I'm inhabiting.

That is especially true if we look at the contexts inside of Parliament, where people behave – politicians, administrators, constituents –, where they act outside the institutionalized arenas that people like me often study, outside things that are easily countable and measurable, where categories are usually well-defined or where formal rules strongly apply and constrain political behaviour. So, once we move outside these areas into the more personal, the more relational realm, the more informal realm that also exists inside parliaments, our vision then gets a little blurry and our concept gets fuzzy and our analytical tools just lose some of their sharpness.

While we still can say a lot about parliaments and the people that are active in them, there are certain limits to our understanding if we take this very standardized macro-level perspective that always has a lot of abstraction included. How and why parliaments and parliamentarians function and behave in the way that they do, some of that just evades our analytical grasp.

So, what can we do about this? – One option, of course, is for all of us to become ethnographers. And yes, in some situations that will be the best methodological choice. But of course, in many instances it's unlikely to happen. There is, of course, still value in the more abstract, quantitatively based work, and people are not going to switch their methodological traditions and customs from one day to the next so easily in lots of cases.

That's why I want to highlight another lesson that I, for me personally, have drawn



from Professor Crewe's presentation and her work: Even if researchers from my methodological tradition will never become full-fledged ethnographers, they would still be well advised to think about the materials, the documents, the data that we use to study parliaments and parliamentary behaviour, and especially the processes through which that data becomes available in ethnographic terms. These data – all the materials that we all know very well in our studies: minutes of plenary sessions, parliamentary questions, government bills, roll-call votes, even smaller things like interjections or calls to order in a plenary session –, all these are highly standardized objects, but of course that shouldn't conceal that there is always a big story behind those data.

So, if we try and think ethnographically, what do we learn? – I think it should lead us to ask the question: How is this information that we're using recorded? How is it put into categories? How is it made available for public consumption and use? What are the organizational processes and the human relations, the human interactions, the performative acts that take place in order to produce the very polished standardized data that somebody like me would rely on to study parliaments?

Recently, I was lucky to have the opportunity to engage with members of the Austrian Parliamentary Administration. I was in the course of teaching a class at the University of Vienna together with Christoph Konrath, and we were in contact with members of the Parliamentary Administration to highlight for us and for the students in this class some of the story behind the data. And the people that we talked to, they produced much of the data that I and many others in research, in academia, use to examine what happens in parliaments. They are, for example, stenographers or they are the people overseeing topical categorizations and which labels are going to be put on certain pieces of legislation or a parliamentary question, or which labels are put onto stages in the parliamentary or legislative process.

These people, if you talk to them, can reveal a lot of the story behind the data, the life behind the data that is indispensable to understanding what is going on in these processes. The people who work in the Parliamentary Administrations are sort of the



people that we rely on to turn the richness, the complexity, the weirdness and the uniqueness of human interaction in this political arena into these well-defined, clear-cut and very easy-to-handle objects and categories that we then use. In some sense, they are our ethnographic interpreters of what is happening in parliaments. For me, understanding their work is key to injecting some ethnographic thinking into even the most abstract quantitative analysis. And to achieve this requires – and here I want to echo what Emma Crewe said – collaboration. It requires not only collaborating between disciplines, but also collaboration across the gap between academia and research and the political practice.

So, to understand more and understand better, we need to talk to the people across institutional boundaries. I think that this Day of Parliamentary Research is an important step to foster this exchange, and I want to invite you all and I hope that we can all make use of that today. – Thank you.

Discussion with Emma Crewe and Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik – moderated by Christoph Konrath (Parliamentary Administration)

Christoph Konrath (Parliamentary Administration): Thank you, Emma, thank you, Laurenz, for the thoughts that you have shared with us. We have now about 15 minutes for a discussion among you. I really find it hard to start it because I'm so surprised that Laurenz, who is such a well-known quantitative researcher, is speaking about ethnography. But I know from the course that we hold together that we really share a lot and also try to give the students a fuller picture. But when I think of the course, I also realize that it can be very, very difficult for students to see this whole picture and to understand it. And it seems to be so necessary to break it down into small pieces and to give them sort of a toolbox to understand things.

This is something I would like to ask you both: How do you train the skills that we can on the one hand understand the big picture but also see how things can be interconnected? Because sometimes there is the risk that the big picture might



become a journalist picture and you warned us of that.

Emma Crewe: Can I answer your question and also respond to the challenge that Laurenz made about in a way how we work together or: Do I become quantitative and you become an ethnographer or do we collaborate? And how do we do this?

In a way, Christoph, I think part of what you're asking about is: How do we achieve an even higher standard of rigor, even when we're trying to do studies which are very complicated like look at the wider context or look at these entanglements with a sense of proportion?

And I think part of the answer is to actually challenge one's own training to some extent. So, I was trained in anthropology, which is a small, rather marginalised discipline, to be so hypercritical of other social sciences – out of defensiveness, I think – and to say: Oh, what they're doing, they are the ones who are very powerful, and they're just trying to look like scientists. I mean, it was really disparaging, unnecessarily disparaging. And I think that's really seriously worth challenging because if you take these disparaging attitudes towards other disciplines, then you fail to learn from what they understand as rigor.

The way anthropologists achieve rigor is partly by triangulation: endlessly looking at things from many, many different angles, endlessly thinking of how different individuals and groups have different views. You have to be very careful not to overread what one person says, although it is idiosyncratic, as if it is necessarily typical of wider pattern. It takes a very long time. We achieve rigor by taking sometimes 18 months for a full ethnography. It gets quicker as you get more experience.

What's interesting about working with political scientists is that you are able sometimes to do things at much greater speed and in ways that are highly reliable. So I actually think we can work together or we can even attempt each other's methods as long as it doesn't entail any kind of compromise in standards. And I think if we are going to work together, we have to keep talking about what we understand as rigor



and how we achieve it and put to one side the training which tells us not to respect each other's disciplines.

Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik: Yeah, I think that is all true. I want to highlight another way of how we can maybe achieve this, another way that I haven't mentioned before where we can profit from collaboration. Parliaments are kind of the epitome of what a political institution is to a political scientist. Almost like if you think: What's a political institution?, of course it's: A parliament, that's an institution.

I think that means the study of parliaments is relatively well-established. It's also older than many other fields of research and political science, and it has ways of doing things that are very well established and have long traditions. And I think that means, not only in the methods, in the data that we use there are strong norms and expectations in the subfield, but also in the ways we theorize about it and we understand it.

And I think it's even more: I think sometimes the disciplinary boundaries are even stricter in some sense. It's sometimes even easier to import or to rely on a new methodological approach that you have seen elsewhere or learned elsewhere and to adapt it for your own purposes. I think it sometimes becomes even more difficult if people challenge the fundamentals of how you understand political behaviour in an institution like a parliament. And I think there it becomes of course more challenging and more difficult, but potentially even more fruitful to talk to each other and collaborate and look at the same behaviour and talk to each other, but like: Okay, so how would you explain this? How would you understand this? What is going on? What motivates the people to behave in the ways that they do? And there could be very different answers.

I think that is one avenue where I feel there is still a lot of potential.

Christoph Konrath: We have a lot of people in the audience that work in parliaments and are also confronted with this question of how parliament works and how parliament performs. But for them it can be very difficult to find an answer because



there's a very strong demand on impartiality and objectivity, and also the expectation from politics to science or academic counselling is that it should be objective and impartial.

You both mentioned impartiality. I wonder what your take is on people who work in parliaments, who work with almost no distance to politics: How can they show that their work is also impartial and not sort of sided? Even when they talk about what they do: How can they not get too personal but also not too abstract? What would you tell them?

Emma Crewe: I think that's difficult. The way I was trained was that it's impossible to be completely impartial because that would imply that you don't have any ideology yourself. How can that be possible? So, of course, it's quite common to find people that don't fit within a particular political party. I would include myself, I'm a maverick, but I have very strong views about some issues. And of course parliamentary officials in the UK, I find, do as well. But I think the answer is more in the judgements about where you can articulate your partiality.

We have something called the Study of Parliament Group, which Cristina Leston-Bandeira was chair of, and it's parliamentary officials and scholars who meet regularly and have conversations where it is possible to debate things like performance, which is very difficult to do without making judgements. And as soon as you make judgements, ideology comes into it. But it's extremely discreet. I think there's still the need for discretion sometimes. Full transparency is not always helpful.

So I think while scholars have got the luxury to be reflexive and be more honest about their partialities in public, it's difficult for parliamentary officials. So then the decision becomes more about which audience you can be more honest about your partiality to.

Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik: I'm not sure I have a really good answer. I have noticed in my exchanges with people working in the Austrian Parliament that they have internalised this norm of impartiality to a really, really high degree. So I would consider myself to be relatively impartial or at least trying to approach the things that



I look at in a somewhat neutral manner. Of course there's no way of overcoming implicit biases and one's own ideological backgrounds. It's a skin that you cannot get out of, in a sense.

I have still been surprised at how strongly this norm is in the thinking of people in the parliamentary administration, much more than I would have had it. Sometimes you collaborate, you discuss certain choices of how to present things like: Can you write this half sentence? Can you show this graph as it is? And then there are methodological or linguistic or language choices that you make that I wouldn't even spend two seconds thinking about. But the people here are so well trained in constantly thinking: Okay, could somebody understand this in a way, could that even in bad faith be misunderstood or misinterpreted in a partisan way or in a partial way?

At some point I was even a little like: How could you get the idea in this case that this could be something that's a partisan statement or something? So I was surprised. The interesting thing is that what I've sometimes seen is, and I think that's the way, for instance, journalists try to do this – I'm not sure it's a conscious choice, but I think it's something that happens –: Their strategy to deal with partisan actors is to become cynical. So cynicism is a strategy where you can avoid partisanship because you can draw a line between them and you and you are different than they are because they have all kinds of moral defects.

That's a different kind of dimension of being party to something or to the process. But I think that's not something that I've seen in the people who work here who are not at all cynical about the process that they're dealing with.

And I think it's also important as researchers to question whether sometimes there are things that you maybe can see as a researcher, that sometimes the empirical realities, whatever they are – we can talk about that –, are not impartial. So I think it's a gap that we have to navigate in that sense.

Emma Crewe: Can I continue on this? Because I think it's so interesting and important. I think there are different forms of impartiality and I think actually part of the



imperative for us all comes back to research. We're all passionate about research. So I think one can inch towards being more honest about one's partiality, but only if you do exceptionally good research. But I would make a distinction. Recently I wrote an article about standards and ethics in parliament and how they were under attack by the former prime minister. Now, obviously as a parliamentary official you are going to get into trouble if you do that. I do not normally comment on political parties or on individuals, but in this case, I felt that the attack on parliamentary standards was so serious that it needed systematic research. I spent more time writing that article than I did writing a whole book because I don't think you can take such a partial stand without doing very, very careful research.

I wanted to relate this to a topic that Cristina knows a lot better than I do, which is about public engagement. So, there was a lot of partiality, or specifically antagonism, towards public engagement in the UK-Parliament 20 years ago. But I think part of the reason why there's been movement and a much more positive attitude towards it is because of the research that's been done, a mixture of experimenting, really finding out what are the kind of pros and cons, where are the risks, what works, what doesn't work.

So I think research is part of the answer to your question.

Christoph Konrath: Thank you. We have to come to an end. And I have one last question. Emma, you talked about the importance of acting-as-if. 100 years ago Hans Kelsen, the famous legal philosopher, worked one floor above us. Then, the parliament housed the newly founded Austrian Constitutional Court. Hans Kelsen is known for his most distanced and abstract approach to law, but he was a committed defender of democracy and wrote a lot about democracy that is relevant until today.

His central theme is that in a democracy we have to act as if: as if everyone were represented, as if we would work together. And he was convinced that we need fictions to create and sustain this reality of democracy. So one last sentence from you both: How do you relate to fictions and performances? And how do you uphold this very important insight as a researcher? Because a journalist would say: I see through



things and I can explain how it really is.

Emma Crewe: Shall I go first? I think it relates to what you were talking about in relation to cynicism: that the way to get away from cynicism is to inspire hope. And you can only have hope with imagination and thinking about the future as if it could be different. I'm going to go away and read him because I think it's such an interesting antidote to the negativity that we're really suffering from in politics.

Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik: I have two young kids. They're seven and nine , and they love everything that's fiction of course: stories, theatre, whatever, dressing up as, I don't know, Princess Elsa or somebody. And I think what we can learn from the idea of fiction in politics is: We should try at times to get out of the cynicism, of the over-strategizing about things and over-thinking what others have thought and playing three-dimensional chess in our minds to sometimes just stand there, look at things and try to be really naive, to have the courage to be naive at some point. That will at times help you to focus on what's really happening.