

Technology, Law and Forms of Government at the National Assembly of Quebec: An Anthropologist's Perspective

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If parliaments have been an understudied research site in science and technology studies, the same is true for social anthropology. Like the few other anthropologists who have studied parliaments, I have become interested in the relationship between the practices and logics present in parliament and elsewhere in society. These debates take a particular turn in Quebec, where a perception that its National Assembly represents '(francophone) Quebec's point of view' intersects with an extremely complex socio-political past and present. During my yearlong fieldwork at the National Assembly of Quebec – where I observed parliamentary sittings, committees, backstage meetings and the everyday life of MPs and civil servants – I was able to observe the intricate ways in which ideas and the material, as well as new technological advances, paper documents and archives intertwine in everyday practice. I was also a first-hand witness to how a British-style parliamentary system and procedure, terminology borrowed from France, the French and English languages, and a mixed legal system of French-based civil law for everyday, private matters and British-based common law for public ones overlap and intersect. I will combine an analysis of these issues with an attention to spatial organisation, architecture, temporality and rituals and forms of government. More broadly, I will reflect upon the methodological and epistemological challenges presented by opening up anthropology to new field sites and the dialogues with other disciplines (e.g. sociology, political science, law) that are essential in such a context.