

Business Ritual Studies: Corporate Ceremony and Sacred Space

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Business organizations are comprised of shifting and multi-layered cognitive and affective networks which may at times have areas of dispute or disparity. Analyses of business rituals, such as celebratory launches of new products, business conventions, award ceremonies, retirement parties, and openings of new plants offer potent loci for capturing how the hierarchical conventions are reiterated in different forms; how individual agents and groups of stakeholders engage with one another in public performance; and how they bring forth synergetic fusion and creative adaption, or alternatively, mutual alienation, confusion, and even hostility. The author provides a short history of ritual studies in anthropology, and then argues that business ritual can be investigated as a kind of critical event, or conversely a critical event can be analyzed as a kind of ritual. Studies of corporate ritual as condensed public drama can delve directly into the actual cognitive, emotive, and neurological processes of meaning creation by various stakeholders, and can capture multi-level enactments of organizational descent, power and hierarchical order, as well as shifting images of future possibilities. In order to strengthen this argument, the author offers a detailed ethnographic study of a retirement party of a Japanese multinational in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Many business anthropologists follow the perspective of interpretive anthropology that human groups including those in business settings transmit diverse systems of meaning both verbally and non-verbally, and that “culture does not exist apart from individuals but rather lies in their interpretations of events and the things around them” (McGee and Warms 2004, p. 524). As Mahadevan notes:

“It is...important in ethnographic research and writing to reflect the ‘multiple voices’ of the field, to contextualize one's findings, to pay attention to questions of power and inequality, to emphasize both what people say and what they do, to not restrict oneself to ‘front-stage performances,’ to look closely at how language is used, to be reflexively aware of the ethnographer's ambiguous position and to not simply seek confirmation of what is already known.” (Mahadevan 2009, p.1)

With founding figures such as Mary Douglas (1966, 1970,1986, 1992), Clifford Geertz (1973, 1975), and Victor Turner (1967,1974), interpretive anthropologists are concerned with “structures of significance and systems of meaning” (Sidky, 2003. p. 199). This mode of thinking has led to the theory of cultural hybridities (Bhabha, 1994; Garcia-Canclini, 1995, 2001) and multi-modal discourse analysis (Kress, 2003; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001,2006). Studies of power and symbols have shown how those with power and those without interact in the symbolic realm of meaning creation, cooptation, resistance and creative adaptation in organizational settings (Ong, 1987, 1999, Ong and Collier, 2005; Hall, 1997).

Despite their strong interest in meaning, however, interpretive anthropologists have rarely delved into the actual cognitive, emotive, and neurological processes that get activated when sign-stimuli are received and interpreted as being meaningful by various stakeholders. What are the processes of linking individual agency, collective meaning-creation, and institutional outcomes? This author presents an argument that applying ritual analysis to corporate settings will offer an effective tool in order to explore this important investigative theme. Ritual analysis is one of the most potent analytical tools of our discipline.

For example, an analysis of the celebration of a successful product launch or of the mournful burial of a company president (Nakamaki 1999) can provide insight into the previously hidden or less-than-transparent corporate hierarchical world, filled with “arguments” about socio-political representations of meanings. An ethnographic analysis of such business rituals can reveal important movements, partly because the ritual space is usually set aside from the routine work space, and the time-space is marked as being extra-ordinary. Rituals are announced with special pre-scribed scripts, and frequently include particular symbolic representations of corporate past, present and future. Rituals may be deployed by powerful stakeholders for multiple purposes, such as crisis interventions or for creating synergy among existing and alternative forces. Despite some pre-scribed scenario and choreography envisioned by the ritual-makers, once the event begins, it is more than likely that participants may act-out ad-lib mini rituals, novel sidelines and/or critical commentaries as actor-audiences. This paper advocates the development of business ritual studies in order to shed a critical beam-light on this crucial juncture between the existing power structure, the social, political, and psychological performances of the participants, and the resultant transformation. By placing an anthropological lens on the ritualization process, we can effectively capture the unfolding political economy, interpretive hermeneutics and collective historiography, as well as institutional implications.

In order to expand upon the theoretical utility of business ritual studies, this author offers an ethnographic case of one such ritual: a retirement party at a multinational company.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES OF ORGANIZED RITUALS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Catherine Bell in her comprehensive discussion of ritual and magic pointed out that most traditional debates among anthropologists were constructed dichotomously, such as in the cases of early debates between science versus magic; structure versus anti-structure; and ritual- as-action (or performance) versus belief-as-thought, (Bell, 1992), and causality vs. participation (Tambia, 1985,1996).

In the early days, the so-called “rationality versus symbolism debate” emerged in the wake of Evans-Pritchard’s work on Azande witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard, 1937). Those who drew on the earlier evolutionism claimed that belief in magic served as a primitive substitute for science. On the other hand the symbolists, who were associated most prominently with Durkheim, saw ritual

primarily as symbolic systems which express important meanings--often about the social order through metaphor and analogy (Durkheim, 1912). While scholars such as Firth, Beattie and Leach analyzed the instrumental components of rituals, Turner (1967, 1974) considered ritual as social drama or performance, generated out of conditions of liminality and marginality. He regarded the bonds created among ritual participants as being anti-structural in that they are undifferentiated and egalitarian because their signs of previous social status were stripped from them.

Bloch further articulated the process of ritualistic transformation in terms of the “rebounding violence” (Bloch, 1992, p. 8). He noted that ritual encompasses a marked element of conquest, particularly during its final stage when actors return to the mundane/routine world and participate in symbolic killing and consumption of other humans or animals, through which the community as a whole regains vitality. Bloch theorized that by sacrificing participants (and symbolically “roasting them”), the transience of individual mortal existence is replaced by the eternal transcendental state of Being. Likewise, Schechner and Schuman argued that ritual shares some key characteristics with drama, and noted that both ritual and drama deal with conflict and resolution (Schechner and Schuman, 1976). Many themes of ritual, like those of drama, center on rebellion, generational conflict, taboo-reversal, and rites of passage. Tambiah (1985) also saw ritual primarily as performance generated by a society to convey messages about social norms and structure.

More recent literature presented arguments for or against the instrumental functions of ritual. However, Winkelmann (2000) criticizes this artificial distinction between the instrumental and the expressive, and stressed that ritual processes encompass both instrumental as well as symbolic /aesthetic functions simultaneously. Lewis (1980) states that considering ritual only in terms of its instrumental or expressive components is reductive and that all types of responses of those performing the ritual are crucial when one attempts to understand the ritual’s meaning for them. Lewis summarizes this position succinctly by saying that ritual is “ primarily action—a way of doing, making, creating, showing, expressing, arousing—a complex form of stimulus to which people respond (Lewis, 1980, p.118).” Luhrmann argues that while traditionally rituals were defined as formalized, predetermined sets of symbolic actions, ritualistic beliefs are not necessarily *a priori* for ritual activity; that participants’ beliefs sometimes develop as a *result* of their magical activity; and that emotional and imaginative involvement in ritual activity help determine their beliefs in ritualistic craft such as magic (Luhrmann, 1989).

In presenting an ethnographic study of personal identity formation among the Vezo in western Mozambique, and examining their key mortuary rituals of the dead, Astuti explicates the complex performative identity formation of those alive in the present, that dynamically interacts with the inherited imprint of the dead (i.e. descent) from the past, which the alive unquestionably recognize (Astuti, 1995). Likewise, Rountree observes in her fieldwork in New Zealand feminist witchcraft that rituals incorporate diverse purposes including play and performance, expressive aesthetic and semiotic values, as well as instrumental functions (Rountree ,2002). She points out that emotional involvement is a highly significant aspect of any ritual as it embodies “magical” experiences.

Consequently, anthropologists’ attention has finally shifted from static analyses of rituals themselves to those of reutilization processes. Anthropologists pay increasing attention to the juncture between the inherited structure (of descent, power hierarchy, order), the individual agency’s performative acts, and the resultant collective memory-making, cognitively and affectively. Today the anthropological understanding of rituals has been transformed because

ritual is no longer a unique kind of non-routine phenomenon. The modern framework behooves anthropologists to examine lived practices and cosmological transformation among multiple stakeholders, in relation to the present status-quo order derived from the past.

Like the study of the Vezo identity hanging between the living and the dead, the crux of the current inquiry is upon a specific moment of time-space where the individuals' performance meets the historically-derived order. This author argues that business ritual studies bring forth a new and refreshing insight into how the existing power arrangement from the past is acted upon, by the performative acts of the living in non-work, extra-ordinary, settings. In other words, we can investigate business ritual as a kind of critical event between organizational past and future, or conversely we can analyze a critical event as a kind of ritual. Because business ritual presents condensed public drama, we can effectively identify ongoing socio-political under-currents, multiple enactments of power, contested images of past, present and future, and memory-making, both at the individual and institutional levels.

In order to explicate the above-mentioned perspective, I will now turn to an ethnographic observation of a ritual in a multinational company. This critical event took place in the form of a retirement dinner party for Mr. Mike O'Casey in May 2010.

ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY: O'CASEY RETIREMENT PARTY AT KVI COMPANY

Mr. O'Casey was a 67 year-old Human Resources (HR) Director of KVI Company (KVI) in Virginia, USA. KVI is a subsidiary of Kado Tech Company (pseudonym), a Japanese multinational firm that established its US operations in California during the 1960s. In 1989, Kado Tech expanded manufacturing facilities to Virginia, USA. I have been following this multinational company and its subsidiaries including KVI for the last twenty years.

During the startup period of the Virginia operation in the 1980s, KVI faced a series of labor and legal disputes. Before Mike O'Casey was hired as the new HR manager in 1992, KVI's president and CEO had dismissed three human resource managers because they had failed to resolve many HR issues. There were many communication problems and labor disputes between the management and the workers. At that time, Mr. O'Casey, a native Virginian Irish-American, was working for the VA subsidiary of a British company in Richmond, VA. Unfortunately, his employment there was terminated when the British company closed its Virginia plant. KVI then hired Mr. O'Casey.

Mr. O'Casey energetically initiated dialogues with KVI workers and managers. He eventually reorganized the corporate structure, and solved many HR related issues. Mr. O'Casey gained the confidence and trust of the Japanese management, which was quite a feat for an Irish-American from rural Virginia who had never traveled abroad. In 1996, Mr. O'Casey was promoted to KVI directorship, while he continued deftly handling HR challenges. At the time of his retirement in 2010, KVI's VA plant boosted a total of 650 employees, and its production capacity had increased five-fold since 1992. Despite the subsequent US economic downturn in the 2000s, KVI was profitable and successful.

Unfortunately, Mr. O'Casey recently lost his beloved wife of thirty-five years to cancer, and his health also began to decline. Early in 2010, Mr. O'Casey told the company that he would like to retire, and that he would like to pass his baton to his second-in-command, a 49 year old operation manager, named Mike Clark. Mr. Clark was hired by Mr. O'Casey in as a day-shift supervisor. In 2010, Clark oversaw all the production personnel except the Japanese engineers, in

the plant. Mike Clark had expected that he would fill in Mr. O'Casey's position upon his retirement. However, to his and Mr. O'Casey's surprise, the company decided not to promote Clark to the HR directorship. Clark wondered if the management's decision was due to some past rivalry with other shift supervisors. Plant Manager Sakai, on the other hand, wanted Clark to hire and train more supervisory personnel on the shop floor as the company was expanding rapidly. Sasaki also wanted to keep Mike Clark as the operation manger of the plant and to lead an increasingly multi-cultural pool of supervisors, group coordinators and facilitators.

In early May 2010, Sasaki asked Clark to organize a retirement party for Mr. O'Casey. Clark prepared the list of participants, which was approved by the management. He then booked a private party room of a historical colonial tavern, and sent formal invitations to the following people: Plant Manager Sasaki, Vice-Plant Manager Tabata, Procurement Manager Ishibashi, and five Japanese engineers (Kano, Mitsui, Nakahashi, and Takamura). These Japanese, aged 38 to 58, had been dispatched (*shukko*) from the parent company in Tokyo, and some of them had been working at this plant for more than ten years. The American participants of the retirement party included the current Operation Manager Mike Clark, Night-shift-Supervisor Harry Tuttle, HR Manager Emily Smallwood and her assistant Roxana Gonzales, as well as a number of group coordinators, (including Darrel, John, Oscar, Jesus, Barb, Lorenzo, Ann and Charlie), and several facilitators who had worked with Mr. O'Casey for many years. The company also invited Mr. O'Casey's adult son Mike Jr. and daughter Juliet to the party.

On one very hot Wednesday evening in May 2010, the people arrived at the colonial tavern after they finished the day's work, around 6:30 PM. The men wore sport shirts and pants without jackets, which was quite different from their usual white uniforms in the manufacturing plant, while Mr. O'Casey and Plant Manager Sasaki wore more formal attires. Emily Smallwood, Ann, Roxana, Barb and other female employees wore summer dresses with some jewelry. Jewelry was strictly prohibited in the manufacturing plant. The people's choice of clothing made it clear that they thought that this was a special occasion.

The outside temperature hit 94 degrees Fahrenheit (34.4 C) despite the fact that it was May. The cool and somewhat dark interior of the tavern was welcoming. The participants were ushered into a private room with a bar, and they were given generous rounds of drinks. Soon everyone became quite jovial, exchanging small talk, joking and laughing. Several men ordered local a micro-brewery beer called "Legend." Then the guest of honor arrived, accompanied by his son and daughter. Warehouse Supervisor Darrel told Mr. O'Casey that he was drinking "Legend" for him, because Mr. O'Casey was indeed becoming a KVI legend. Another supervisor Charlie said that Bud in comparison to Legend tasted terrible. Mike Clark chimed in, and commented that InBev, a Belgium beer company, had recently bought Anheuser-Busch, which had a Budweiser plant in Virginia. Charlie said that the new owner InBev had laid off many Virginian workers. The tacit consensus among the men emerged that they would now drink Legend, produced by Richmond VA micro brewery. Nobody ordered Bud at the bar.

Mr. O'Casey ordered bourbon on the rocks, which was a Southern gentleman's drink. He was the only man drinking bourbon, not beer. While several female participants waited for the men to bring wine or ice tea to them from the bar, Barb, who was the most senior group coordinator, went to the bar and ordered a bottle of Legend beer herself. She drank beer from the bottle.

Around 7:00 PM while the KVI men and Barb were finishing the second drinks at the bar, Clark told the restaurant staff to re-arrange the dining tables so that the top seats, closet to the back wall, would go to Plant Manager Sasaki, Vice Plant Manager Tabata and Procurement Manager Ishibashi. Then he told Mr. O'Casey to take a seat in the middle of a very long dining

table, accompanied by his daughter Juliet and son Mike Jr. Clark and Shift-Supervisor Harry Tuttle sat opposite of the O'Casey family. Everyone else, American and Japanese, sat around the dining table.

At the head of the table, Vice Plant Manager Tabata and Procurement Manager Ishibashi produced the two latest Japanese video cameras out of their brief cases. Tabata and Ishibashi got up and began shooting interactions around the table, while Plant Manager Sasaki sat alone at the head table drinking beer. Two waitresses placed pre-ordered appetizers of Chesapeake Bay crab dip, colonial-style pickles, and coconut shrimp on the table. The people ordered more drinks. The individual dinner order was taken one-by-one around the table. Many male participants went for the Surf and Turf (SandT) dinner, which happened to be the most expensive item on the menu.

Plant Manager Sasaki and Procurement Manager Ishibashi both ordered T-bone beef steaks. Most women on the other hand ordered seafood, such as the Atlantic salmon, flounder stuffed with imperial crab meat or Chesapeake Bay crab cakes.

Mr. O'Casey wanted a dish of creamy crab gratin. Harry Tuttle said that he wanted exactly the same thing Mr. O'Casey would be eating. Mr. O'Casey smiled at Harry across the table. Warehouse Supervisor Darrel wondered aloud whether he should eat Gulf shrimp or not. Charlie said to Darrel that these shrimp were not from the Gulf, but from North Carolina. Their conversation drifted to the recent oil spill on the Gulf Coast. Charlie said that he was mad at "British Petroleum" (despite the fact BP long time ago dropped the term British from its corporate name). A Mexican group-coordinator Jesus said in English that next year they would not be able to eat Gulf shrimp because the oil slick had already killed shrimp larvae in the estuaries. Darrel did not order the shrimp dish and instead went for a SandT dinner.

When everyone's dinner arrived, Mike Clark, who was a devoted Catholic, told the people as follows: "Although it is customary for us to begin our dinner with a Christian prayer, tonight we are very multi-cultural. So I propose that we will have a moment of silence, to think of many memories we have with Mr. O'Casey. Let us hold hands and bow. We will have a minute of silence." Everyone held hands of the neighbors and bowed their heads for one minute of silence. After one minute, Clark said "OK, Let's eat."

Conversation at the table was in a mixture of English and Japanese. While Roxana, Oscar and Jesus and a few others were native Spanish-speakers, they kept their language to English. At the top end of the table, Procurement Manager Ishibashi started fidgeting with his video camera. He pointed the camera at Plant Manager Sasaki, and jokingly said in Japanese that he had just called up the Japanese headquarters by Skype. He then pretended that he was talking with the head office, saying "this is Virginia calling. We are starting our dinner. Honorable Chairman Asayama, please give us your wise opening remarks." Vice Plant Manager Tabata frowned and said to Ishibashi in Japanese, "What you have just said will be formally recorded in the official log, and I will report this back to Mr. Asayama. Ha Ha Ha."

Every Japanese who heard the conversation burst out laughing. Mitsui translated it to the rest of the crowd. They all laughed. The little skit reminded everyone of Tokyo's enormous power over the entire Virginian outpost. The rather sarcastic skit implied that although Asayama did not come to the party, nothing would ever happen in Virginia without his approval. Plant Manager Sasaki did not say a word and kept eating his steak and drinking Legend.

The food was good, and everyone heartily consumed their dishes. This was a treat, and they did not eat this type of food at home. They discussed the delicious food and great drinks, their own summer plans, families and children. People also talked about the upcoming Virginia Derby horse race. Noticeably absent in this friendly conversation were references to the recent tragic

death of Mrs. O'Casey and the declining health of Mr. O'Casey himself. The participants tacitly understood that their conversation had to be a happy and celebratory one.

When the dinner was almost finished, Plant Manager Sasaki stood up, and said in English that he would like everyone present to say a few words to O'Casey-san; that their speeches would be duly recorded; and that the video would be given to Mr. O'Casey as a gift. Sasaki would speak first.

The plant manager's speech began with a reference to a Japanese cliché that the best public speech had to be a short one. Everyone smiled. The Japanese participants knew that absent in Sasaki's reference to this cliché was its politically incorrect part, that the best speech and women's skirts should be short. In any event, Sasaki established at first the acceptable time frame for succeeding speeches. He then proceeded to say that this VA plant produced its first product twenty years ago in 1990; that Mr. O'Casey was like the father of this new-born child; and that the father would do anything to ensure the child's well-being. Now, twenty years later, this child had reached adulthood, because in Japan, 20 years-old is the mark of the coming of age.

This (anthropologically interesting) speech then traced the company's spectacular growth using metaphors of personal rites of passage, with a touch of paternalism, where the father guiding the son through thick and thin, over the last two decades. Thanks to the father's wise advice, this son had finally reached maturity. Sasaki ended the tale by affirming the successful future of KVI. His speech is quite poignant because this fifty-eight year old Plant Manager had been the longest *tanshin-funin* at KVI. *Tanshin-funin* refers to the single transfer of employees around from branch to branch without family accompanying them. Due to his extremely busy schedule Sasaki had rarely visited his family and children in Japan. So this story about the father willing to do anything for his child's welfare was particularly poignant. Sasaki then thanked Mr. O'Casey for his faithful service, and he sat down.

Sasaki's remarks about Mr. O'Casey's paternal role were appropriate in the older-generation's mindset. However, younger participants fidgeted, as they were juggling conflicting demands of career and family. Next, Vice Plant Manager Tabata stood up. He relayed in fluent English a story about how Mr. O'Casey taught a young Tabata an important lesson, which was to "be patient." Tabata said that one day when he was very angry, Mr. O'Casey calmed him down by saying "be patient" repeatedly.

In fact, to the older Japanese managers at this party, Tabata's story sounded like a re-hash of another story, told many times by Chairman Asayama, in reference to one of the most critical challenges the firm faced, back in 1993. Chairman Asayama, in 1993, was a very angry man because the company had just been "wrongly" sued by disgruntled female employees for alleged sexual harassment. From Asayama's perspective, the company had done nothing wrong. Asayama had already dismissed three "inept" American HR managers who could not handle HR issues satisfactorily. So when this new crisis of sexual harassment happened, he decided to fight the case openly in the American court. Asayama hired a veteran labor-lawyer named Parshall. Parshall told Asayama that he had to be patient.

O'Casey also repeated the "be patient" credo. Parshall told KVI management that this was America, not Japan; that this law-suit particularly concerning sexual harassment was going to be very expensive, possibly \$ 300,000 or more, excluding lawyers' fees, and that regardless of whether the company was "innocent or guilty", it would be much cheaper and appropriate to settle it out of the court, without stepping into the limelight of the media. Only a few years earlier, in 1991, many Americans were glued to their TV sets to witness the riveting testimonies of Anita Hills versus Clarence Thomas. The terms sexual harassment and EEOC (Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission) suddenly became everyday American household words. Soon case after case of SH hit the news headlines.¹ KVI back then was a young company struggling financially. Mr. O'Casey and Lawyer Parshall eventually persuaded Mr. Asayama to be patient, and the company settled the case quietly out of the court.

Seventeen years later, Tabata's 'be patient' story did not elaborate on the background of why O'Casey emphasized patience. And yet, Tabata's tale resurrected a bitter memory in the mental reservoirs of some senior Japanese and old-timer Americans, particularly female employees such as Barb. After Tabata sat down, nobody else wanted to speak up. Meanwhile, younger stakeholders, without contextual knowledge surrounding the meaning of "patience" could not understand why their senior suddenly became sober and quiet.

On the other hand Mike Clark, an old timer who was present during the corporate crisis, clearly made sense of the situation. He blurted out, "I ain't gonna spik til da last," using Dixie "red-neck" vernacular in his linguistic delivery. Clark's Dixie act was rather artificial, because he was an Anglo Yankee college grad from the state of New York. He was by no means a "red-neck." Nonetheless, he intentionally utilized Dixie vernacular to show his empathy with the local working class, in his effort to brighten up the somber atmosphere. In response to Clark's call, Warehouse Supervisor Darrel, who was an "authentic Appalachian," stood up, and told a funny story about a fist-fighting brawl among folk-lift drivers that gentlemanly O'Casey had to break up some time ago. Darrel's colorful depiction of O'Casey's handling of angry rough-necks made everyone laugh. Their laughter was actually louder than considered normal, as the audience appreciated Darrel's humorous way of breaking the dark spell.

Barb who was a stout 56 year old female group coordinator and who liked to drink beer was the next one to speak. She got up and said that she was among the very first batch of employees hired by KVI in the late 1980s. She then remarked that there were so few of them left in the plant, and that the plant was now full of 'different types of people.' Spanish speaking Oscar, Roxana, and Jesus immediately got on an alert mode, and became watchful. They straightened their backs. Barb then said to Mr. Tabata that she was not known to be patient, and that she wanted to ask Mr. O'Casey important questions. Now everyone became a bit tense. She asked Mr. O'Casey in jest what secrets he had in order to continue working with these 'Japanese gentlemen.' She also asked whether working with the Japanese gentlemen was the most challenging thing in his long career or not. The Japanese sucked in their breath through their teeth.

Mr. O'Casey shot back at Barb, saying, "Barb, Come to my office tomorrow, and I will tell you that secret." Everyone burst out laughing, because KVI's supervisors knew very well the underlining meaning of being called into his office. When Mr. O'Casey put his arm around the shoulders of those on the shop floor and told them to come to the office, it meant only one thing. It meant that something very bad had happened on the operation floor, and that the supervisor in charge would get into a real trouble with Mr. O'Casey. Mr. O'Casey's 'come to my office' quip immediately put Barb into submission. Barb laughed, saying "OK, Boss, I will come to your office tomorrow." She sat down. The American supervisors then started telling individual stories when they had to 'come to the O'Casey's office' and their past troubles with the HR Department. Tabata and Ishibashi moved around the tables with video-cameras, faithfully taking video shots of these conversations.

Night-shift-Supervisor Harry Tuttle, who was sitting opposite of the O'Casey's, stood up and told people to be quiet because HR Manager Emily Smallwood wanted to talk now. Emily was the highest-ranking female manager in KVI, hired by Mr. O'Casey ten years ago. Currently

Emily and her bilingual assistant Roxanna handled all the HR related paperwork for more than six hundred employees of diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds.

About one year ago, Emily's Irish-American truck-driver-husband got involved in an accident and broke his leg. His disability leave recently expired. Consequently Emily became the sole bread-earner for her family of five-her three small children and injured husband at home. Tonight, however, Emily was enjoying the party. Emily sipped her third glass of Chardonnay and got up. She looked directly at Mr. O'Casey, saying that it had been a real privilege for her to work for KVI because of Mr. O'Casey, who was like a real father to her. It had been very reassuring to have the mentor-advisor, she was truly sorry that he would leave the company, and she would miss him badly, she said. To everyone's amazement, Emily then burst into tears and abruptly sat down, apologizing for her outburst, and blaming it to wine. Everyone nodded sympathetically.

Harry Tuttle, the night-shift supervisor, quickly got up to speak. In the past several months, Harry had felt a sense of rivalry and a series of let-downs with Mike Clark. Harry had eventually and finally resigned to the newly folding prospect that Clark, not Harry, would succeed the position of HR Director after Mr. O'Casey's retirement. Despite the original instruction about time by Plant Manager Sasaki, Harry's speech was unusually long. He recounted in quite a round-about way, how as an African American he grew up in a single mother household in a poor neighborhood in Richmond, Virginia; how he had to drop out of community college due to the family's financial trouble; and how he drifted away from his own responsibilities, leaving his girlfriends and illegitimate children behind. He had never met his biological father.

And then one day, Mr. O'Casey came into his life. According to Harry, Mr. O'Casey saved him. It was because of the careful guidance of Mr. O'Casey that Harry eventually turned away from vice and began working hard for the company. He even mastered conversational Spanish in order to supervise Spanish-speaking plant associates. He is now one of KVI's top-level supervisors, responsible for three-hundred people including many Spanish speaking associates on the night shift. This autobiographical success story was highly emotion-laden with a format reminiscent of the Southern Baptist's "born-again" Christian story--in which a wise mentor redeems a strayed novice from his previous life of sins by showing the light of Jesus. When Harry finished this salvation story, he went around the table, and hugged Mr. O'Casey. Mr. O'Casey hugged him back.

Lorenzo, another African American then stood up and told a similar story. He concluded that he was eternally thankful to O'Casey. Lorenzo's tale also followed a story-telling format concerning a protagonist who goes through a series of misfortunes and crises, and who meets a wise man, and experiences cathartic awakening and salvation. The tale ends with an expression of deep personal gratitude. The air was getting hot, and as people got more drunk and emotional, the ambiance became similar to a religious fever.

Mike Clark finally stood up. He quickly shifted gears, and talked about the day Mr. O'Casey interviewed him for the KVI job some fifteen years ago. The emphasis of this "once upon a time" tale was different from the previous two tales. Clark pointed to the origin of his own successful career at KVI. Clark mentioned that it so happened that his marriage anniversary coincided with the date of his employment at KVI, implying that the years of his happy marriage paralleled the years of his faithful and truthful service for the company. Compared with Mr. O'Casey's seventeen years of service, Clark himself had put in fifteen years for the company, implying his proven loyalty and his "seniority" as the leader of the pack. Clark then said that although Mr. O'Casey was not a father figure to him, they had been a very great friend and that

they would continue to have lunches together regularly. He said, jokingly “Mr. O’Casey, it’s your turn to buy me a lunch.” Then, Mike sat down.

Coffee was served. Plant Manager Sasaki who had been quiet up to this moment, asked Ishibashi to bring out a specially framed “Certificate of Appreciation”. Sasaki ceremoniously presented it to Mr. O’Casey while Ishibashi and Tabata took multiple photos and video footage of this mini-ceremony. Darrel joked that Mr. O’Casey should check the back of the frame to see if there was a fat check attached to it or not. Mr. O’Casey ignored Darrel’s comment, while everyone laughed.

Mike Clark then gave Mr. O’Casey a “Happy Retirement” card signed by everyone present. It was clear in this mini-ritual that Clark had become the official representative and the head of the work force at KVI. Vice Plant Manager Tabata presented a digital photo frame to Mr. O’Casey, and said that the video and photos of this party would be duly edited by himself and Ishibashi personally, and that they would be given to Mr. O’Casey. The digital picture frame would come in handy to view these images, he said. Finally, Mr. O’Casey stood up and gave the following speech, using simple English to ensure that non-English speaking participants could also understand his speech.

“Thank you everyone. It was so nice of you to come. Thank you. I have worked for almost fifty years in my whole life. I have worked for three companies in total. I worked for the first manufacturing company for 15 years, and then I moved to an English tech manufacturer and worked there for 25 years. When KVI approached me, I thought I would work for the company for a few years and retire, but now I have completed seventeen years here.” With these remarks, O’Casey identified himself as the oldest manager at KVI. Indeed his advancing age and “wisdom” had worked well in this Japanese firm. He then shifted gears, turning to the Americans, and said, “I have a few things to tell you.” He continued: “First of all, this company is owned by the Japanese. Don’t you forget that.” The Japanese sat up straight. Mr. O’Casey stressed the bi-national demarcation and the power inequity between the Japanese (dispatched from the headquarters) and the American (the locally hired.)

Mr. O’Casey continued, “This company is owned by the Japanese. So I gave the Japanese my advice, but I could not tell them what to do because they are the owners of the company. Don’t forget that.”

“Secondly, we all want to make money. The company wants to make money. We want this business to thrive.”

“But in the process, remember that the company is made up of people, and that this company needs to run its business in the most humane and ethical ways. If you can do it, I mean, run your business in the most humane and ethical ways, then I think that I have taught you something. Be humane and ethical.”

“I have been working very hard for the company, and this company has been good to me. Thank you. But most of all I enjoyed working with you. I have been very lucky to have you not only as my business colleagues but as friends. If you still need advice from me, just call me, and I will be there for you. Thank you.”

The messages Mr. O’Casey gave to the participants were clear and simple. He affirmed this company’s ownership and identified the loci of the ultimate decision-making authority. He also emphasized and endorsed the capitalistic principle of profit making, by saying that we were all here to make money. And finally, he referred to an idealistic and mythical image of the corporate community, evoking an image of him being a teacher-mentor who had coached juniors day and night to work hard and to be humane and ethical in their dealings with workers.

At that moment, Barb shot back at Mr. O'Casey, "Hey, No negative comments on the company management?" O'Casey responded, "Barb, I've told you to come to the office tomorrow." And everyone laughed. Absent from O'Casey's rhetoric was a mention of the recent "inhumane" breakdown of the social contract between workers and managers, as an increasing number of KVI workers were now dispatched from temporary agencies, with less benefits and no job security. There was also no mention of the punishing long work hours put in by the Japanese technicians to run the plant 24/7, nor of the extreme shortage of career paths for female workers in the company. He did not refer to a huge disparity in financial rewards between those from the head office and the locally hired. O'Casey deftly minimized any potential rocky issues and ended his remarks, with a mention of his humanitarian philosophy.

Mike O'Casey Jr. who sat next to his Dad got up and thanked everyone on behalf of the O'Casey family. He was so grateful that the KVI people had treated his Dad so very nicely, and now he and his sister could see how much the KVI people cared about Dad. Upon his retirement, he and his sister would take good care of Dad. Ironically this remark of Mike, Jr. reminded everyone of Mr. O'Casey's lonely widowhood, without his beloved wife. As the dinner party was coming to close, Harry, Lorenzo, Emily and a few others were getting emotional. Emily started sobbing again. Others felt mellow and sad, as the evening event was ending.

Mr. Clark ordered everyone to get up and move as they would be taking pictures with Mr. O'Casey. The photo-shooting session was organized in a manner similar to a wedding photo shooting. Mr. O'Casey was a center of attention, just like a bride, as Mike Clark and O'Casey Jr fussed around him. Clark then announced that Mr. O'Casey and Plant Manager Sasaki were the first ones to have their pictures taken, followed by Mr. O'Casey and the rest of the Japanese managers, then Mr. O'Casey with American managers; Mr. O'Casey with all supervisors and group coordinators, Mr. O'Casey with ladies only, Mr. O'Casey with men only, Mr. O'Casey with his family members, etc. Finally everyone had to join in for a series of group photos.

The party was over at 9:30PM. Mr. O'Casey shook hands with all the participants, while his son and daughter stood nearby. They were then escorted to their car first. After their departure, everyone, now quite happy and jovial, left the premise into the night.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: BUSINESS RITUAL STUDIES

In the above ethnographic case study, notable ritualistic features were observed. For example, Mike Clark as the ritual maker delineated the time-space as being separate from the mundane work time/space by setting the party stage at a tavern restaurant that serves abundant alcoholic beverages and lavish dinner plates, away from the physical confines of the company. The participants themselves marked this occasion by dressing up festively. While the conversation topics, drinks, foods and other materials may re-enforce pre-existing identities and hierarchical positions of the participants, with such pre-existing categorical demarcations as high/low, manager/worker, those from the headquarters/ the locally hired; Japanese-speaking/English-speaking/ Spanish-speaking; men/ women, old/ young, senior/junior, etc, some participants behaved quite unusually, out of norm, and emotionally.

For example, the normal rule that encourages orderly, formal, and hierarchically framed communication in the workplace, was traversed by Ishibashi's "skype" skit, that poked fun of the lack of the local management autonomy against the global power center of Kado Technology. Everyone laughed, except Plant Manager Sasaki. In acting like a fool, KVI's licensed jester Ishibashi poked fun of the powerlessness of KVI and its total subjugation to Tokyo's power. The

mini-prank evoked the unmistakable recognition of their common “descent”-- their common property from the past, shared among those living in the present. What is more, this “descent” was understood as a downward , geo-political, movement through the global chains of command and reporting, ubiquitously transmitted by technology (such as skype), from the center to the periphery.

Vice Plant Manager Tabata, while reprimanding the “uppity” subordinate, nevertheless appropriated Ishibashi’s discursive resources, and said that he himself would “record and report everything” to the headquarters, therefore re-enacting the image of KVI descent structure. Power get enacted in a different but related way, when Barb as the first woman to speak defiantly questioned Boss O’Casey about the “Japanese gentlemen.” In the guise of initiating a “roasting and frying” ritual of killing and eating O’Casey, Barb’s question nevertheless shot at the existing power hierarchy.

In this non-work, tri-lingual setting, one also notices several incidents of linguistic code-switching. The code-switching involves the alternation between different languages (such as English, Japanese, or Spanish) as well as different tonal registers (formal/informal, feminine/masculine), and different regional dialects (Yankee/Appalachian).

Language-switching wise, observed switches were from Japanese to English, not the other way around, as in the case of Mitsui translating Ishibashi’s skype gig to the rest of the crowd. As for selecting different tonal registers, Mike Clark shifted gear from “office English” to “informal” speech pattern as well as to Appalachian vernacular. Such a switch or a cue prototypically opens a new ‘frame” or “stage” for subsequent mini-drama and ad-lib story-telling which were shared and enacted by the participants.

While banters and jokes became abundant (especially after Barb’s gig) in the English and Japanese-languages, it was noteworthy that most Spanish-speaking participants did not use the Spanish language to tell their jokes and stories. No Spanish-speaking members stood up to give a formal speech, despite the fact that they were “old-timers” and bi-lingual. Only Jesus played a supporting role in the English language when Charlie acted out his anti-foreign BP story. Jesus as a sidekick relayed a story about the plight of the Mexican shrimp during the pre-dinner drinking session at the bar.

It was clear that most stakeholders began this ritualistic event without a pre-determined scenario for self expression and public performance. Nevertheless, some of them volunteered to act out the prescribed formulae during the increasingly patterned “ritualization” process (Comaroff,1985).

We have also noticed that technology, such as cameras and video-recording devices, played a pivotal role in organizing multiple mini performing acts. Toward the end of this ritualistic event, the concoction of symbols produced by individual actors somehow started to be lined up, forming a discernable pattern –cliché and metaphors were copied and utilized (such as family-oriented metaphors, paternalistic guidance, Christian moral stories, stereo-typical images of ethical and humane community, and the wedding photo shoot formula). Once edited, the recorded images and discourses would become “proofs” for collective sense-making and memory-sharing, and was “framed” and re-presented as a gift (Mauss, 1922).

The cognitive, affective and even physiological time-space during the party at this historical tavern was in fact full of hidden dangers and pot holes. At any moment in the ritualization process, there might be symbolic sabotage and footnoting because of underlying conflicts, personal rivalry, gender-politics, past grudges, ideological wars and/or idiosyncratic feelings. The Japanese directors and power holders kept silent or kept themselves in the shadow and let

the two ritual makers, namely Mark Clark and Mike O'Casey, handle potentially dangerous spots of contestation, satire, and resistance. The two ritual makers who were the hand-maidens of the management jointly framed this event, and led the event to conclude, without major incident.

As a form of collective rite of passage, KVI people symbolically moved from the O'Casey phase to the post-O'Casey/Clark phase. It was also important to note the initial moment of silence that began this ritual, and the final photo-shoots at the conclusion of the "ceremony" were orchestrated and initiated by Mike Clark, that affirmed visually, the "inevitable" shift in power from O'Casey to Clark in the presence of the top management and everyone else, including Harry.

We have attempted to examine multiple and simultaneous discourses enacted by stakeholders during a critical and ritualistic incident in the form of a retirement party. In the process, we have learned that organization possesses do not operate with pre-set, coherent or crystal-clear ideology for actions, and yet the inherited power structure and formulae get activated as footing for the transformative performances of the individual agency. Once performances and mini-acts are displayed, some of these stimuli-responses are judged as "meaningful" and stored in the memory reserve of the participants, not only at the cognitive level but also at the affect and neurological levels, for possible future retrieval.

For instance, as KVI people sip Legend beer or eat Surf andTurf dinner, their brains begin to form a repertoire of the images of the beer and dinner, and such memories of taste and their meanings become associated with their perception of the organizationally sanctioned ritualistic shift of power at KVI. In other words, while KVI people make neural connections in terms of their choice of drinks or food items, these choices were also "framed" in this specific corporate critical occasion. In the above ethnographic case, we have observed that a lot of new cultural learning takes place as the KVI people socialize while observing and performing this drama.

What is anthropologically significant is how certain patterns of connectivity become more established, re-enforced and stabilized over time among a specific group of humans. Such firmly established schematic system then becomes a kind of guideline, or a "cultural" map to interpret new stimuli, and to promote certain expressions and behavioral outcomes, that may include ideological behavior such as patriotism, nationalism, and neo-liberalism capitalism. The schematic connectivity is very important not so much as to what it allows us to "see", (for example, Legend beer and Surf and Turf dinner) but how and in what ways it lets us "think" and "feel" about the world (i.e. what Legend and SandT now signify to the KVI people). The more well-established this "how to think and feel" connectivity becomes, the more predictable the outcome when we face a new but similar stimulus. Next time they drink Legend and eat SandT, they will probably "fondly" remember this retirement party and the passing of the power torch.

However, during the event, not all representations and meanings are shared, and categorical boundaries are porous and shifting. Significant memory pieces were resurrected out of the memory reservoirs of the old timers in order to concoct new interpretations and new responses. The preset visions of reality were sometimes challenged, most notably by Barb, and personalized stories were creatively modified by individual actors, as in the case of the born-again saga told by two African American participants. Some participants attempted to syncretically reconcile disparate feelings *in situ* (as in the case of Harry ordering the same dish as Mr. Daughterly, while sitting next to Clark.). Some participants, particularly Spanish speakers, kept very low profiles in this English and Japanese dominant environment.

In cross-cultural situations, either within one organization or between organizations, two or more schematic modes of connectivity are simultaneously at work. In this anthropologically

fertile setting, the stakeholder may become uncomfortable or vulnerable because they will not be able to make sense of the situation and/or totally misinterpret the action of others, unless and until new connectivity gets established. For example, the “be patient” story told by Tabata-san meant little to newer members of KVI while it acutely stirred a strong emotional response from the old timers who vividly remembered the critical SH incident in the past. On the other hand, everyone laughed and become animated when Mr. O’Casey silenced Barb with his “come to the office” quip, because all the stakeholders already knew what it meant.

We have also witnessed that two important ritual makers, Mr. Mike Clark and Mr. O’Casey, successfully regulated the course of the corporate ritualization process by avoiding potential points for fission and sabotage. The test of a first-rate enterprise operation in today’s culturally diverse environment resides in the ability to handle two or more opposing schemes and still retain the ability to think for oneself. Obviously Mr. O’Casey, and to a lesser degree, Mike Clark, were able to handle this challenge quite deftly and professionally. Less culturally adept managers in the middle in the battle of multiple opposing symbolic schemes might have experienced strong negative emotional responses (such as fear, anxiety, anger, stress, disrespect, disdain).

Capitalistic enterprises are comprised of shifting and multi-layered cognitive networks which may at times have areas of dispute or disparity. Ritual space and ritualization process in corporate settings offers potent analytical loci for examining such multiple-level enactments that may have been previously hidden from the investigator’s view. Capturing such critical junctures promises effective theorizing about how individual agents engage with one another and bring forth cathartic conversion, synergetic fusion, and creative adaption, or alternatively, mutual alienation, fragmentation, atomization, and hostility. The above-mentioned perspective offers a holistic understanding of a multinational corporation’s ritual as a site of shared circuits and disconnects among multiple symbolic networks in relation to power and power-transition.²

ENDNOTES

1. EEOC is a federal agency prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability or genetic information. Anita Hills’ testimonies at the US Senate Committee of the Judiciary on the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court Justice was a historical moment in the American feminist movement by marking Sexual Harassment an important component of the gender and labor relations in US companies.
2. Network theory has helped identify the web of connectivity in terms of nodes and links (Scott 2000). The individual nodes can be human individuals but they can also be ideas, stimuli, or any units of analysis. Links (ties) are the relationships between the units. There can be many kinds of ties and the degree of the strength of ties between the units. Network analysis reveals that units are linked with one another and that the degree to which individual units succeed and fail is often tied to the nature of these network arrangements rather than the unit’s idiosyncratic attributes. In the societal realm of organizational life, for example, one proposal presented by a particular individual may be widely approved or promoted by others, partly because these people are placed in certain positions in the networked world, and not because this particular proposal is necessarily superior to other ideas. Organization consists of a web of connectivity of actions as well as connectivity of meanings, with multiple nodes of interaction that are open to new stimuli.

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