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**Review of *Popularization & Personalization
A Historical and Cultural Analysis of 50 Years
of Dutch Political Television Journalism* by R. Van Santen.
Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Almanakker, Oosterhout,
2012, 196 pages**

In the last couple of decades various scholars have signaled the occurrence and development of important processes in political communication. If some have broadly coined these transformations as “Americanization” (Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Scammel, 1998), “professionalization” (Blumler & Kavanaugh, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008; Stamper & Brants, 2011), “tabloidization” (Barnett, 1998; Connell, 1998; Klein, 1996) or “infotainment”, (Street, 2000; 2001), others have associated them with terms such as “video malaise” (Robinson, 1976) or “spectatorship democracy” (De Beus, 2011). According to these views, political journalism nowadays has stepped into a new era, in which the coverage of political events and television programming itself are heading towards an entertainment logic.

Rosa Van Santen’s work addresses all of these issues and represents a very valuable contribution to assessing these hypotheses. The book represents her PhD thesis and is structured into seven chapters, one of which illustrates a literature review on the concepts of popularization and personalization; and five represent separate empirical studies addressing them.

The second chapter of this study introduces a thorough and highly structured theoretical undertaking on the abovementioned concepts. By synthesizing the meanings attributed to popularization and personalization in the established literature, the author offers an insightful perspective on them: while the two notions are closely connected, they illustrate distinct processes. The plea that bases this view is the following: popularization is characterized by a combination of popular topics, narrative means, audiovisual means and forms of audience participation; while personalization is a product of individualization (focus on private professional qualities), privatization (highlights the private *persona*) and/ or emotionalization (stresses on personal emotions). Furthermore, as Van Santen shows, popularization concerns the entire message and style of a TV program, whilst personalization relates to “a specific media coverage of individual politicians” (2012, p. 19) Thus, although conceptually they may overlap, one can exist without the other.

Chapter three, “TV programming in times of changing political communication”, presents an analysis of television genres in the Dutch media. Here, the author takes a historical approach on the content and proportion of entertainment and information-based programs.

The fourth part of this book explores the popularization hypothesis by focusing on the analysis of Dutch current affairs program, *Brandpunt*. Thence, the study treats the evolution

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of entertainment elements in this broadcast, from 1960 to 1996. A similar approach is presented in chapter five, where the analysis turns to the presence of personalization elements in the televised portraits of Dutch politicians, between 1961 and 2006. Finally, the last empirical study illustrates a collection of interviews with practitioners from the local political and media environment on the abovementioned concepts.

While the book represents a very ambitious, compelling analysis of Dutch television programming, genres, media and political environment, the magnitude of such empirical approach being equaled only by Brants' "Who's Afraid of Infotainment" (1998), it keeps silent on a number of issues.

First of all, the theoretical part of this study offers a definition of the "video malaise" hypothesis which is not fully explained. While the author highlights its frequent association with trends like negative, sensationalist coverage, "infotainment" (a mixture of classical political genres and popular culture elements), she invests more energy in the thorough literature review than in developing a personal, clearly-outlined understanding of the concept. Moreover, the increasing visuality in political communication implied by the video malaise hypothesis does not make the object of her analytical discussion. But, obviously, approaching all the above mentioned processes in only one book takes its toll on the depth of each approach.

As for the book's conclusion, it shows that popularization and personalization trends have not evolved significantly in the Dutch landscape. One explanation for this assessment of phenomena is that the empirical analyses are mostly based on public broadcasting data. Nevertheless, this conclusion raises a number of questions. For instance: what is specific to the Dutch political communication? Van Santen's work seems to focus extensively on exploring different hypotheses forwarded by the established literature, but tends to leave out how the local media discourses have built a certain identity. Also, if the results can be considered generalizable for the Dutch media, what are their implications? From the book, we find out that personalization has somehow always been there, it has just not developed. Thus, what does this aspect tell us about the mass-media evolution and democratization in the Netherlands?

Van Santen's work represents an insightful tool for doctoral students and researchers wishing to understand and learn how trends in political communication can be analyzed. It represents an example of thorough academic work in assessing the aforementioned phenomena and a necessary citation for scholars who are approaching them.

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