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Media hype in the Monarchy; How the torrent of images and sounds shakes a centuries-old institution

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het publiek c.q. het electoraat ze meer zal accepteren. Tot excessen als in andere landen, zoals het Verenigd Koninkrijk, heeft dit nog niet geleid, hoewel men vraagtekens kan plaatsen bij de werkwijze van de voormalige spindoctor van minister-president Balkenende Jack de Vries, die onder journalisten de bijnaam 'Jack het lek' had. In het algemeen heerst er wantrouwen tussen journalisten en voorlichters, die elkaar tegelijkertijd ook weer nodig hebben. Op zichzelf is het niet problematisch dat publieke organisaties aan PR doen, mits er een duidelijke scheiding bestaat met journalistiek. Wat veel publieke organisaties, ook universiteiten, tegenwoordig doen, is onafhankelijke journalistiek afschaffen ten gunste van in glossy magazines verpakte verkooppraatjes. Journalisten die mediatrainingen verzorgen voor politici, geven er evenmin blijk van zich bewust te zijn van de noodzaak van die scheiding.

"In het algemeen heerst er wantrouwen tussen journalisten en voorlichters."

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

De politieke strijd is in sterke mate een gevecht om beeldvorming, betekenisgeving en interpretatie. Media, voorlichters en politici mengen zich alle drie in dat gevecht. Ze hebben elkaar nodig, maar zijn tegelijkertijd antagonisten. Ieder van die drie vindt zichzelf goed en de twee andere partijen bad en ugly. Maar in feite hebben ze alle drie goede, slechte en lelijke trekken.

Media hebben in een politieke democratie een onmisbare functie door gezagsdragers kritisch te volgen en te onthullen en openbaren. Maar ze dragen, de commerciële media voorop, ook bij aan incidentalisering en emotionalisering. Het gros van de journalisten, een

uitzondering als Pieter Hilhorst daargelaten, is weinig bereid tot reflectie en beroept zich wanneer er kritiek is op hun optreden, op de vrijheid van meningsuiting. Voorlichters kunnen bijdragen aan transparantie van beleid en besluitvorming en voorlichting kan ook een beleidsinstrument zijn (denk aan de bekende Postbus 51-spotjes). Voorlichters hebben met diverse vraagstukken te maken waar ze hun weg in moeten vinden, zoals de vraag of ze loyaal zijn aan het beleid of aan een bewindsperoon en hoever ze gaan met het verkopen van beleid. Voorlichters geven net zo min als de meeste journalisten blijk van behoefte aan reflectie.

Politici hebben een zware, matig betaalde en vaak weinig dankbare functie en bekommeren zich om de publieke zaak. Maar ze zijn ook sterk op de korte termijn gericht en moeten voortdurend scoren. Politici die zich hieraan onttrekken en in betrekkelijke stilte hun werk doen, krijgen het verwijt dat ze onzichtbaar zijn en hebben een grote kans niet opnieuw gekandideerd te worden.

Bestuurskunde is zowel een empirische als een normatieve wetenschap. Dat houdt in dit geval in dat bestuurskundigen zowel beschrijven hoe de media de politieke besluitvorming beïnvloeden als alle betrokkenen een spiegel voorhouden. Bestuurskundigen delen geen gele of rode kaarten uit, maar confronteren verslaggevers, voorlichters en politici met hun praktijken. Veel journalisten, communicatieadviseurs en volksvertegenwoordigers willen ongetwijfeld bijdragen aan een goed in de zin van effectief en legitiem openbaar bestuur, maar moeten opereren in een krachtenveld en hebben met rollenconflicten te maken. Het is een illusie te verwachten dat de vulgarisering van de media te stoppen is, al is het maar omdat veel burgers niet anders willen dan GeenStijl. Maar Hare Majesteit was te kras en ongenueanceerd, want de leugen regeert niet.■

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Media hype in the Monarchy; How the torrent of images and sounds shakes a centuries-old institution.

In modern western constitutional monarchies, the King and Queen are the remaining stabilizing factors while the political landscape is ruptured by a divided population of voters. The media have also changed remarkably since the early days of the world's monarchies. However, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands has adapted to the changing circumstances.

Julia van Proosdij



functional and more political involvement of the monarch and a positive influence on the symbolic and more personal approach of the monarch on the monarchy. Three dimensions will be tested, i.e. a functional-symbolic dimension, a political-nonpolitical dimension and a personal-nonpersonal dimension.

"How did media coverage influence the monarchy over the last thirty years?"

How incremental change can come about

Streeck and Thelen identified five modes of incremental institutional change that they call displacement, layering, drift, conversion and exhaustion. These models will be discussed below.

Displacement is a process that can occur in organizational fields. Within the institutional framework a new model emerges, which calls into question the old organizational forms that were previously taken for granted. New practices gain salience above old practices as a growing number of actors within an institution choose the new practices over the old ones. (Streeck and Thelen, 2005, p. 22).

Layering is the type of reform that occurs around the elements of institutions that cannot be changed. Layering can set in motion path-altering dynamics through differential growth. The introduction of new elements sets in motion dynamics that will drive out the old system as the dominant one: the old system shrinks in relation to the new elements (Streeck and Thelen, 2005, p. 24).

Drift occurs without explicit political maneuvering. The world around an institution evolves which alters the scope, meaning and functions of institutions. Drift can also be caused by incomplete regulatory or the non-existence of rules (Streeck and Thelen, 2005, p. 25).

Conversion happens when existing institutions are adapted to serve new goals. Conversion is made possible by the gaps that exist between institutionalized rules and their enactment due to political compromise (Streeck and Thelen, 2005, p. 26). Actors will strategically fill in the gaps and interpret the rules in their own interest. (Streeck and Thelen, 2005, p. 27).

The monarch has to closely follow all the important changes in society. At the same time the monarch has to represent the factors that bind the people in his or her country and give them something to hold on to. This includes all political beliefs and movements in society. Queen Beatrix is well aware that, in order for the monarchy to continue, it has to be supported by a majority of the parliament and thus of the people (Manning, 1991, p. 39). The change that occurred in the monarchy has not been very apparent to most of us, which is mainly the result of its incremental nature. Queen Beatrix has reigned since 1980. The Queen is the core of the institution of the monarchy in the Netherlands. This paper will analyze her adaptations of institutional change during her reign, but will focus mainly on media attention for affairs and scandals and how this has influenced the changes. Years of scandals and hypes will be compared to relatively quiet years. Therefore, this paper will answer the following research question: "did media coverage influence the monarchy over the last thirty years?"

This paper hypothesizes that scandals and subsequent media hypes have had a negative influence on the

Exhaustion leads to institutional breakdown rather than change. The collapse is gradual and due to self-consumption, decreasing returns and overextension due to the limited growth of institutions (Streeck and Thelen, 2005, p. 30).

Media

When certain media become interested in a particular popular topic, they will look into it as long as it is necessary to find new facts or information. Vasterman (2005) speaks of news waves, that can become self reflecting (Vasterman, 2005, p.23). When a subject or issue becomes a 'hype', the media exploit the news. He defines a media hype as a news wave throughout the media that is the product of a self-reproductive process where news does not only generate subsequent news, but also generates societal implications. These societal implication will then also be presented as news (Vasterman, 2005, p.23).

The concept of positive linking is introduced by Van Ginneken (1999, p. 94). When media pay a lot of attention to a certain issue, more people will become aware of the issue and more related stories will emerge. The outset of a hype is a key event: one first event brings about curiosity within the media, which sets in motion the circle of increasing returns (Vasterman, 2005, p. 26). A media hype is thus carried by a wide range of media, has one event as its starting point and quickly reaches its peak. The hype continues through self-reproductive processes and increasing returns (Vasterman, 2005, p. 31). When events occur that are of the same type or the same theme within a certain institution (Vasterman, 2005, p. 35), it triggers the media to start a new snowball effect on the next affair.

“When a subject or issue becomes a ‘hype’, the media exploit the news.”

Scandals in the monarchy

The Zorriguieta-affair, the Margarita-affair and Mabelgate followed each other up in the period 1999 until 2003. This could easily have been a snowball-effect; due to the Zorreguieta-affair, the Royal family was high on the media's agenda. When the Margarita-affair occurred, all eyes were on the Queen already, so it was not much of an effort to convince people that the Royal family was scandalous. The same is true for Mabelgate, which also occurred in 2003. Mabelgate was the most dramatic scandal; practically everyone had an opinion about Mabel's past love life with criminal Klaas Bruinsma. It is possible that this was due to the timing of the scandal. Since the media were already focused on the Royal family they did not diminish attention of this third scandal.

All three affairs had a key event, but the very first key event was the announcement of Willem-Alexander and Maxima's engagement. Because Maxima's father played a part in the Junta-regime in Argentina, Willem-Alexander's choice of marriage was disputed upon. Maxima's father had to apologize. Margarita and her husband De Roy van

Zuidewijn claimed in 2003 that the Queen was monitoring. This affair was exaggerated, possibly due to the fact that the media were still on edge because of all the arousal around the marriage of Willem-Alexander and Maxima. When in June 2003 the engagement of Friso and Mabel was made public, it became clear that Mabel had been befriended with Klaas Bruinsma, a famous Dutch criminal and drug-trafficker, from 1989-1991. Bruinsma died in 1991, and crime reporter Peter R. de Vries revealed their relationship on television in 2003. Mabelgate was the last and most dramatic scandal, and at this point the Royal family had to give in: Friso and Mabel were allowed to marry, but Friso would no longer be in line to the throne.



The Christmas Speeches

Every year at Christmas the Queen addresses the public via television and radio. The Christmas speech provides Beatrix with an opportunity to address issues she considers important. In 1980 and 1981 Beatrix regarded the speech as a Christmas greeting in which she described some of her own personal feelings and thoughts. She then spoke of all the sorrow in the world, threats to the world, and the powerlessness of the individual. From her third Christmas speech onwards, she spoke about current themes; in 1982 this was the economic crisis that held the Netherlands in their grip. In the speeches from 1996 until 2000 she said less about current incidents, mainly because in that period she was blamed for being too influential. From 2000 onwards, Beatrix has been mentioning current issues related to her personal life. She has become more explicit about these topics than she was before. There have been suggestions that the references of her relatives had something to do with the 'modernization of the monarchy', but another explanation is that during those years there was a lot going on in her personal life (Van Baalen, 2005, pp. 43-45). In her speeches there is a decline in her interference in politically sensitive issues or current themes and an increase in issues concerning her personal life. This can be regarded as a tendency towards a more ceremonial role of the Queen and a diminishing political relevance. The results for the years 1982, 1996, 2001 and 2003 are shown in Table 1. In 1982 the main topic was the economic crisis, whereas 1996 was all about spiritual and religious

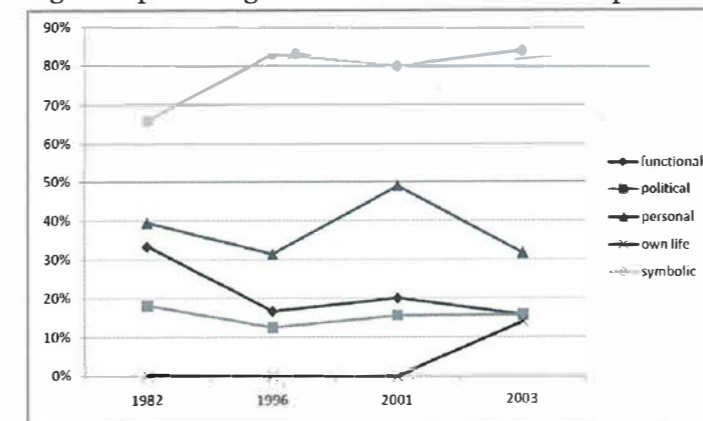
ways to deal with death as a result of two disasters with many casualties. In 2001, the theme was influenced by the attacks of 9/11 in the United States and strong emphasis was put on the message to people of how to be tolerant towards each other. In 2003 Beatrix first said something about her family, and the theme was the legacy of her mother. In structure, this speech was very different from the other three.

Table 1: percentages of attention and framing in Christmas speeches.

	Functional	Political	Personal	Own life	Spiritual/ Religious
1982	33%	18%	39%	0%	6%
1996	17%	13%	31%	0%	38%
2001	20%	16%	49%	0%	16%
2003	16%	16%	32%	14%	12%

As table 1 shows, the occurrence of functional phrases diminished and that of symbolic phrases increased. This effect is reinforced by the fact that the queen started speaking about her own life, such as how much she looks forward to Friso and Mabel's wedding and how much she enjoys having a grandchild. If this effect would be incorporated in the functional-symbolic dimension, it would be even more apparent. The personal dimension reached its culminating point in 2001, due to the personal address to people not to hate, but to love each other and be tolerant. Therefore the personal dimension does not really show much influence of the media hypes. The political stream seems to be fairly unaltered. There is not much difference in the political message throughout the years.

Figure 1: percentages of attention in Christmas speeches



¹This will be done in my Master Thesis, which is forthcoming this autumn.

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The Christmas speeches show the decrease in functional phrases and the increase of symbolic language. This points towards displacement as well as to conversion. The decrease in functional lines combined with the rising salience of more personal themes in the speeches redeploys the old institution to a new purpose: the symbolic function of the queen as a mother of the nation. People can now identify with the Queen on a personal level rather than being addressed about the hardships of the world. But it is also a rediscovery of a task the monarch has always had; that of head of nation.

Overall, conversion seems to be a fair explanation of this change, but displacement fits even better. The institutional incoherence of the dissatisfied parliament encourages the single most important actor in the monarchy to deviate her behavior and give new salience to an already existent ingredient of the monarchy: the symbolic function.

“People can now identify with the Queen on a personal level rather than being addressed about the hardships of the world.”

As pointed out in an earlier section, the media did hype the affairs and scandals. But did it have a real influence on the monarchy? In the light of the Christmas speeches the media did appear to have an effect. In her 2003 speech Beatrix even claimed to look forward to Mabel and Friso's marriage. She also put strong emphasis on positive things in her family: for example the birth of Amalia, her granddaughter. Since she never spoke of these personal details of her own life before, this could be a direct result of the media hypes. The Christmas speech got a new purpose: it converged to a channel for the Queen to tell her people how she feels about certain events in her personal life. The institution thus changed a bit, it became more symbolic through the new dimension in the Christmas speech.

As an answer to the questions posed earlier on, some assumptions that were brought up in the hypothesis can be excluded. The political involvement of the Queen in the Christmas speeches did not differ very much throughout the years. The Queen obviously pays attention to provide a political message as a stable part of her speech, though never in more than eight sentences. The hypothesis may be correct with regard to the degree of symbolism as a result of pressure due to media hypes.

However, more research is necessary in order to be able to exclude other variables.¹ ■