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SCHOLARSHIP

# HEDWIG TE MOLDER

## DISCOURSES OF DILEMMAS. AN ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS' TALK

WAGENINGEN AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY, 1995, (ISBN: 90-5485-494-4)

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While government communication has increasingly become the topic of methodical precept, studies on the mundane practice of government communication are rare. The current study attempts to fill this major gap. More specifically, the aim of the study is to explain the interactional resources which communication planners use to make sense of government policies and the actions they may accomplish through their reports on these policies.

In method and perspective, this study is an attempt to forestall the idealisation of communication planners' practices which can be found in many introductory books on government communication. It draws on a form of discourse analysis which studies talk in its *natural* surroundings. Rather than considering language as a neutral medium for the description of reality, discourse analysis as developed by the British social psychologists Potter, Edwards and Wetherell, focuses on the social and constructive nature of language. Informed by such diverse sources as linguistic philosophy, ethnomethodology, post-structuralism and social studies of science, its concern is with the things people do with their language and the contextual resources they deploy for these actions.

Discourse analysis sheds new light on the nature of government communication. In its official appearance, government communication reflects the traditional conception of language as a passive medium for the transmission of information. It implies that communication planners, that is, government communicators and policy experts, can transmit political messages without touching upon or "contaminating" the nature and aims of the policies to be communicated. From a discourse-analytic perspective, however, government communication is not so much representation as representational *practice or discursive*, representation. This thesis shows how and to what purpose communication planners represent policies when producing a government communication campaign.

The data on which this study is based, has been collected at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment in the Netherlands. It concerns detailed transcriptions of "natural" conversations between government communicators, policy makers and advertising managers. Four government communication campaigns were chosen for this study: the Disability Facilities Act or WVG campaign, the Disability Insurance Act or WAO campaign, the campaign on the Social Fiscal number or *SoFi* campaign and, finally, the campaign against *Sexual Harassment*.

Chapter 5 is the first analytical chapter and explores in detail how communication planners formulate the central message of the campaign. In particular, I focus on how communication planners make sense of government policies by juxtaposing and contrasting the needs of what they consider to be their main audiences. Their active orientation to the wishes of varying audiences, ranging from politicians to press and public, establishes a complex picture of often contradictory claims as the starting-point for their message. Depending on the target group they orient to, communication planners are

either caught in an *efficacy dilemma* or in a *political dilemma*. These dilemmas are managed by a variety of discursive devices.

In the case of the campaign against sexual harassment, communication planners make sense of the policies in terms of an *efficacy dilemma*: how to make the message known to the “official” target group without hurting its feelings? I show how they manage this dilemma by formulating it from a rhetorical point of view, namely, by taking potential counter arguments from sex offenders and their victims into account. The problem is how to meet these counter arguments without changing the policies to be communicated.

In the other three campaigns - the VWG (Disability Facilities Act) campaign, the WAO (Disability Insurance Act) campaign and the campaign on the Social Fiscal number or *SoFi* campaign - communication planners are caught in a *political dilemma*: how to convey the message without compromising the government? Three discursive devices through which the political dilemma is managed, are distinguished: “factual” or information campaigns, selective omissions and couching the message in terms of a shared interest of government and citizens.

In Chapter 6 I examine how communication planners, in their construction of government policies, attend to their own accountability. The chapter confines itself to accountability practices in the case of the VWG campaign, the WAO campaign and the *SoFi* campaign, that is, the campaigns in which the communication planners are caught in a *political dilemma*. Three observations indicate that through formulating the political dilemma, planners attend to their own problems of accountability. First, in those passages in which the *contentiousness* of the policies is at issue, communication planners try to secure their official neutral status: they portray themselves as participants who merely transmit government policies, thereby preventing others from holding them personally accountable for the content of the policies or their veiled presentation.

Chapter 7 shows how the efficacy dilemma (how to make the message known to the “official” target group without hurting its feelings) is rooted in the acceptance of accountability for the message. In contrast to the political dilemma, communication planners not only feel accountable for the policies to be communicated, but also accept this accountability. That is, they orient to sexual harassment as being a genuine problem, thereby allowing themselves to be held accountable for policies rooted in this problem. I argue that the acceptance of accountability for the policies results in a message which is designed to be effective.

In Chapter 8 I consider the implications of the study. A main conclusion is that communication planners are active participants in the process of formulating and reformulating government policies, rather than passive intermediaries of these policies. The neutral status of communication planners is used to perform defensive actions with. It is proposed to provide government communicators with the status of policy maker. This status would bring their official accountability in line with their daily practice. Recent developments in communication studies advise communicators to lay aside their neutral role, and become official participants in policy processes. The role of the communicator would have to change from a passive intermediary into a facilitator. This can be considered a step forward. However, the status of facilitator may become as problematic as the status of a passive intermediary. To a great extent, this depends on the kind of responsibility the facilitator is officially attributed with. This is an important new area of research. In any case, as long as communication planners are not fully and officially accountable for the policies they communicate, the tension will never entirely disappear.

LIZA TSALIKI  
THE ROLE OF GREEK TELEVISION IN THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY SINCE  
BROADCASTING DEREGULATION

SUSSEX UNIVERSITY; DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA STUDIES, 1997

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This Ph.D. dissertation examines whether Greek television after deregulation plays a role in the construction of national identity, and defines ways in which this identity is articulated. The dissertation consists of the following seven chapters:

Chapter One presents the theoretical perspectives of the doctorate; it offers a historical and critical insight into the process of identity construction in Greece, before the advent of the media, by means of a number of mechanisms (for example, the army, education, public administration, the Church). Then, it sets out to explore what role the mechanism of Greek television may have to play in identity-making. The chapter adopts an approach towards the understanding of Greekness that accommodates the 'flexible articulation' between tradition and modernity, and between the 'indigenous' and the 'foreign'.

Chapter Two explores West European broadcasting systems, and addresses the changes which they have undergone as a result of deregulation and internationalisation. This provides a frame within which to examine whether Greek television fits contemporary trends and developments.

Chapter Three introduces the history of Greek television since its birth and sets out the legal frame that regulates it. The chapter then offers a critical analysis of the complex social and political factors that have shaped Greek broadcasting. Domestic television is also compared to and contrasted with the European broadcasting practices presented in Chapter Two.

Having done this, the thesis moves into its empirical part, which combines three methods of research: a quantitative one, one that brings in the opinion of the industry (in the form of interviews), and a qualitative one (in the form of textual analysis). In this respect, Chapter Four provides the trajectory of domestic to imported programming on Greek television before and during the first years of deregulation; this is followed by the impact which programming patterns had on viewers and on the channels themselves.

Following the findings of Chapter Four, Chapter Five presents the results of interviews conducted with people working in the broadcasting industry either as decision-makers and administrators, or as program makers. Heads of Programming from state and commercial channels, directors, producers and scriptwriters are asked to assess the degree of 'Greekness' of domestic television programming. Their responses provided material for a qualitative assessment of domestic broadcasting. Chapter Six presents a textual analysis of contemporary television situation comedies in an attempt to define whether domestic programming is 'Greek'. The analysis of television texts is premised on the argument that the construction of Greekness has to be situ-

ated within a dynamic process of 'flexible articulation' between tradition and modernity, and between the indigenous and the foreign; this process takes place both in state and private channels. The chapter also argues for the 'Greekness' of various transformations (seen in the appropriation of foreign forms by domestic productions), which is an inherent feature of Greek culture.

Finally, Chapter Seven takes this argument further and investigates textually non-serialised live broadcasts. The events analysed involve the live transmission of annual military parades, and that of the funeral ceremony of Melina Merkouri. The chapter argues the role of state and private television in the construction of a 'nationally imagined community' within the realm of the 'traditional' and the 'modern' by means of the television broadcast of the military parades and Merkouri's funeral.

In summary, this thesis maintains that television has a complex relationship to the production of national culture; it also maintains that television in Greece manages this relationship through the 'flexible articulation' between tradition and modernity, which is carried out by both the state and commercial operators. The thesis argues that, given the particular socio-political environment, a substantial proportion of domestic television programming is 'Greek'. This is reflected in the origin of programs and in the forms of appropriation: imported forms may be used in the production of domestic material. However, once appropriated, their foreignness is relativised within a national context of recognisable Greek characters, traditions and ways of behaviour; imported forms become, then, national hybrids.

The thesis illustrates the various ways in which Greek television has reacted to competition in relation to other nations. Its contribution to academic and professional debate lies in the argument that sweeping generalisations about the Americanisation of indigenous television systems are mistaken and that, in fact, the construction of national identity is more socially and culturally complex.

## SANDRA BAŠIĆ HRVATIN THE PUBLIC AND MASS MEDIA - FROM DECONSTRUCTION TO RECONSTRUCTION

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA, 1997

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This dissertation analyses two basic problems related to the impact of mass media in the democratically developed countries: the existence of the public as the area and principle of the regulation of the relationship between the state and economy, and the significance of public opinion for the democratisation of the society. The dissertation consists of four major chapters. In the first I deal with the deconstruction of the meaning of the term, the public. I try to answer the question which might seem simple: How did the concept of the public vary in different historic eras?

Historical investigation starts with the etymology of the words and the analysis of articulation of particular terms in different historical periods and different languages.

It is followed by the presentation of the ancient model of the public and the private that is determined by a segregation between the sphere of politics (*polis*) and the sphere of privatised economic relationship in domestic household (*oikos*), and the public and private spheres in feudalism. The period between the 16th and the 19th century is marked by a division of the society and the state, which was institutionalised in the rise of parliamentary democracy and the bourgeois public. From then on, the relation between the public and the private came to be more and more in conflict. The analysis is focused on the particularly with conceptualisation of private as a contemporary category. It also deals with the evolution of the mass media and their influence on a lush growth of the private sphere in contemporary societies and the “fall of public man” (Sennett). The author descends from the statement that a deeply patriarchal republican ideology is reproduced in the centre of the bourgeois public. It is explicitly opposed to the feminine forms of speech and power that dominated pre-bourgeois salon societies. The author is interested in the question of why the French revolution that represented the interests of all structures of the society, once more “left” women outside the public.

The second part of the chapter includes classical interpretations of the ‘public and private dichotomy’ (Weber, Marx, Simmel) and also more recent interpretations. Among the more recent approaches to the analysis of modern subjectivity, the dissertation especially discusses the so-called “aesthetic reflectivity” or “individual self interpretation” as known in the work of Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Klaus Eder, and the communitarian approach which emphasise the importance of traditional communities for the existence of contemporary societies. The third chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the opinion dimension of the public — public opinion. The historical development of the term public opinion is presented, including the difficulties with definitions of it, and the role of mass media in the creation and mediation of opinions. The basic assumption of this chapter is that all the questions referring to an analytical understanding of public opinion are also the key questions for the understanding of democracy. The last chapter deals with the implications of new technologies (computer mediated communication) for the changing between the public and private. The chapter also discusses the differences between the concepts of civil society and the public and argues why the notion of the public is analytically and theoretically more adequate for the understanding of contemporary societies. It is argued that the majority of the questions which arise with new technologies are related to the questions raised two centuries ago, at the time of the French revolution. The final chapter introduces the basic thesis that the role of the public—private dichotomy is its basic dimensions in contemporary late capitalist societies are similar to the period of the so-called representative public during feudalism. The key questions of the possibility of democratisation of contemporary societies are related to the possibility of the establishment of an autonomous public and public opinion.