

ORDINARY PEOPLE AND EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION IN DUTCH PUBLIC SERVICE NEWS

MERVI PANTTI
KARIN HUSSLAGE

Abstract

In news broadcasts, there is a growing tendency to rely on the voices of ordinary people in comparison with official voices, such as media professionals and experts. In our study, which is based on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis and interviews with journalists, we look at the vox pops on the Dutch public service newscast, NOS

News. This article addresses questions of how ordinary people take part in public discussion - what kind of views and emotions they express – and how journalists assess the quality of the vox pops and the emotional expression they include. Our study is discussed in the context of citizen participation in public life through the mass media, the emotionalising of news journalism and the crisis of public service broadcasting. We suggest that the emotional dimension of news, exemplified in the vox pops interviews, should be examined in terms of its potential to foster passions and identities that connect people with public life and with each other.

Mervi Pantti is Research Fellow in the Amsterdam School of Communications Research (ASCoR), University of Amsterdam; e-mail: m.pantti@uva.nl.

Karin Husslage is a journalist and MA graduate from University of Amsterdam.

Introduction

During the last decades, we have witnessed an increasing number of so-called ordinary people who have been invited and have been willing to speak their minds and express their feelings in the televised public sphere. In the Netherlands, as one television producer ironically remarked, the current situation regarding television viewing is such that “one half of the nation is watching the other half” (de Winter, cited in Van Velzen 2006, 14). The presence of private individuals is most prominent and discussed in factual entertainment genres, such as talk shows and reality TV (e.g. Carpentier 2001; Gamson 1998; Livingstone & Lunt 1994; Syvertsen 2001). However, the news media have also shown more interest in citizens’ voices (e.g. Graber 1998; Hvítfelt 1994; Lewis, Inthorn & Wahl-Jorgensen 2005; Vettehen, Nuijten & Beentjes 2005). This development implies a rising value of personal experience and particular knowledge gained from ordinary people (e.g. Connell 1998; Brants 2008). Moreover, technological advances have supported a shift towards journalistic practices and formats, which promote audience involvement (see e.g. Hermes 2006).

With regard to citizen participation, the presence and participation of ordinary people in the news world could be interpreted as a democratising development, demonstrating that journalism has taken a further step toward expressing citizen’s views and promoting their political engagement (e.g. McNair 2000; Gans 2003). Yet, the quality of citizen involvement in news has not been met with enthusiasm by scholars of journalism and citizenship. It has been suggested that the voice of citizens is lacking political depth and meaning, their reactions to public issues being driven by feelings instead of rational reflection (Hermes 2006; Lewis, Inthorn & Wahl-Jorgensen 2005). Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005), in one of the few broad studies of the ways in which citizenship is represented in the news media, argue that citizens “have moods, experiences and emotions, but they are rarely seen making forays into a deliberative public sphere” (p. 35).

The research literature on the representation of citizens in the news is focused on British and the US journalism. To widen the perspective and enhance a more culturally sensitive understanding of the topic, we look at the presence of “ordinary” people in NOS News (*NOS Journaal*), Dutch public news service, during the last 15 years. In the Netherlands, the tradition of public broadcasting, based on political and religious “pillars,” as well as journalism’s relationship with the public, has been traditionally different from those in the UK and the US (Brants & Van Praag 2006; see also Hallin & Mancini 2004). However, like public service broadcasting in other countries, the NOS has been struggling to adapt to the changing media landscape and media usage. One central aspect of dealing with this “crisis” is to rethink strategies of citizen representation and engagement.

Compared to large-scope studies that attempt to analyse all references or contributions to citizenship (e.g. polls, letters to the editor, indirect references to the “public opinion,” vox pops) within certain media contexts (e.g. Cushion, Franklin & Court 2006; Lewis, Inthorn & Wahl-Jorgensen 2005), this article is concerned with one very specific aspect, namely the vox pop segments within NOS News. The vox pop represents a unique opportunity for citizens to be heard and seen within professional news media that has traditionally been restricted to media professionals and members of different elites. In this article, the category of “ordinary

people,” then, refers to “unknown” individual citizens who are invited to express their views, concerns and feelings in the news, as opposed to private citizens interviewed merely because they have been eyewitnesses or victims of some events (cf. Gans 1979) or to elite sources who are interviewed because of their expertise or position in society. Moreover, our starting point differs from existing research on representation of citizenship in the news media in that we are concerned with emotional expression within vox pops segments. One of the criticisms Lewis et al. (2005) raised about journalistic performance in representing citizens was that they tended to present their experiences and feelings rather than political opinions. Instead of disregarding expressions of emotion and personal experiences as meaningless, our aim, in contrast, is to look closer at them and re-assess their relevance regarding engaged citizenship.

This study, then, is concerned with three related questions. First, how are ordinary people represented as directly quoted sources in NOS News, in terms of prominence and story topic during last 15 years? Secondly, what kind of contributions are citizens making to the news? In particular, how are (if they are) political and emotional citizenship entangled? The third question deals with how journalists perceive the role of citizens and emotional expression in public service news. In order to explore these questions, we use a multi-method approach combining a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of news reports with interviews from journalists. The aim of our historical, multi-level analysis is to provide a comprehensive picture of the “voice of the people” in this specific media context and add to the understanding of the emotional dimension of public participation and talk. This article begins by discussing the theoretical and historical context within which this study is situated. It then moves on to discuss the findings from our study. In the final section, some conclusions are drawn and suggestions for further research are recommended.

Vox Pops: “Connecting State and Street”

Over the past 30 years, journalism studies have repeatedly pointed to the hierarchy of accessed voices in news. Journalism is focused on different elites whose authority to speak derives from their established position in society, while the voices and lives of ordinary citizens have been marginalised (e.g. Sigal 1973; Gans 1979; Whitney et al 1989; Hallin et al. 1993; Franklin 2003; Kim & Weaver 2003; Ross, 2007). What is at stake in news sourcing is a deficit in democratic communication, and therefore, the democratising of the news media means the breaking down of this hierarchy of public speech, thereby giving access to non-elite voices (McQuail 1983; Blumler and Gurevitch 1995; Sparks 2000; Cottle 2000). As Karen Ross (2007, 454) argues, those who are invited to speak in the news shape not only how issues are perceived but also contribute to determining whose views count in society.

While different institutional sources (such as academics) are used in the news to provide “general” information and expert knowledge, citizens draw their right to speak in news broadcast from their “common sense” insights and authentic experiences and reactions (e.g. Carpentier 2001, 229; Leurdijk 1997; Zelizer 2007). Of course, it is also a matter of what kind of comments is sought after from different sources. As John Hartley (1982, 113) argues, the standard vox pop question “How does it feel...?” aims to elicit personal feelings from the interviewee. There

is a paradox, however, concerning the expressive, the particular knowledge that is gained from citizens. Even if “ordinary experience” is (increasingly) considered valuable, it is precisely the lack of expert information that sets limits to citizens’ access and authority to speak about public issues.

The same kind of ambivalence characterises, overall, the value of vox pops in the news. The featuring of views and feelings of citizens in the news has been interpreted as evidence of journalism becoming more consumer-oriented, in other words, more “populist” (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999, 220-221). Other commentators have seen the use of vox pops as signalling the desire to let go of the elitist discourse and to make the news more accessible and relevant to ordinary people (e.g. Brants 2008; Lewis, Inthorn & Wahl-Jorgensen 2005, 70-74). The vox pops vignettes are often understood as belonging to the category of “journalism lite,” providing an emotionally compelling “human touch” or a light relief from serious discourse. Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005), for example, provide the following characterisation: “The vox pop is the extra in the unfolding drama of news. The citizen is there to provide mood, background, emotional reaction or light commentary, but will often be incidental to the central narrative.” (p. 143). Yet, the authors also note that vox pop interviews have a serious purpose in that they bring discussions of politics and public affairs into everyday life (pp. 70-71, 143; cf. Leurdijk 1997). In terms of reflexivity, we would like to argue that vox pops matter since they allow the citizens to watch “themselves” and to use these “peer representations” for understanding their own responses and for building their own images of the world.

The emergence of civic-oriented news practises and formats needs to be understood in the historical context, against the backdrop of the much-discussed crisis of public service broadcasting. In the Netherlands, as in many other West European countries, public service broadcasting has had a uniquely important role. Since 1989, however, it has faced a legitimacy crisis due the entrance of commercial competitors in the television market and changes to traditional patterns of media usage. Though NOS News has retained its market dominance, it has also witnessed erosion of the public trust and decreasing audience share (Brants & van Praag 2006, 35). In a new highly competitive media landscape, public broadcaster and public news are struggling to both defend and redefine its special “public” function and value (see Bardoel 2003; Brants 2003; Brants & Van Praag 2006; Costera Meijer 2003, 16).

In the Netherlands, however, the growing awareness of the need to be closer to citizens is also embedded in a more particular historical background. Journalism in the Netherlands has recently come under heavy criticism for compromising its truth-seeking role by becoming more dependent on the political elite, and subsequently, for not giving enough notice to the concerns of ordinary citizens (Brants 2003; RMO 2003). The political events over the last years, specially the rise of the right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn during the national election campaign of spring 2002, caused the NOS (and Dutch media in general) to reassess its relationship with the Dutch public. The support of Fortuyn and the anger his murder mobilised – with accusations of biased framing in the news media – illustrated the distance between politics and citizens, and the interdependence of politics and the established media. Within NOS News, this led to a public reappraisal of its policies and editorial practises. Hans Laroës, editor-in-chief, declared that NOS

News would leave behind their top-down approach and listen more to the people. With a new slogan “Connecting the state to the street,” public television news was to become more representative, more relevant and more accessible (Laroes 2002; Pantti & Wieten 2005; Van Liempt 2005). This challenge of connecting with Dutch citizens provides the context for this study.

Double Jeopardy: Ordinary People and Emotional Expression

As we have pointed out, the failure of vox pops to promote engaged citizenship has been connected to the personal and emotional nature of citizens’ contributions. A suspicion towards emotional expression and discourse is deeply rooted in journalism. Regarding journalism, emotion is often seen as best for dealing with less relevant matters – matters of “human interests” – or even as an impediment to rational critical discussion. This is because traditionally journalism has defined its core function as a provider of information, which contributes to rational decision-making and debate. Moreover, the quality of journalism has been articulated in terms of “detachment”: objectivity and impartiality. Consequently, the “emotionalising” of news is usually seen as evidence of decaying journalistic quality (e.g. Blumler and Gurevitch 1995; Franklin 1997; Scherer 2001; Sparks & Tulloch 2000). As Irene Costera Meijer (2001, 190) illustrates, “quality journalism” is traditionally conceived as being oriented towards the public sphere and characterised by rationality and political opinions, whereas popular journalism operates in the domains of private and everyday life and puts emphasis on emotion and experience. Few studies so far have drawn attention to the positive connection between emotion and the public role of journalism (e.g. Langer 1998; Bird 2000; Costera Meijer 2001; Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen 2007; Lang et al. 2003).

The main problem is that within journalism, both in scholarship and professional practice, emotions usually signify entertainment, and are typically coupled with generally negative concepts, such as sensationalism, popularisation, commercialisation and tabloidisation. Toby Miller (2005), for example, has argued in the context of U.S. news on September 11th and the Iraq War that the stress placed on feelings has resulted in the shortage of information, analysis and context. Similar critiques have been voiced by professionals. TV journalist Tessa Mayes (2000) has lamented that the “Feeling-question” has damaged fact-based and objective journalism: “Instead of a news reporter’s starting point being facts and analysis about the outside world, people’s inner lives and emotional reactions to events including the reporter’s own dominate how events are perceived” (p. 30).

While concerns over the value of mediated emotional expression for public life have not been central to journalism studies, scholars from other disciplines across social sciences and humanities have questioned the opposition between reason and emotion, which underpins dominant conceptions of public life, and that of “quality journalism.” These studies show that emotion is critical to public commitment and engagement (e.g. Barbalet 2002; Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2001; Marcus 2002; Marcus, Neuman & MacKuen 2000; Richards 2004). Similarly, we could say that the traditional ways of evaluating the quality of news media do not facilitate an appropriate understanding of the role of news media in relation to emotional expression and public life. As Peter Dahlgren points out, “In our everyday lives we

make sense of our experiences, ourselves and the world around us largely through an 'arational' mode, a combination of using our head and heart. There is no reason why the public sphere should – or even could – be any different." (Dahlgren 2006, 276-276; see also Jones 2005, 18). We would argue that it is important to pay attention to how the news media might promote appropriate emotions needed for public engagement (cf. Gamson 1999; Lunt & Stenner 2005; Richards 2007). Thus, rather than contrasting emotion with knowledge, information or facts, scholars of journalism should consider how emotional expression benefits engagement in public life. We propose, then, that "emotional talk" in vox pops may also have political relevance, since mediated emotional expressions are central in building the emotional environment that shapes public discussion and participation. Moreover, citizens giving expression to their uncertainties, fears and hopes, may provide openness and richness to public debate (Richards 2007).

The Rationale and Methods of the Study

In this study, we have chosen to focus on the main newscast of Dutch public television, NOS News (aired daily at 8 o'clock). Until the introduction of a dual broadcasting system in the Netherlands in 1989, and concurrent launching of RTL News (*RTL Nieuws*) by the first commercial broadcaster RTL, the public service broadcaster NOS was the only provider of television news. Regardless of the increased competition and declining number of viewers, NOS News has persistently attracted a larger audience than its commercial counterparts. The other main commercial broadcaster SBS has failed in its attempts to create a successful "serious" news program. Currently, however, it is airing a popular news show *Hart van Nederland* (Heart of the Netherlands) that is focused on local news and ordinary people's experiences.

We chose to focus on NOS News because of its public service mission and historically important role in the lives of Dutch citizens. Unlike its commercial rivals, NOS is committed to building a common public sphere, representing a diversity of social views and interests and developing greater participation in public life. In recent mission statements, NOS has emphasised the need to engage citizens in public life, as the following example demonstrates: "We would like to function as some sort of 'agora', a site where all groups of Dutch society can meet each other, where all views are represented and opinions are exchanged" (Long-range plan, National Public Broadcasting 2000-2003, cit. in Costera Meijer 2003, 21).

In order to provide a more comprehensive picture of citizens' voices in NOS News, we have conducted a multi-method study combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. This approach allows us to ask questions from different perspectives regarding citizens' representation and emotional expression.

First, in order to study how the role of citizens in the news has changed – how often and for how long did they appear in newscasts, and what topics did they commented on – we conducted a quantitative content analysis. We analysed NOS newscasts between 1993 and 2006. All items from the newscasts aired on the first, fourth and seventh day of the first week of April, August and December were drawn for analysis. Individual (speaking) news sources were used as the unit of analysis. A total of 168 newscasts were analysed, consisting of 5,649 actors. Nine categories of actors were distinguished: 1) governmental sources and politicians,

2) experts (institutional sources who has first-hand knowledge about the topic, such as scholars), 3) representatives of law, police and military (e.g. lawyers, prosecutors, police officers, military officers), 4) business and non-governmental organisation sources, 5) representatives of churches and religious organisations, 6) sports people, 6) celebrities (e.g. artists, actors, royalty), 8) eyewitnesses (eyewitnesses or victims of events such as accidents or crimes) and 9) ordinary people (private citizens who are not associated with organisations or groups). These categories were formed based on the anchor's or reporter's introduction, voice-over narration or on-screen captions referring to the identity of the source. Only ordinary citizens were typically not introduced with name and/or profession. News sources were analysed in terms of the frequency and duration of their appearances. In addition, we examined the topic of news items commented on by ordinary citizens.

Second, we used a qualitative content analysis to assess the representation of ordinary citizens in the news. We looked at the vox pop interviews in order to analyse how they are allowed to speak about public issues, and how they derive their authority to speak. For every three years between 1993 and 2006, we transcribed and analysed three newscasts from the first week of April, August and December. In addition, since we hoped to gain a more current and comprehensive understanding of the presence of citizens in the news, we have included the first full weeks of April, August and December of 2007. These recent newscasts can be found online, making access to the data easier. Altogether 36 newscasts were transcribed and analysed.

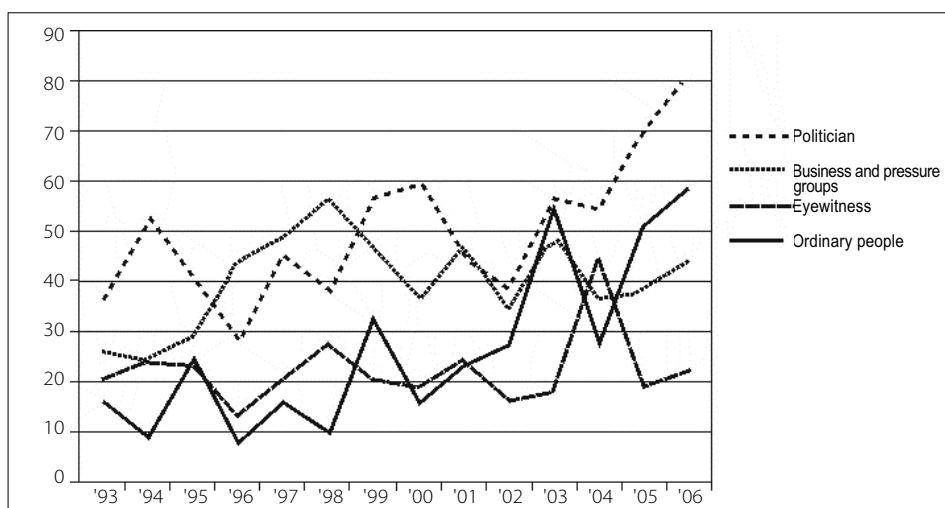
Third, we conducted nine face-to-face interviews with journalists (reporters, editors and the editor-in-chief) concerning their views on the role citizens play (or should play) within NOS News, and more specifically, on the role of emotional expression both in vox pop interviews and in public service news in general. These interviews took place between September 2007 and January 2008.

The Voice of People in NOS News

From looking at the changes in the presence of ordinary citizens in NOS News, it seems that Dutch public TV news is taking seriously its renewed mission to reverse the top-down nature of news making and seek more contact with the public. Our study shows that the citizens' voice has gained a more important role in NOS news. Looking at the presence of different source groups during our study period (1993-2007), politicians have continuously formed the largest or second largest (when representatives of business and pressure groups have been most prominent) source group. While the dominance of political sources is expected, it is perhaps more surprising that the citizens have evidently gained a more prominent role in the news. While in 1993 citizens comprised 4.3 per cent of all sources, in 2006 they amounted to 9.0 per cent.

In Figure 1, the four most important sources (politicians, business and pressure group representatives, eyewitnesses and citizens) are compared over years in absolute numbers. Whereas in 1993 citizens represented the fourth most frequently interviewed source group, in 2006 they form the second most important source after politicians. Between 1993 and 2006, the total number of sources in our sample increased from 380 to 648, as both newscasts and news items became longer. However, the increase in citizens, from 16 in 1993 to 58 in 2006, is more considerable

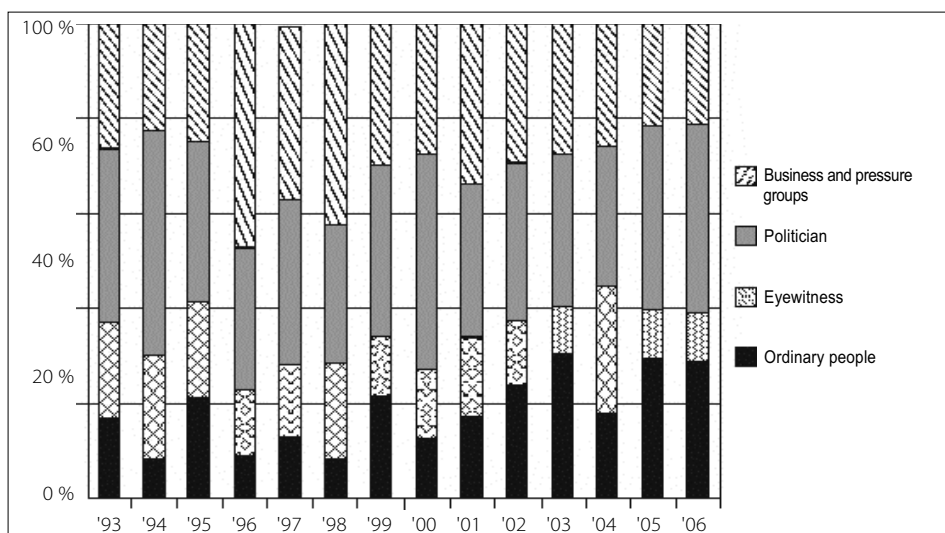
Figure 1: Main Source Groups in NOS News (in absolute numbers, N=2,238)



than the increase in sources in general. Their number grew 3.6 times between 1993 and 2006, while the number of other sources grew 1.7 times. Additionally, among the group of “unofficial sources” (consisting of citizens, eyewitnesses, celebrities and sports people) only the presence of citizens has increased considerably. Figure 2 reinforces the data in Figure 1; the four biggest source groups have all increased in amount (absolute numbers), but looking at the percentages of all sources, the most notable increase concerns citizens, especially since 2000.

Between 1993 and 2006, the mean length of time that interviewees spoke (reporters’ questions excluded) was 21.5 seconds ($SD=19.7$). During this period, citizens

Figure 2: Main Source Groups in NOS News (percentage, N=2,238)



received the least amount of time to talk, 10.6 seconds on average. The interviewees that were allowed the most time to express and explain themselves were experts (M=26.7), who have been asked in to explain a particular issue, and representatives of churches (M=24.1). Despite the fact that newscasts and stories increased in length over the years, the average length of interviews decreased. The time allowed for all the interviewed sources to speak decreased over the years from 22.9 seconds (1993) to 18.7 seconds (2006). However, as Figure 3 shows, the length of citizens’ speaking time has remained approximately the same (10.7 seconds in 1993, 10.8 seconds in 2006). Thus, while other sources’ amount of time to speak has been decreasing, this reduction does not concern citizens.

Figure 3: Average Length of Interviews in NOS News (in seconds)

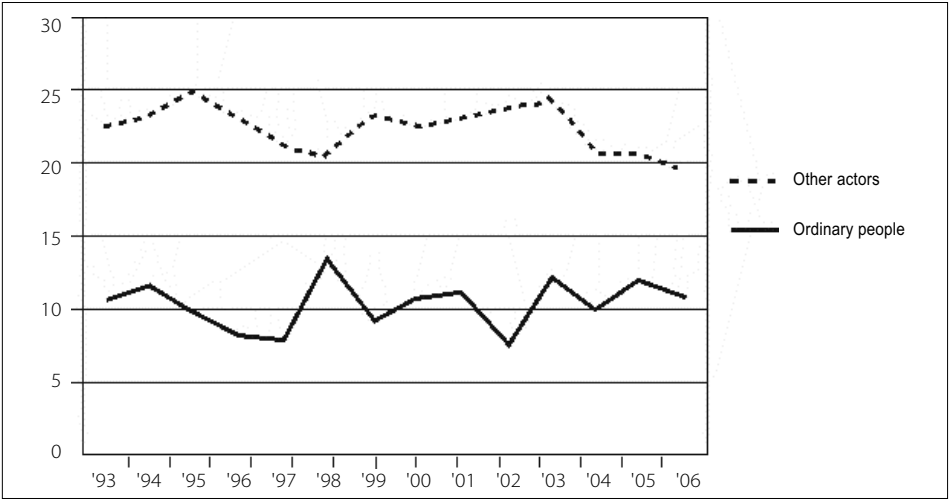


Table 1 shows which news stories include interviews with ordinary people. Our study shows that the vox pops are not confined to non-political subjects. Thus, our finding is similar to that of Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005, 76) who point out that vox pops allow citizens to speak about a wide range of topics, rather than being limited to “soft” or human interest topics. In NOS News, citizens are most often invited to express their views and feelings on war and defence and foreign politics. Besides these subjects, however, citizens were typically consulted on issues surrounding celebrities, sports and human interest topics. In our sample, for example, recurring news stories about Gay Pride Day and Deventer Book Market in August included interviews with men and women on the streets.

Table 1: Main Topics Commented by Citizens (in percentage)

Topic	F	%
Defence/War	58	14.0
Foreign politics	50	12.1
Celebrities	33	8.0
Human interest	31	7.5
Sports	31	7.5

Going into the Streets – Interviews with NOS Journalists

The NOS News editors and reporters we interviewed talked about a change that has taken place in the relationship with ordinary citizens. The public promise of connecting the state with the street, by editor-in-chief Hans Laroës in November 2002 after the murder of Fortuyn, has obviously been internalised by individual journalists. All interviewees mentioned the rise of the populist politician as one of the key events in reassessing their editorial practises and the ways in which they engaged with the lives of Dutch citizens. As one journalist described, they were shocked that they were being critiqued for forgetting the concerns of ordinary citizens: “What surprised us is that we were very much identified with the establishment ... We had forgotten what we are supposed to do, and we started doing it again: going into the streets. And the ‘streets’ should be more than just interviewing a few people at the market place” (journalist 7).

Another explanation given by journalists for the rise of the “common man” in television news is connected to the changes within the media industry itself, namely, increased competition and commercialisation within the Dutch news market. During the last years, commercial news programs such as *Hart van Nederland* (SBS 6) and *Vier in het Land* (“Four in the Country,” RTL4) have increasingly attracted viewers with local, non-political and emotionally charged news stories of ordinary people. Some journalists implied that public news has been forced to follow the example of these human interest news programs.

Going into the streets means rethinking the dominance of political and other elite as news sources and trying to make news more “recognisable” for average citizens. Journalists talked about their old habit of interviewing only men and women of power and, consequently, of the danger of news becoming too “bloodless,” that is, of making news from which ordinary viewers cannot recognise themselves. In journalists’ accounts, the strategy of making news more recognisable involves more conscious planning of the news sources, more background stories, more consciousness of public emotion and more emphasis on the consequences of the political decisions for citizens. Here are examples of journalists’ views on how public news is trying to connect with the street:

These days we make political items in which we try to establish a link to the consequences for people like you and me, ordinary people in the street, in villages, in the country (journalist 4).

We try to tell the big story by using a micro story. You do this, of course, because in the micro story there is more space for recognisable emotion, and thus, for the viewer, for the public, to identify with the story (journalist 9).

In the interviews, we asked separately about the role of ordinary people and emotional expression in news making. These two issues, however, appeared to be intertwined because journalists tended to locate the “emotionality” of news first and foremost to the emotions expressed by the interviewees, rather than, for example, to form giving features of the news story. Moreover, the function of emotional expression in news was typically connected to the “ordinary” public: emotion makes news stories more accessible, intelligible and recognisable for viewers.

Journalists shared the view that emotional expression has become more accepted and sought after in public news. This is partly seen as a consequence of the idea

of getting closer to the people and partly as a reflection of a broader socio-cultural phenomenon, namely the aspiration for more open emotionality: "There is just, also in news stories, more and more space for emotions, for the street, for what people think" (journalist 3). Overall, the journalists considered emotional expression as an accepted and even necessary part of news reporting. Journalists emphasised the value of emotional expression in helping viewers understand the meaning and consequences of the event or issue. Most interviewees raised a question about identification with news narratives, suggesting that it is through emotions that ordinary people can make meaningful connections between news information and their own lives. Emotion, then, is deemed important in interpreting what abstract news means to ordinary people and how they cope with it: "It [emotion] translates abstract news – politics, economy – to 'what it means for you'" (journalist 9).

Clearly, journalists also have strong reservations about the legitimacy of emotional expression in news reporting. In particular, they stressed the importance of emotional expression being "relevant." Journalists argued that emotion should always serve a function within the news story, meaning that it should add something to a news story. For example, while representing collective feelings can be relevant (i.e. collective grief) or "showing that people are angry because their houses are being demolished because of a new train track" (journalist 7), some emotional expressions are too banal to contribute anything substantial to the story. As one journalist explained, it is completely meaningless to include the predictable "It's awful" comments from citizens: "You don't go out to the street because that's easy and you hope you get a right reaction but you try to make it really really functional" (journalist 6).

Journalists were also very wary over the potential danger of going over-the-top with emotional expression. Like in everyday use, the term emotion seems to carry negative connotations of slipping easily over-the-top. Subsequently, all journalists emphasised the necessity of being careful when dealing with the emotions in their news work. Getting the measure right is crucial since it tells about the quality of news; the use of emotion works to distinguish public news from sensation seeking commercial news programs. NOS journalists were very concerned about the line between "just reporting" emotions that are "out there" and trying to intentionally evoke emotions.

Interestingly, one long time experienced journalist identified a cyclical development in the reporting on ordinary people and their emotions, shifting from severe abstinence about 20 years ago to recent emotional indulgency (shown in the "great mourning" of public figures and "silent demonstrations") and, within public news, back to a more "careful" style. Similarly, it is said that public news has lately become more careful in using vox pops. This is partly because in street interviews citizens' reactions can be excessive and unpredictable. Another reason for the "carefulness" is that vox pops are often too manipulating ("you can get people to say anything you want"), and, therefore, they do not generate meaningful insights and authentic emotions: "You introduce emotions into the story with street interviews but it's a wrong kind of emotion. You walk around and ask, 'What do you think about these badly built balconies?' 'O yes, terrible!'" (journalist 3). Instead of collecting individual voices from the street, they currently aim to go deeper into the thoughts and feelings of citizens by, paradoxically, letting the journalist tell their story:

We try to get the story from the street by having a reporter on location for one or two days and have him tell the story. Or only use one person to tell the story. So not like we used to do: go to Albert Cuyp [street market in Amsterdam] and get some fast quotes (journalist 2).

Citizens Speaking

In recent years, the use of vox pops in NOS News has not only become more common but – to a certain degree – more diverse. Until 2000, interviews with citizens were typically used to dress up the main story. In our sample, the earlier vox pops were usually delivered in one-liners, as in the following crime story about the series of racist arsons in The Hague. Unidentified man nods his head and says sorrowfully, “I find it strange ... yes, it frightens me” (April 1, 1997). We see a development in the use of vox pop to carve more space for citizens. On the one hand, the number of citizens speaking per news story has increased. Between 1993 and 2003 the number of citizens appearing on news items ranged from one to three, however since 2003, it is not unusual to see five, six or even more members of the public in one item. On the other hand, since 2003, we see also lengthier interviews with citizens among the standard short soundbites, to the extent that occasionally, the response of citizens is the focus of a news story.

Regarding the emotional/rational/political nature of vox pops, we found that emotional responses and political opinions or rational discussion are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, in our sample the most apolitical or “trivial” comments are also devoid of any strong emotion. Consider the following story about political corruption in a small Brunssum town as an example of “political passion,” how political opinion and emotional expression are intertwined in the vox pop: “My opinion is simple: everything should be demolished in the municipality of Brunssum. Tear it down, all of it. And then we’ll begin all over again” (Unidentified man, April 1, 1994). In this story, which was reported following the arrest of the mayor and some council members of the town, the citizen appeals to politicians and fellow citizens to have a new start in local politics. This interview has a strong emotional undertone but it also puts across a clear moral judgement and a suggestion of what should be done, drawing authority from a genuine display of anger.

Different kinds of citizen responses are also combined within the same news item through different speakers. A news item about the announcement of the takeover of Dutch ABN AMRO bank by British Barclays includes multiple interview segments with citizens that provide miscellaneous and contrasting evidence about public opinion and emotion, which ranges from emotion-based concerns to “straight” substantive opinions:

Unidentified woman 1: *“I don’t know if I should be happy about it.”*

Reporter: *“Why shouldn’t you be happy about it?”*

Woman 1: *“Yes, well. British, English. Let’s just keep things Dutch. That would make me happy.”*

Unidentified man 3: *“Yes, that is of course well explored and well thought-out. I think that ABN is safe with Barclays’s takeover. I think that you need to be very careful with this kind of takeovers. And ABN is of course a big player at the financial market and certainly Barclays is not a small one either, so I think that the future of ABN is in good hands and guaranteed” (April 23, 2007).*

This and some other of our examples also illustrate the role of the journalist in vox pops. Journalists' questions are not always included in the story but when they are, they can be rather suggestive. In contrast to the journalists' claim that they are not trying to evoke emotions, the news stories show that journalists often use suggestive questions aimed at making the interviewees confirm a certain emotion or lead them to talk about their feelings (cf. Hartley 1982).

Our quantitative study showed that NOS News vox pop segments are most likely to appear in international news. Moreover, it is in this category that citizens' contributions are most politically oriented and passionate. This can of course be explained by the fact that foreign citizens usually talk about clearly political issues such as elections, conflict or harsh economical situation, which can elicit strong emotions. There is also a difference, and this came out in the interviews too, between international news and national news regarding the direction (i.e. positive vs. negative) and intensity of emotional expression (i.e. weak vs. strong). While foreign news is typically characterised by "hot" and negative emotions, news about national issues are bound to include calmer, more positive and more politically correct emotions. Citizen comments such as "Bush is the devil" (news on elections in Venezuela; December 1, 2006) do not fit in the discourse of domestic news. Thus, in our sample, Dutch citizens are most often discussing human interest or celebrity topics, such as new enclosure of the fugitive gorilla, camping sanitation and the birth of the Dutch princess, the overall tone of vox pops being characterised by tame cheerfulness. Even though the domestic topic belongs to the domains of politics, social policy or economy, the questions asked from citizens often leave little room for critically/emotionally engaged comments. For example, the introduction of the story about the rise of luxury nursing homes for demented elderly people concludes that "Not everyone can afford these," but instead of going deeper into this dilemma the reporter carries on by asking a resident, "What did you eat today, Mrs. van Es?" (April 7, 2006).

While foreign news in NOS News increasingly comes from international news agencies – which opens up another question on the role of NOS journalists in the rise of vox pops – in our sample there are also examples of reporting from NOS staff's foreign correspondents that is oriented towards citizens' views and public emotion. Our example is from a series of reports from Cuba, which look to show how ordinary Cuban people see the political situation in their country. Focusing completely on the opinions, feelings and personal experiences of local people, the story manages to communicate an emotional climate of anger, fear and disappointment that is related to underlying political structures. The correspondent talks with an elderly man who fought for revolution and speaks about Fidel Castro with gratitude, and with two young men who express views of anger both about the Cuban regime and the interference of the Bush government: "Nobody has the courage to speak up. A father with children is afraid to be captured. How is his family supposed to survive then? I dare to say that this is a dictatorship. I am not afraid to say that" (unidentified man, April 27, 2006).

If we are looking for evidence about the more emotionally oriented news reporting, we should also look at the seemingly emerging genre of the "news of feeling" (see Kitsch 2000). These are news stories, set apart from detached reporting and expert knowledge, in which the focus is on collective emotion and recently

emerged informal public (and political) rituals, such as the laying of flowers at scenes of accidents and the sending of e-mail petitions (see 6 2007, 43). Typically, the news of feeling follows major news events, but increasingly, the reporting on local tragedies includes interviews with members of the public who are not directly involved with the event. In the following example, after a short introduction by the anchor and reporter, four local women talk unselfconsciously about their feelings concerning the murder of an eight-year-old boy at a primary school in the town of Hoogerheide:

Unidentified woman 1: *"Yes, horrible. I have just sent some flowers... to the school too. They are our neighbours. It is for us, yes, for us who all have children..."*

Reporter: *"That hits you very hard?"*

Woman 1: *"Yes, of course"* (December 1, 2003).

Here, the voices of ordinary people are the main story, and even if their reactions are predictable, we would not like to consider them as irrelevant or apolitical. Instead of using a usual expert source (police, for instance) to explain what has happened, the news story allows these local women to open the tragedy up for the involvement of a wider public. They define its meaning through their own emotional involvement that is not only expressed in their words and postures but also in the confusing sentences, hesitations and repetitions.

As Lewis et al. argue (2005, 87), by allowing the entry of non-elite people into the televised public sphere, the vox pops challenge the elitism of news programmes and bring diversity in television news representations. Based on our qualitative analysis and interviews with journalists, we argue that in NOS News, besides attempting to create more choice in topics, storytelling and sources, there is also an attempt to foster more ethnic diversity. We can interpret this partly as a response to the "failure" of Dutch multi-ethnic society, becoming evident with the rise of Fortuyn, and to the concerns of rising Muslim radicalism. One example of this, a feature story that takes an in-depth look at the ideas and beliefs of young Dutch Muslim men, gives an exclusive voice to a minority group. Interviewees who are gathered in a Moroccan "coffee shop" (a shop which sells drugs) in Amsterdam express their dissident views about the war in Iraq, about Jihad and about living in the Netherlands:

When the American government calls for volunteers to fight in Iraq, how would you call that in the Western world? [Speaks and gestures angrily]... If he [American soldier] dies he is a hero, he gets a beautiful flag, and his wife gets the folded flag sent home. And then? Joe's a hero. But here, when he happens to be a Muslim, then it happens to be a Jihad and he would happen to be a terrorist (Unidentified man 6, April 4, 2003).

These interviews are different from typical vox pops in that the citizens express their views in the form of conversation with the journalist, and they have much more space to express their views and feelings, even if they are politically incorrect. In these interviews, certainly, the personal and emotional is also highly political. We could interpret this story as public news' serious attempt, in a polarised political atmosphere, to represent also those non-elite voices that contrast the dominant ideas and values of the society. In the context of foreign news, the interviewed journalists stress the role of the emotional expression in invoking solidarity and compassion

towards distant others, but it can also be used to create some understanding towards “others” who are uncomfortably close, such as these young Muslim men.

Discussion

Over the last years, the vox pop in Dutch public news has gone through a revival. We have seen a change in the prevalence of vox pop but also in the ways in which citizens are represented. Both the interviews and content analyses of citizens as speaking sources seem to show that “ordinary” people have become more central in the NOS News, although far more preference is still given to different elite voices. The interviewees felt that there had been changes in their editorial culture, due to profound changes in society (emotionalisation), the media landscape (commercialisation) and also due to particular political events (such as the support towards populist Fortuyn and the defeat of the European Constitution by the Dutch electorate), which had forced them to recognise the need to improve their practices in order to reach out to the public.

We have also noted that there is a tendency in NOS News, which has traditionally stressed strictly factual and detached reporting as core professional values even more than Dutch commercial news outlets, to be more open towards emotional expression. Besides the recognition of the above developments, this can also be a result of NOS journalists learning to think more openly about the quality of news, as many of them have gone through training in recent years on alternative ways of thinking about “public quality,” about incorporating emotions and everyday life experience into news reporting (see Costera Meijer 2001, 2003). Accordingly, in some stories, as our analysis has shown, the focus was completely on public emotion.

Within NOS newsroom, however, traditional views of journalism and journalistic practices, based on the juxtaposition of reason and emotion, are also present. Thus, the journalists consider emotional expression legitimate as long as they are “relevant,” do not blur or surmount the facts and come in an “authentic” manner from the people interviewed (as opposed to being evoked by the journalists). Journalists are also very careful in pointing out the differences between “registering emotions” and “sensation seeking,” and between their motives and practices regarding emotional expression and those of their commercial rivals. Similarly, they expressed concerns about the relevance and informative/emotional value of vox pop segments. Despite many reservations the interviewees had concerning emotional expression, it is also clear that journalists recognised the importance of emotional expression and “ordinary experience” in the news as a means of eliciting interest, facilitating understanding and creating meaningful connections between everyday life and public issues.

Certainly, emotional expression presents a challenge to the traditional paradigm of journalism as well as to the traditional way of understanding the public sphere as a space for rational, critical discussion. Within journalism studies, the (emotional) voice of the people in the news is often an indication of compromised journalistic quality, news becoming more “entertaining” or “populist.” Moreover, in the debate on the merit of vox pop interviews, the argument has been that the voice of citizens is merely emotional, and thus, it fails to present political opinions and analysis. We have wanted to contribute to this discussion, from the starting point that emotional expression is critical to public discussion and political en-

gement, by looking more closely at the emotional dimension of vox pops. If we believe that emotional expressions articulated in the news media are consequential for public life (certainly, they can have both unifying and disruptive, and engaging and disengaging consequences) and that journalists “play a crucial role in building the emotional environment within which politics happen” (Richards 2007, 12), the emotionally charged interviews with ordinary citizens may represent a resource for political life. We suggest that they can facilitate the emotional investment and recognition needed for the engagement with public life. This is not to say that all emotional expressions are meaningful. While we have seen an increased interest in emotion in NOS News and attempts to focus on public emotion, at the same time we also noted a “deficit of emotion.” On the one hand, and on the contrary to what journalists claimed, the emotional expression in vox pop is often merely anecdotal and derives from journalists’ suggestive questions. On the other hand, when we hear citizens speaking passionately about politics, they are usually foreign citizens.

Since this study is focused on Dutch public service television news, we cannot make generalisations regarding other news contexts. What we hope to have done here, however, is to have provided enough cause to look further in which ways, by whom (paying attention to categories such as socio-economic position, gender and ethnic origin) and in which context emotion is articulated in the news; how emotional expression and public life are connected. Since there is no previous empirical research on this subject, further studies with expanded samples and with other news sources are clearly necessary. In the era of participatory journalism, it would be important to compare how citizenry emotions are incorporated in the news broadcasts and on the website of the broadcaster. We also think an extended comparative study on vox pops, including several European countries with different broadcasting traditions, is also worth pursuing in order to provide evidence on how citizens are represented within specific editorial cultures and/or national cultures. Further comparative empirical research in newsrooms of both public and commercial broadcasters is also important as a means of understanding journalists’ values and motivations behind giving access to non-elite voices and space for emotional expression.

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