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Migration between Politics, Journalism and PR

New Conditions for Power, Citizenship and Democracy?

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Abstract

In this article we present a preliminary theoretical background and some empirical findings concerning a migrating trend between the fields of politics, PR and journalism: one day a political reporter, the next a communication officer; one day a PR consultant, the next a state secretary. To understand contemporary politics one must, we argue, comprehend the convergence between three fields of power holders that together form the realm of politics and communication: elite politicians, elite political reporters and elite communication/PR officers. Together, they form a communication elite that sets the parameters for the public discourse on politics. When politics is produced and constructed in, and through, social networks formed by elite agents from politics, journalism and PR, what does this mean for how democracy is worked out and what does it mean for citizenship in general?

Keywords: communication elites, convergence, politics, public relations, journalism, democracy

Introduction

This text can be seen as a starting point for a research project – Post-politics in Mediaocracy: the structural transformation of political communication – dealing with the fundamentals of contemporary Swedish politics and democracy. The basic outline of the project concerns social power, power agents and the production and construction of 'the political'. In focus are the agents that form the realm of politics and political communication, that is, those agents that possess the resources to produce a dominant discourse – a basic knowledge structure – of politics and democracy, but also how this agency is socially and culturally contextualized.

In this article we present a preliminary theoretical background for this research project and some empirical findings concerning three groups of communication power holders: elite politicians, elite political reporters and elite communication/PR officers – a body of persons we refer to as a *strategic communication elite*.

This communication elite sets the parameters for the public discourse on politics, largely affecting how citizens will perceive 'the political'; but it also sets the limits for their right to take action.

The elites in question act and interact in specific *social fields*, conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu as arenas of socialized action where relations are structured and where

agents compete for positions and power (Benson, R., & Neveu, E. 2005, Bourdieu, P. 1992 and Neveu, E. 2007). Social fields are structured systems governed by internal rules, and within any field there is social division; therefore, fields are arenas of competition. From the perspective of field therory we distinguish a political field, a journalistic field and a communication/PR field, each populated by professional actors whose actions are based on accumulated resources and forms of power.

An established social field is generally autonomous, albeit related to other fields, but we argue that the boundaries between the three fields in question are becoming more and more porous due to the processes of agents migrating from one field to another. Gradually the agents come to share a common body of professional knowledge as well as a set of common norms and rules; therefore, the distinctions between the fields are not as clear as could be expected.

There are, we argue, two common denominators distinguishing the fields of politics, journalism (political reporting) and political PR: *marketization* and *convergence*, constituting the structural conditions for agents in the fields. While we will return to the question of marketization later, we note now that convergence is a process that tends to blur distinctions between the fields in question. This makes it possible for agents to transcend the demarcations of one field and enter another, something we refer to as processes of migration.

To understand contemporary politics one must comprehend the convergence between the three fields mentioned above. 'The political' – and how it is perceived – is produced and constructed through constant interactions and negotiations among the elite agents populating the fields. This, we argue, necessitates an in-depth understanding of the communication elite: their genealogy, their composition and evolution, the habitus they possess, the strategies they practice, and the patterns of conflicts and collaborations between them.

A Migrating Trend Between the Fields

There are many indications of a migrating trend in and out of the three fields under study, pointing to a situation in which positions in politics, journalism and PR are more or less interchangeable. Below we present some examples of this migration – from political reporting to PR; from PR to politics; and from politics to PR – with individuals tending to quite 'undramatically' change places or positions, some of them more well-known than others (Sandström and Palm 2013).

Case 1: Journalist – Press Secretary, Government offices – PR consultant – Press Manager, the Social Democratic party – PR consultant (private firm) – Press Secretary, Swedish National Police Board.

Case 2: Journalist (the Swedish news agency TT) – Head of Press Office, Government offices – PR consultant – Head of Press Office (Mona Sahlin, former leader of the Social Democratic party) – PR consultant – Press Manager SEB (one of the largest banks in Sweden).

Case 3: Op-ed. Svenska Dagbladet (the second largest morning newspaper in Sweden) – Political Secretary, the Conservative party – Chairman of the youth organization, the

Conservative party – PR consultant – Communication Manager, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise – Senior Fellow at Fores (a Swedish think tank) – Political Editor, Svenska Dagbladet.

Case 4: Expert, Government offices (former Prime Minister Göran Persson) – Head of Press Office, Government offices – State Secretary – Management Consultant – Director of Communications, Nordea (one of the largest Banks in Sweden) – Head of the Social Democratic party election campaign, 2014.

Case 5: Journalist, Dagens Eko (Swedish public service radio) – Press Secretary (Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt) – Expert (office for the Minister for Migration) – PR consultant – Communication Manager, Swedish Export Credit Corporation.

Case 6: PR consultant – Member of Parliament – Minister for Gender Equality – PR consultant.

This migrating trend is obvious also at a more structural level. For the period January 2000 to November 2012 we have found the following pattern of interchange between the three fields:

- From journalism to PR: 48
- From journalism to politics: 44
- From politics to PR: 57
- From PR to politics: 19

Four ministers in the present Swedish government (June 2013) have a background as PR consultants: the Minister for Culture and Sport (Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth, the Conservative party), the Minister for Information Technology and Energy (Anna-Karin Hatt, the Centre party), the Minister for Gender Equality (Maria Arnholm, the Liberal party) and the Minister for Social Security (Ulf Kristersson, the Conservative party).

Several former ministers are presently working as PR consultants. Among them: former Prime Minister (Göran Persson, the Social Democratic party), former Minister for Defence (Sten Tolgfors, the Conservative party), former Minister for Employment (Sven Otto Littorin, (the Conservative party), former Minister for Education and Research (Lars Leijonborg, the Liberal party), former Minister for Gender Equality (Nyamko Sabuni, the Liberal party) and former Minister for Defence (Anders Björck, the Conservative party).

In addition, several former State Secretaries are to be found in the PR sector. For example: Per Schlingmann (the Conservative party); Ulrica Schenström (the Conservative party); Dan Ericsson (the Christian Democrats); Jöran Hägglund (the Centre party) and Krister Nilsson (the Social Democratic party)

A number of former Press Secretaries, both from the political parties and from the government offices, as well as former political reporters and chief editors, have taken on new roles as senior PR consultants. The Swedish journal Dagens Samhälle mapped the "The Political Public Relations elite" in 2013 (Sundling and Holmkvist 2013), resulting in a list of more than 300 persons, "the Swedish elite in political PR and public affairs". Among them, 119 have a background in the Conservative party and 94 in the Social Democratic party.

The migrating trend, or convergence between the fields exemplified above, can be attributed to structural transformations in the fields of politics, political journalism and PR/communication.

The Political Field: Redefinition of Democracy

Basically, democracy has to do with the power of citizenship laid down in important institutions, the most important of which, we argue, concern the right to distribute knowledge (e.g. freedom of information) and the right to (independently) form and express opinions (e.g. freedom of speech). These institutions together form what in political theory has been called the public sphere (Habermas 1989). So, democracy should be regarded as a genuinely participatory process, operating at different levels: local, national, regional and global (de Sousa Santos 2005).

But today democracy tends to be redefined as something limited to a quite narrow sphere of party politics where a range of options, related more to identity (or lifestyle) than to citizenship, is offered in what tends to become a political marketplace (Zizek 1999). Citizens are transformed into voting blocs or target groups addressed like customers and consumers, and citizenship is transformed into an activity worked out every four years – the *marketization* of politics (Kiely 2007).

This redefinition of democracy determines the structure, content and distribution of the contemporary political ideas, and therefore also the features of political communication (Bourdieu 1992, van Zoonen 2005). In this text we argue that the political communication of the present era is of a very specific kind because it is grounded in two very distinct features of contemporary politics.

Firstly, the space of politics – what is communicated to citizens and how they are embedded in politics – is decided by elite networks comprised of agents from party politics, the PR industries and the newsrooms of the most influential and powerful news media.

Secondly, as we already have noted, positions or places in those networks are – on a personal level – interchangeable amongst the leading agents; that is, a person can migrate from one position to another.

These features produce a very specific set of political power, exercise of power, power structures and power struggles that shape the content of the political field. But we argue that there is not only a political field, but rather that this field is structured in two different but linked layers.

The first layer is the space and practices of *state apparatuses*, where policy is produced and implemented, politics 'pure', while the second layer is the space where *party politics* – or political competition – is worked out. So, politics takes place in different arenas, and politics that is public, aimed at the citizen, is quite restricted in the sense that fundamental policy questions and decisions are often left out of the public arena– that is, beyond citizen control.

This split of the political field we have discussed so far, where 'pure' politics actually becomes 'limited', makes it politically unthinkable to approach and understand politics any other way. To speak with Pierre Bourdieu (1992:172), this understanding of politics constitutes the *dominant political habitus*.

When Bourdieu discusses "entry into the field", we see this not only as an entry in the sense of becoming a politician but also think of this "entry" as a way of understanding

what politics is; agents of the field reproduce this understanding, and this – the separation between the two forms of politics – becomes the way politics is understood from citizens' point of view.

Eric Louw (2010: 20-21) argues that contemporary politics is made up of three dimensions: "policy", "process management" and "hypemaking" (all including different processes). The first dimension is the most basic and important, "substantial" politics – resource allocation. The political processes in this dimension are driven by "insiders" representing different elite interests, and these processes are generally not public and are quite seldom reported upon by media.

The processes in the second dimension – process management – form a kind of preparation for the third – elite interest (after negotiations) decides what issues will be made into voter issues. The processes are also kept away from the public eye, and most often also from news reporting.

The first two dimensions are really "insider politics" – sometimes elite reporters are included as drivers; the third dimension, though, is open politics: issues put in front of citizens as voters. This is the hype dimension, where different kinds of communication processes and communicators are involved and where media and news reporting are central and vital.

Louw looks upon the media not as a passive channel for information – hype – but as an active participant in mass politics geared to images and myths – politics to be consumed by voters. And sometimes reporters and editors can take part in substantial politics, becoming "insiders".

So, political communication deals almost exclusively with issues that are presented and re-presented at this second layer of the political field. Actually, agents from party politics, media and communication/PR produce and construct what becomes politics in the minds of citizens. This is the form of politics – and political issues – that becomes a shared, natural and self-explanatory common political habitus.

The Journalistic Field: Downsizing and Stratification

In the past two decades the journalistic field in Sweden has undergone dramatic and fundamental changes. *Firstly*, it has transformed from a relatively distinct field to a more complex and less transparent one. Basically, this transformation has to do with the parallel transformation of the production sphere – or the economy – in general: a transformation from industry to service, from materiality to culture, from use value to symbolic value (Castells 2001, Harvey 1990).

This symbolic capitalism has generated a multitude of new professions (or semi-professions), people who deal with a variety of symbolic forms: brands, CSR, ads, spin, PR (which in itself includes many forms), and of which news is just one – and very often not the dominant – form. All this has blurred the distinction between traditional journalism and other forms of creative writing. Mark Deuze (2005), Susanne Fengler (2010) and Kent Asp (2007) argue that the conceptualization of journalism as a professional ideology – claiming an exclusive role and status in society – can no longer be taken for granted.

Secondly, the transformation of the journalistic field has to do with the transformation of the media industries themselves. Today, the constant focus is on relating all activities,

even those in the newsrooms, to the *market principle*. This structural condition of news production can be seen as an ever-growing commoditization and commercialization of news, and as a *disciplining* factor for all kinds of work and work standards related to the practice of journalism.

News rooms have been downsized, and this is accompanied by increased pressure on individual journalists to produce more, resulting in a concentration on the most 'doable'. A study by the Swedish magazine Medievärlden (2013) addresses this downsizing of newsrooms: in 2012 376 journalists had to leave their jobs, almost 10 per cent of the total workforce in Swedish newsrooms.

A study from Södertörn University (Nygren 2010) focuses upon the members who left the Swedish Union of Journalists in 2007, as many as 800 members. Twenty-eight per cent of the members who left not only the Union but also the journalist trade started working with public relations and information.

Research from Gothenburg University (Jönsson 2005) indicates that more than 25 per cent of journalists in Sweden are planning to leave the trade for other fields. Among those aged 40-49 years, 35 per cent are planning to do so.

On the other hand, a survey study of communication officers in Sweden (Palm and Sandström 2013) shows that 25 per cent of the respondents have a background in journalism (have been employed in the trade) and that 40 per cent are open to leaving the communication business for a job in journalism.

Thirdly, the far-reaching rationalization of production in the media industries, resulting in a very tight labour market for journalists, also manifests itself as an ever-growing *stratification* of the trade itself. A three-tier social structure of the journalistic field is observable.

At the bottom, forming a kind of *periphery*, something like a journalistic proletariat can be found; replaceable, and with almost no autonomy, they perform routine tasks and are most often temporarily employed.[1] They seldom have professional skills, and very few have field-related education or training.

The majority of professional journalists are to be found in a middle layer, or the *semi-periphery* – these journalists produce the bulk of news on a day-to-day basis. The production process is heavily structured, but with a certain degree of autonomy. Their terms of employment are still relatively secure, although they tend to be becoming increasingly replaceable. They are expected to deal with multi-tasking, that is, managing different technical skills and also dealing with different subject areas (Wayne 2003, Nygren 2008, Wiik, 2010).

The top layer, the *centre*, is comprised of an elite group of journalists. This is a very small but powerful group often very close to the management level, and more often than not they take active part in decision-making processes (Tunstall 1996). They also often become important brands at their corporations, viewed as celebrities by audiences, and many cultivate their own trademarks. They have a high degree of autonomy; they interact with political, economic and cultural elite groups; they are integrated into important and powerful networks. It is in this group we find those who migrate to powerful positions in media-related communication businesses like PR agencies.

The practice of political news reporting has also been profoundly affected by the large-scale transformations described above. The traditional news formats, constructions and news frames are mixed with formats from popular culture. It becomes more and more problematic to separate the high from the low, the important from the less

important, hard news from soft, news from opinion, and sometimes even facts from fiction. *Politicotainment*, "/…/ the ways in which politics and political life are interpreted, negotiated, and represented by the entertainment industry/…/", seems to be a reality in political news reporting as well (Riegert 2007:1). Perhaps this embodies what Douglas Kellner (2003) refers to when applying the concept of *spectacle* to contemporary politics and political news reporting.

The Public Relations Field: Expansion and Legitimacy

On a global level, public relations grew into a significant, and powerful, industry during the 20th and early 21st centuries and there is a clear tendency towards an oligopoly situation (Miller and Dinan 2008).

The PR industry is closely connected to the centres of political and economic power. Washington and Brussels, as two significant examples, house significant bodies of concentrated public relations and public affairs businesses.

So, public relations have no doubt come to occupy a strategic position in the public sphere, with political as well as cultural impact. Contemporary PR might be present in technological, economic, social, political and legal changes. It takes place in a variety of contexts: politics, science, health, sport, entertainment, leisure, and education.

The field of public relations has undergone significant changes in recent decades; one significant change is related to the question of the status and legitimacy of public relations in different organizational contexts. Apparently, strategic communication is regarded as an important factor in and for organizations. Communication strategists and experts are more frequently given access to the inner circles of powerful organizations, where they can influence decisions and function as a strategic management resource (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier 2006).

So, compared to the downsizing processes in the newsrooms, here we see the opposite trend: upsizing, arming already resourceful news sources with a plethora of 'new' communication competences.

Today the field of public relations encompasses a wide range of communication activities, both within organizations and in the consulting sector: internal communication, public affairs, lobbying, business intelligence, CSR, media relations, crisis communication, branding, impression management, social marketing – to mention some of the most common.

From a critical discourse perspective, all these communication activities can be regarded as a symbolic and constitutive system that structures knowledge and social practices. We argue, like Motion and Leitch (1996), that public relations professionals have a significant role in the maintenance and transformation of discourse. According to this, a main task for the communication experts is to make sure that certain ideas and practices are established and understood. If they succeed in this, their clients will gain the hegemonic advantage in the discursive struggle.

Therefore, there is good reason to examine and analyse the public relations field not only as a unique or separate field but as one interlaced with the political and journalistic fields.

Magda Pieczka (2006) elaborates on an identified circuit of power between media, PR and politics. This circuit of power is an illustration of the existence of elites work-

ing in the same terrain or domain, knowing each other and socializing with each other. Three distinct groups constitute this circuit of power, according to Pieczka: journalists, elected politicians and public relations experts.

The question is: who has the upper hand in this power circuit? From the above-mentioned survey on communication officers (Palm and Sandström 2013), we note that one in two communication officers regularly (on a day-to-day basis) interacts with reporters, with the initiative to contact between the two groups in most cases being in the hands of the communication officer. One in two also states that they are able to influence the reporting in "a positive way", and 46 per cent state that they also interact with reporters outside working hours.

A great majority of the responding communication officers are very critical of contemporary news journalism; sensationalist, celebrity-oriented and trivial are but a few descriptions. At the same time, though, the communication officers regard all this as an opportunity to influence reporting. One of the informants declares: "Reporters are always in a rush and overloaded with work and therefore in need of easily digested factual information – I'm the provider."

From the point of view of the communication/PR officers, they seem to have the upper hand in contact with reporters, something that is also attested to by reporters and communication officers inside the EU system (Palm 2002). Communication officers are not seen (and they do not see themselves) as news sources in general; they take part in the news production in a much more complex and comprehensive way. They not only provide information, but also act as *interpreters* (provide analysis), *sounding boards* (exchanging ideas) and *correctives* (interpretation of facts, confirmation).

Yet another survey of communication officers and journalists (Cision.se) confirms the picture of increased activities of communication officers directed at newsrooms and reporters. Sixty per cent of the reporter-respondents state that information, like press releases, from organized sources has increased in the past five years, and the same percentage of respondents state that working hours devoted to fact-controlling and news coverage have diminished. So, reporters have to deal with an increasing amount of information from organized sources, more often than not planned, compiled and packaged by public relation experts.

A Few Notes on Elites and Power

Above we have presented a small selection of perspectives and empirical findings addressing, as we see it, the convergence between the fields of politics, political journalism and PR. We now turn to an elaboration on our theoretical approaches: elites, power and strategic networks.

Studies and research on social power and power holders often use two terms interchangeably: elites and (ruling) classes. Furthermore, there is no consensus on how to apply those two terms: C. Wright Mills argued that the US was ruled by a small – mostly non-elected – group of actors, the power elite, while G. William Domhoff (2009) and others (Bottomore 1993, Carroll 2010, Sklair 2001) discuss these actors in terms of a class dominance theory.

Domhoff (2009) elaborates on the concept of a power elite when analysing three overlapping networks of people and institutions: the corporate community, the social

upper class and the policy-formation networks. The power elite is drawn from these networks and, Domhoff argues, focusing on this elite makes it possible to understand how power is organized. The power elite is a leadership group, a 'community' in itself, excluding other agents from the three networks described above.

The common ground for these studies and theoretical elaborations is the existence of an *inner circle* (be it a dominant class faction or an elite) controlling and dominating social, political and economic life. This inner circle is – more often than not – closely interconnected by different types of bonds, sometimes family bonds and sometimes those of a more 'professional' kind. They form networks in which members share aspirations, goals, norms and values. It is also important to note that elites are not restricted to the political sphere, but are rather a social phenomenon that transcends 'the political'. It is more accurate to talk about *social elites* that control different kinds of resources, or capital; resources that can be used to dominate the most important social fields.

Studies of national Swedish elites have taken a somewhat different approach than the studies mentioned above, with a focus instead on elite *positions*, elite *polarization* and elite *integration*. When studying positions one delimits a realm of formal positions, and 'owners' of such positions constitute a power elite. Polarization implies the existence of two or more, more or less separated, elites. Although they interact, they do not interconnect. Elite integration describes the degree of closure within a separate elite group.

Gergei Farkas (2012) has observed the existence of a polarized elite structure, two decoupled but interacting elite formations: the political and the economic. Although relations between the elites have sometimes been conflictual, the dominant impression is the high degree of consensus.

In a recent comprehensive study of the Swedish power elite positions (Göransson 2006), the 'classic' form of Swedish duality – the political and economic – is extended with a more in-depth and enlarged analysis of power holders, separating not only corporate elites and political elites but also administrative, organizational, scientific, cultural and media elites. This gives a better picture of the contemporary complex social differences and polarizations than does the 'old' model of dual elites.

The concrete, empirical, study of (different) elites tends to follow two broad approaches: positioning and networks. The network approach, linking different positions, individuals and groups trying to establish the quantity and quality of relations and interactions, is the method used by Domhoff (2009), for example, while social network analysis is used by Carroll (2010) and Farkas (2012).

In this paper we have presented some empirical findings on positions concerning politicians, political reporters and PR officers. The positions in these three groups are elite positions in more or less the same way as Bottomore (1993: 7) defines elites in his study Elites and Society, where he describes elites as "/…/ groups which have high status (for whatever reason) in a society." And elites are those persons or sub-groups who "/…/actually exercise power in a society at a given time."

This broad and extensive concept of the elite, applied by G. William Domhoff, Leslie Sklair and Tom Bottomore, fits our research interest very well as we argue that political elite reporters and elite PR officers, through the means of political communication, influence 'the political' in multiple ways. So, considering politics from the perspective of Tom Bottomore, 'the political' is produced and constructed by not only the 'pure' political agents but also agents from other elite fields.

Networks and Power

We also argue that the elite groups under consideration are interlinked and interconnected (although we do not present any empirical evidence of this statement in this text), and for this we have borrowed a term from Mark Duffield (2001): *complex strategic networks*. Duffield, who studies global developmental and security issues, argues that the aim behind Western aid to 'poor' countries and/or regions is not so much developmental as it is a question of Western security. Through aid, agents in the West try to encapsulate conflicts in the Global South to keep them from affecting Western interests. In order to accomplish this, the agents in the West construct complex strategic networks.

The networks are strategic in the sense that they unite agents around common goals and interests, even though these agents in contexts and situations outside the common interest may have diverging ambitions. We believe this approach can be translated into the field of politics and political communication; the relations between politicians, political reporters and communication/PR officers can be described in terms of complex strategic networks, although these relations can be quite conflictual as well.

In order to understand the formation and importance of contemporary political communication, elite agents – individuals and groups – and their interconnectedness and strategies must be analysed and understood. The concept of complex strategic networks can therefore be quite illuminating, but it requires taking into consideration at least the following processes: the origins and genesis of positions and networks; recruitment to positions and networks, and the bases for such recruitment; reproduction of positions and networks; circulation of agents within networks and exclusion of agents from them. Also, the analysis of strategic networks must be attributed to power: strategic networks are power networks.

Therefore, power is at the centre of our analysis, and since our interest is in elites and political communication the ability of these elites to produce, control and communicate knowledge and information is naturally of utmost importance and must be studied. The ability to select, present and circulate knowledge and information in ways that promote a certain interest or construct a certain frame of understanding is a power resource; to follow Thomas Mathiesen (1993), *information control*.

When such information control is systematically applied in order to produce and construct specific descriptions or views of reality – knowledge of a certain field, for example politics – we can talk of this world-view as a *discourse* (or discursive power). A discourse is a complex of formations and constructions – with specific rules – that makes up a certain area of knowledge in a way that encloses a specific meaning structure and excludes others (Jackson 2005, Lukes 2005).

The elite agents we deal with all possess such power resources that enable them to discursively control knowledge and information. They can construct an image of the political by defining the rules of the game; that is, they can define a certain *knowledge institution*. Klas Åmark (1998) labels this *meta-power*, a form of power that frames how one comes to understand and interpret one's own interests, a form of power that defines and structures alternatives for action and points out conceivable strategies.

According to Sandra Braman (2002:94), a power resource of this kind enables agents to "/…/ [dominate] the uses of all other forms of power and [change] how other forms of power come into being and are exercised"; that is, in Braman's words, "*genetic power*". With this term, Braman emphasizes the importance of control over informa-

tion and knowledge; and today, when information and knowledge are of vital social importance, this form of power tends to dominate alternate forms of power and how they are exercised.

We think of meta-power and genetic power as useful ways to understand the power resources – and how they are applied in different situations and contexts – of the three elite groups under consideration in this paper. Meta-power and genetic power enable the agents to define the political issues in the field as well as how the 'political game' should be understood – and also the patterns of political conflicts. This is what Richard Peet (2007:5) labels "a *policy regime*"; that is "/…/ a systematic approach to policy formation /…/ dealing with a definable, limited range of issues, which prevails, as the dominant interventionary framework, over a historical period /…/."

Concluding Remarks

Above we have presented what we consider the most important aspects of modern politics, from a perspective of three spheres: politics, PR and journalism. Contemporary politics and democracy are conditioned by the convergence of the three spheres, blurring the lines between party politics, PR and journalism. What politics is in the eyes of us citizens is produced and constructed through negotiations and relations between those three actor categories. Citizens are, in different ways, embedded in the processes and structures of the political, sometimes as 'cases' or 'examples', sometimes as 'statistics', but tend to be less and less addressed and recognized as citizens proper.

The present condition of politics produces a very specific form of democracy and very specific forms of power relations; relations, we assert, must be studied and valued. The theoretical approaches and empirical findings presented in this article can hopefully be seen as a relevant starting point.

So, our interests emanate from the following very broad research questions:

Firstly, if – and there are many indications of this – positions in politics, journalism and PR are more or less interchangeable, what does this mean for political reporting and political communication? This 'migration' must be studied and elaborated on; what are the terms and conditions and what are the consequences for 'the fourth estate'?

Secondly, if – and again, there are many indications of this – politics is produced and constructed in, and through, social networks formed by elite agents from politics, journalism and PR, what does this mean for how democracy is worked out and what does it mean for citizenship in general? These networks must be studied: how they are formed, how they are transformed (and how they fall apart), how they compete and conflict, the barriers to entrance, the 'prize' for upholding them, the way they are internationalized.

Note

1. We have borrowed the concepts *periphery*, *semi-periphery* and *center* from Johan Galtung (1969) and will use them to emphasize that no structure is a stable one. In our case it seems as if very few journalists are going upward from periphery and semi-periphery to center, but a quite distinct tendency can be noted: that from semi-periphery to periphery.

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