The "Americanization" of Political Communication

A Critique

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This article examines the notion of the "Americanization" of political and campaign communication. Beginning with the literature on the evolution of political communication practices in the United States and their adoption in other political systems, We explore the significance of the seeming convergence of practices and the implications for future patterns of political communication and sociopolitical development. Finally, we seek to link the notion of the Americanization of politics with a discussion of the "modernization" of societies.

Media watchers have become increasingly aware of the growing similarities in electoral communication practices around the world. Whether the examples are drawn from southern Europe or from South America matters little; the constituent parts of the election process in whichever country one is investigating have a sense of familiarity to them, as this recent comment on the Panamanian presidential election illustrates:

> The victory of Ernesto "the bull" Perez Balladares in the Panamanian presidential elections . . . marks the second time in a fortnight that Saatchi & Saatchi has won an election in central America. Saatchi & Saatchi "had a very disciplined client who accepted all their recommendations," says Alberto Conte of the rival PR firm McCann-Erickson. "It was a well-structured campaign with attention to detail. The experts did their job and the 'product' followed the instructions to the letter" (Gumson 1994:11).

Whether Ernesto "the bull" Balladares was aware of it or not, his political activities contributed one more piece of evidence to a growing body of literature on the evolution of electoral practices and their seeming convergence. After reviewing studies in this field, this article will focus on the general argument that links communication practices with some notion of "Americanization" and with the idea of the "modernization" of societies.

Campaign Practices and Political Communication

The example from Panama resonates with electoral communication practices across the world. As Paolo Mancini and David Swanson, among others, have pointed out, many of the recent changes in election campaigning share common themes despite great differences in the political cultures, histories, and institutions of the countries in which they have occurred (1994). Such practices as political commercials, the selection of candidates in part for the appealing image they project on television, technical experts advising candidates on strategies, media professionals hired to produce compelling campaign materials, mounting campaign expenses, and the mass media moving to center stage in campaigns are now common characteristics of many elections across the globe.

This raises some fundamental questions. Are these countries copying Western practices wholesale? Are they adapting them to meet local needs? Are these countries becoming more like the Western countries that they are emulating? Are they becoming more like them in their media practices?

It is easier to document the existence of similar practices, such as the use of experts or the increased use of television (Swanson 1991:15), than it is to make sense of the significance of those practices in different political and social settings. Thus, although elections all comprise similar elements, the way these elements are grouped together and their significance vary from one political system to another. In some countries, such as the United States and France, voters have to choose between candidates for president as well as other representatives, whereas in countries like the Netherlands and Greece, the choice is between different political parties. Even where there are apparent similarities, differences of detail may exist: American presidential candidates can appear almost out of nowhere and make themselves into viable contenders for national office through careful and extensive use of the mass media; in contrast, French or Greek presidential candidates cannot progress far without extensive party support, and they tend to be well-known figures before they stand for election. Political parties differ so significantly from one political system to another with regard to their organization and ideological makeup that it is deceptive to discuss them as if they were one and the same thing (Tunstall 1977:264). Thus, a comparison of electoral communication practices in the context of presidential contests requires sensitive analysis of the political processes under investigation.

However, it can also be argued that as the sorts of similarities in communication practices described above have become more obvious across countries, the reasons for carrying out comparative work have become stronger. This task is implicit in Jay Blumler and colleagues' support for comparative (political) communications research (1992). The authors cite three main reasons for pursuing this line of research:

1. Comparative research permits us to explore "patterns and problems . . . in our own spatial and temporal milieu" (p. 3) that are usually taken for granted and treated unproblematically. By making comparisons, one can come to appreciate the extent to which they are either fairly common or unique, and the possible reasons for why that should be the case.
2. Comparative research can often allow us to transcend the specificity of single-country studies and to generalize "theories, assumptions, and propositions" across time and space. As the Blumler group comments, "most election studies are culturally blinkered. . . . They cannot distinguish those features of campaign communication that are common to all democratic polities from those that are nationally exceptional" (pp. 3–4). Here, too, comparisons begin to permit one to make sense of the emergence of similarities and the entrenchment of continuing differences.
3. Comparative research can "explore and reveal the consequences of differences in how communication is organized at a macrosocial level" (p. 4).

Comparative research allows us, then, to view domestic practices not in isolation, but as a set of practices that may have similarities with those in other countries. We are able to begin to explore how such similarities have come about, why they have come about, and the meaning of this convergence for future social and political development. To return to the example at the beginning of the article: Is the political system of Panama becoming more like that of the United States or Europe, or is the resemblance only superficial, with real differences persisting at other levels of analysis—say, at the level of routine domestic politics? Furthermore, if some sort of convergence is taking place, what are the implications for the practices of communicators and politicians?

One reason why such questions are difficult to answer can be found in their formulation. They are conceived as if countries lead separate and isolated existences and that what we are presently experiencing is the importing and exporting of practices across clearly defined boundaries. Although it may be true that certain practices have, in recent years, been imported from powerful nations, such as the United States or Britain, or from powerful neighboring states, this "transfer" has in fact taken place in a world that has become increasingly internationalized. The Panamanians, for example, may have been drawing on practices that are now common across most parts of the world. As Blumler and colleagues also argue, "comparative research . . . implies the interpenetration of space and time. . . . System features and patterns are not eternal but instead are in continual flux, *increasingly brought about these days by influences from a larger world system of communication*"(1992:8–9, emphasis added). If that is the case, the focus of attention need not necessarily be the transfer of practices from one specific country to another, but the broader pattern of practices being adapted from a variety of sources, even a "common pool" of resources, to meet domestic needs.

In spite of the recommendation for a better understanding of the implications of "the interpenetration of space and time" for the emergence of similar practices across the globe, a significant part of the literature focuses directly on the importation of American experiences more than any others. David Butler and Austin Ranney, for instance, identify a range of practices—including the use of computers, fax, and direct mailing—that originated in the United States but are currently widely used elsewhere (1992). As they also point out, even phrases like sound-bite, photo opportunity, and news management, have American origins, yet they are commonly heard today "in every election strategy conference in Western Europe" (p. 8). The suggestion is, then, that the nature of campaigning in democracies around the world is becoming more and more Americanized as candidates, political parties, and news media take cues from their counterparts in the United States. (See Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 1995 for a sustained attempt at tracing the American influence in "political advertising" across a range of countries; and Maarek 1995 for a French account of the development of American "political marketing.")

However, as with the media and cultural imperialism debates of past decades, the use of the word Americanization to describe a complex process is not particularly helpful. Does Americanization simply refer to the adoption of practices first used in the United States? Does it refer to the take-up of technological developments? Does it refer to imitation and importation of practices and values? Does it actually contribute to our understanding of the significance of the transfers being alluded to? As Jeremy Tunstall observed in relation to the press, "All other nations in the world have borrowed American press models and then subsequent media models; but this does not mean that more or less American-style media 'fit' so neatly into, or constitute such an important part of, other political systems"(1977:263). Such comments reveal the lack of specificity of the Americanization thesis and, at the same time, the need to pin down the term more firmly. They also raise three other issues:

1. Given the "easy and incessant two-way traffic in fads, fears, music, fiction, poetry, inventions, reforms, theories" between the United States and Europe, how does one "evaluate the effects?" (Cunliffe 1974:41). The sense of ideas and practices being constantly adapted, imitated, altered, and basically changed as they meet new circumstances does make it difficult to work with the idea of a unilinear process of transfer from the United States to other countries.

2. It is almost impossible to refute the Americanization thesis. We can see this problem clearly if we look at a recent technological innovation: the use of the Internet by politicians and political parties. The practice has now spread outward from Bill Clinton to include British politicians. Are these countries, or their electoral practices, becoming Americanized, or

are they merely making use of the newest form of communication? Does the process in question imply the simple act of importation of technologies, of practices, or both? Does it also apply to the adaptation of technologies and practices? Put differently, what would a country not influenced by American (British, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Islamic . . .) practices and institutions actually look like, and is it possible to conceive of such a thing in the modern world? The problems inherent in the impossibility of disproving the Americanization thesis, or of making any real meaningful headway with it are in no small way related to the increasing speed and wholesale manner in which modern practices flow across the contemporary world.

3. Although the Americanization thesis strongly implies that it is a one-way flow of influences, in reality we may be observing a more complicated process. Not only do some countries adapt practices from outside the United States—in Greece, for instance, European influences may loom larger than American ones; Panamanians have used Saatchi & Saatchi, a British company; in 1994, the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party used Greek communication advisers, and so on—but the United States may itself import practices (Walker 1992). The Clinton campaign, for example, made use of advisers from the Labour party.

Under these circumstances, to focus on specific patterns of importation and exchange of practices and to attribute to them a single source undermines the complexity of the modern world and the sorts of interconnections that the preceding examples make evident; it underplays "the interpenetration of space and time" in the modern world. Nevertheless, because it is the American experience that has come to dominate thinking in the context of electoral communication practices, it is important to appreciate the ways in which that influence has spread to other countries.

The Americanization of Politics

There can be little doubt that many of the practices currently being employed in election campaigns across the world appear to have their *immediate* origin in the United States. As Butler and Ranney have reminded us, many of the practices that dominate contemporary elections—the emphasis on photo opportunities, the use of "spin doctors" and of image consultants—have a U.S. origin (1992). This, for some, amounts to an Americanization of politics, although one should be careful not to imply that these processes have taken place everywhere in the same ways with the same consequences and the same intensity. Americanization may, however, be a useful working hypothesis for exploring contemporary changes (Mancini and Swanson 1994).

We can see the relevance of these comments if we identify some of the tendencies in (electoral) political communication that give rise to the idea of Americanization. These include the increased emphasis on imagery in politics, the use of political advertising and particular forms of that genre, such as "negative advertising," and the use of professional communications consultants or media experts in election contests. Of all these, it is perhaps the use of the communications consultant that marks modern electoral contests from the more traditional ones. As Kathleen Hall Jamieson has suggested, it was only relatively recently—in the sixties—that firms specializing in political media consultancy came into existence (1992). This was not so much a completely new and radical innovation as it was the evolution of a role that had existed for some time. What was significant in this new era, according to Jamieson, was that the role had evolved from "one of technical adviser unwelcome in the strategy sessions . . . to campaign insider responsible for the strategy for all the campaign's advertising and, often, for its communication strategy, as well" (p. 36). By the nineties, it was obvious that the communications adviser had come to play a key role in electoral contests both within and outside of the United States.

One can see a similar evolution in British electoral practices (Scammell 1995; Kavanagh 1995). As in the United States, the early involvement of publicists and advertising agencies from the immediate postwar period onward was mainly in the design and publicity of political party material. It was much later that they came to occupy a more central position, particularly as the political parties themselves became more keenly aware of the importance of effective communication techniques. It was here that the U.S. experience was useful. Michael Cockerell records, for example, how John Profumo "had been on a special trip to study the American presidential campaign of 1952" before producing a report for the Conservative party (1989:15). The sense of learning from the American experience "because they were much cleverer in their election propaganda" (p. 15) cannot be denied, though the details of that process of importation have yet to be fully documented.[1] In point of fact, the televising of British election contests did not begin until 1958, well after the initial contact with American practices, but once established they developed rapidly. (See, for example, Windlesham 1966; and Cockerell 1989.)

By the early sixties, British television personalities/producers such as Christopher Chataway and Tony Benn began to bring their own individual expertise of the medium to their respective political campaigns. In time, others were brought in to advise on campaign communications, and the nature of the electoral contest began to change—so much so, in fact, that by 1966 Lord Windlesham could write that "professionalism in communication techniques became the accepted ideal of party political organizers" (1966:37) without fear of contradiction or ridicule. By the nineties, and after the much commented on techniques of Gordon Reece and Harvey Thomas in support of Margaret

Thatcher's campaigns, campaign advisers had become an accepted feature in electoral contests, and their role as insiders could hardly be doubted.

If we look at electoral communication practices in countries in which the media are less well developed historically or in terms of the legitimacy of their practices, it is possible to test the validity of many of the propositions discussed above. In this respect, Greece offers an interesting example. Ruled by a dictatorship until the mid-seventies, Greece has only in recent decades become a state with democratic practices, and it is only since the late eighties that the television broadcasting system has moved from under the control of the state. Some government control over the state broadcasting channels ET1 and ET2 is still evident, but there is no overt governmental control of the plethora of private television channels that have proliferated since the late eighties and that have come to dominate the broadcasting scene.

As in other democratic systems, television has become the dominant medium in Greece. In a recent piece of research conducted by MRB Hellas, it was found that as many as 69 percent of the citizens surveyed obtained their daily information from television, compared with 15 percent who gave the press as their main source (1993). With such evidence, it is hardly surprising that political parties devote most of their energies to the medium of television. However, this interest in television stretches back beyond contemporary times. Even in the late seventies, when television was a government monopoly, political parties had already begun to tailor their conferences and rallies to that medium's needs.

The current situation may then be seen as an evolution along a path of greater sophistication in the handling of television for (presumably) "effective" communication. Foreign experts, American and European, were first employed by the socialist party, Pasok, in an election campaign in the early eighties, and this tendency has continued up to, and including, the 1993 election, when foreign experts as well as domestic advertisers were used by the conservative New Democracy party. In addition, considerable sums of money were spent by the political parties on television; indeed, in the nineties, more than 90 percent of the total advertising expenditure by political parties went to television.

Yet, if one looks closely at the developments in the United States, Britain, and Greece, it is far from clear that they herald an inexorable drive toward Americanization. In fact, it highlights the importance of defining the meaning of Americanization more carefully. Does it refer to the use of similar practices during election contests only, or to all forms of political communication? We know, for example, that in Britain major political contenders are granted a proportion of airtime and that airtime cannot be purchased for overt and formal political communication. In the case of Greece, political contenders are also granted free airtime, although paid-for political advertisements can be broadcast by both private and state broadcasters. Furthermore, the thesis that televi-

sion is, by nature, a centrist medium (Kellner 1990) does not correspond to certain European experiences in which the services are clearly partial, as happened in Italy with Berlusconi's Forza Italia party and in Greece where the political affiliations of channels are well known. In other words, broadcasters are not always the nonpartisans so favored by American commentators.

So, in what sense does the adoption, and adaptation, of certain American practices in Britain, Greece, and elsewhere lead to a process of Americanization? A similar set of questions can be raised if a second interpretation of Americanization as a more fundamental process by which all political and social systems come to resemble the American one is used. Again, how has the experience of the last fifty years of American communication practices affected British communication practices or the nature of the British political system itself? Are there certain cultural, political, and social factors that inhibit the complete transformation of, say, British or Greek societies into variants of American society? Are these factors any more than "brakes—the force of some of which may be gradually weakening—in the accelerating momentum of the modern publicity process" (Blumler 1990:111)?

This suggests that there are two possible interpretations of Americanization. The first is much more focused on the extent to which U.S. electoral communication practices (American-style "video politics") are becoming "the role model for political communicators in other liberal democracies" (Gurevitch and Blumler 1990:312). The second interpretation touches on the extent to which the process of Americanization is a shorthand term for describing a series of changes in the social, political, and economic makeup of the West (and other countries) that prepares the ground for the adoption of American practices. This second interpretation of Americanization alludes to a larger process of social change.

At times, these interpretations overlap, but it is nevertheless possible to argue that there are important differences between them with respect to the future trends they project. Whereas the former concerns the centrality of the means of communication in modern society, the latter relates to the links, if any, between societies adopting American communication practices and their future sociopolitical development. Furthermore, whereas the former is more directly concerned with the extent to which American practices are imported, the latter allows for an analysis that does take in the "larger world system of communication."

The Centrality of the Means of Communication in Modern Society

Although the idea of Americanization is not a new one—it was first used in the 1830s as a term of abuse (Rose 1974:10)—it has gained greater currency as the mass media, and television in particular, have moved to the center stage of so-

cial and political life. Indeed, as television becomes the main source of informa-
tion for most people, the fact that its own development has been greatly influ-
enced by the U.S. experience increases the connections between practices in
the United States and elsewhere.

Yet there is a slightly different variation to this same theme. This version
does not deny the significance of the U.S. connection, but it concentrates in-
stead on the nature of television per se as a major factor in the changing nature
of electoral communication and other political practices. As Butler and Ranney
observe, "It is the practices of politicians and the media, exploiting technical
innovations and marketing approaches, that have altered the appearance of elec-
tions" (1992:4). This comes about because politicians seek to communicate with
and influence citizens, and the primary way of doing so is via the medium of
television—a medium that they rarely completely control. Hence both politi-
cians and broadcasters devise strategies, including reliance on marketing ap-
proaches and images, to ensure that their preferred presentations dominate. It
is hardly surprising, then, that "the modern publicity process involves a com-
petitive struggle to influence and control popular perceptions of key political
events and issues through the major mass media" (Blumler 1990:103). As poli-
ticians and broadcasters adapt to each other, it remains an open question
whether television has taken into consideration the needs of the political sys-
tem and whether politicians have merely forced themselves to engage in visual
politics. Thus the larger question of political communication for democracy is
sidelined as the logic of the "modern publicity process" dominates practices.

This is not meant to attribute some deterministic power to television, but
merely to point out that the existence of a medium like television brings about
changes in its wake. It is a point that John Thompson underlines when he argues
that "new technical media *make possible* new forms of social interaction, modify
or undermine old forms of interaction, create new foci and new venues for ac-
tors and interaction, and thereby serve to restructure existing social relations
and the institutions and organizations of which they are a part" (1990:225).

It follows that politicians as well as the public will inevitably interact dif-
ferently once a new medium of communication is inserted between them. Just
as politicians will use television extensively because it allows them to contact
all members of the public simultaneously, so too the public will begin to rely
on television for most of its information about the political world because of its
comparative ease of use. There are obviously numerous other changes that one
can use to illustrate what happens once "the modern publicity process takes
over": There is an increased importance attached to media strategies, to getting
the message "right," to the personalization of politics on the grounds that the
medium cannot easily cope with abstract ideas and that it functions best with
personalities (Blumler 1990:104). All of these can be seen as emanating from
the insertion of television into modern life and to its increased importance as a

medium of communication and culture or, as David Swanson has written, of "adapting the institutions and practices of politics and government to the central role of mass media, particularly television, in modern life, producing what may be described as 'media-centred democracy'"(1993:2).

What is significant is that one can treat both Blumler's account of the "modern publicity process" and Swanson's account of "media-centred democracy" independent of any real reference points in the United States. What these accounts describe or document is the increasing importance of television in modern life or, in Thompson's words, the "mediazation of modern culture" (1990:3). In fact, there may be considerable advantage in not attempting to connect the "modern publicity process" or "media-centred democracy" to Americanization, and not only because of the inherent difficulties of searching for the roots of practices in a world that is increasingly typified by exchanges of ideas, practices, travel, and experiences. By simply focusing on the "modern publicity process" one can, for instance, examine the routine strategies of politicians and practices in disparate political and cultural contexts (e.g., Mexico, Italy, Greece) without unduly worrying about American connections. Another advantage of such an approach is in avoiding the argument as to whether there is a process of convergence taking place whereby political systems are becoming more alike. The evidence for this is not particularly strong, with most European political systems retaining many of their traditional features and not seeming willing to drop these in favor of more American traits.

However, detaching the accounts of "media-centredness" from the larger overview may detract from one major argument in support of the basic notion of Americanization, namely, that it is American experiences that often dominate. Though it is possible to argue that the political and social milieu can have a significant impact on the development of a particular medium and that a broad range of options is usually available to media and political planners and decision makers (Gerstlè et al. 1991:281), it is worth observing that non-American options are rarely taken up. To quote from Soren Schou's account of post-war modernization in Denmark, the "modernization (of Denmark) occurred in a specific, American form not strictly inherent in the process of modernization" (1992:157). A similar statement could be made concerning the development of contemporary media, with the emphasis, by and large, on the deregulation and liberalization of media systems—an American idea imported into other countries—and away from the creation of publicly funded and publicly run systems of communications (Palmer and Tunstall 1990).

At other more specific levels, it is probably much more difficult to pinpoint a clear pattern or path of importation, and this emphasizes once again the difficulty of identifying the origins of practices and the influence of circumstances on developing structures and practices. For example, in his study of broadcast-

ing in Britain between the two world wars, Mark Pegg discusses the increasing use of radio in political campaigning by parties within the context of the Reithian era of radio (1983). This, it should be recalled, was a very un-American form of radio, with its emphasis on the informational and educative qualities of the medium as opposed to its more commercial (i.e., American) traits. Yet his account has a modern ring to it. "The close physical contact between the electorate and parliamentary candidates," he writes, "had been considerably diluted by the appeal from the party leadership, using radio to speak directly to voters over the heads of their party colleagues"(pp.187–88). Such an approach to broadcasting also influenced the development of television in Britain, as Grace Wyndham Goldie argues in her autobiography (1977). Television, she observes, inherited all the rights, duties, and responsibilities that had been given to and won by radio broadcasting as a result of the struggles of Sir John Reith and the committees set up from 1923 onward (p. 20). Goldie also readily contrasts, and therefore distances, British television with "the grosser forms of commercial exploitation" evident in the United States (p. 21).

Admittedly, this is not sufficient evidence to suggest an indigenous path of development; in fact, it was obviously not so. Geoffrey Cox, who led the commercial Independent Television News, had spent time in the United States and he relates very vividly his experience of watching the McCarthy hearings on television in 1953 (1983). This experience, he wrote, "had convinced me that television could revolutionise news coverage" (p. 19), though he does not elaborate on that in any way. The view expressed by Cox was not very different from that of Donald Baverstock, one of the pioneers of television journalism in Britain; he too had experienced the American approach to television. As Alasdair Milne, a later director general of the BBC, writes:

> Donald's visit to America had been both a shock and a stimulus to him—a shock that American television studios were far more competently run than ours by people of apparently less calibre than we had available; and a stimulus that Europe had just as much to offer in terms of ideas as the United States. "That place," he said to me, "confirmed to me that I was a European" (1988:15).

These snippets of information suggest a complex process of interaction between cultures and practices rather than a unidimensional process. Yet, in their own way, they highlight the need for the better exploration of the interaction itself and for a closer analysis of whether this provides confirmation of "the emergence of American-style 'video politics' . . . as . . . a role model for political communicators in other liberal democracies" (Gurevitch and Blumler 1990:312). Could it be, for example, that different individuals in different lo-

cations arrived at similar answers at about the same time, in the same way that Anthony Smith describes the coming of radio (1976)? As Smith notes:

> Sarnoff hit upon the idea at a moment when others were making the same connections and separations within other societies which had acquired the appropriate technical expertise. *No single person "invented" radio; nor did any single society.* The post-war world was in a number of partly identifiable ways "ready" for a new piece of machinery which would disseminate the culture of mass society (p. 56, emphasis added).

The sense of there being some spirit of the times in the transfer and adaptation of practices is also found in Gurevitch and Blumler's longitudinal study of election practices in British television news (1993). Although the two authors stress the extent to which the changes identified in the period 1966–1992 reflect "changes in the overall culture of the BBC, derivative partly in turn from cultural changes in British society at large," they go on to suggest that the "processes of change that have played on the election role of the BBC in the period analysed may not be so uniquely British as a first look would imply." They suggest, as an extension, that "the notion of *zeitgeist*" should become part and parcel of explanatory frameworks to portray changes taking place across societies (pp. 440–42). This is reminiscent of Smith's comments on the development of radio.

The development of radio and television was clearly influenced by many factors, with perhaps none regarded as the major force. Is it possible, then, that these media, like others before them, encourage the use of certain practices because they seem appropriate—though it is critical to note that, by and large, it is Anglo-American practices that are being adopted, adapted, and imitated, and not others. Although there may be other options, such as the British insistence on disallowing the sale of airtime for party political uses, these are not options that are widely accepted or taken up. Whether this demonstrates that a fundamental commercialization of societies is taking place, with the legitimacy of publicly owned and run institutions gradually being eroded by economic and competitive forces, is a deeper question beyond the scope of this paper.

Are there deeper connections between the adoption of American political communication practices and the development of political systems? If the first strand of the argument concerns the transfer of U.S. communication practices to other countries, the second takes the argument in a somewhat different direction. The connections between the process of Americanization and a sense of an impending convergence of political systems can be found in suggestions that the adoption of Americanized campaign methods may reflect a wider, more general process that is producing changes in many societies; a process that Mancini and Swanson have characterized as "modernization" (1994). That is, as societies change and are becoming more alike in their makeup, structures, and

processes of governance, they come to adopt American communication practices. In this way, a theory of contemporary social change connects with an account of changes in the practices of political communication. This view is somewhat reminiscent of development and modernization theories that linked expanding electronic media to urbanization, increased political activity, and, ultimately, modernization. One critique of such theories, equally applicable in the present context, holds that too little attention was given to specific sociological and contextual factors that led to different configurations or structures (Servaes 1986:207).

Nevertheless, the picture of transformative social change is, in itself, unproblematic because it merely describes the sorts of patterns that lie at the heart of accounts that document the shift from traditional to modern societies. John Keane, for instance, connects social change with communication in his analysis of the transition from "pre-modern societies" to "modern societies [that] . . . are differentiated and associational and structured by three overlapping organising principles: markets, states and public opinion" (1991:21). Such accounts fit in well with the discussion of modernization because the sense that there has been a shift from one form of society to another—from a traditional society to a modern society, with all its social fragmentation and weakening of traditional community ties—can, for example, be found in the work of Mancini and Swanson (1994).

There is much here that parallels the current debates in social theory on the concept of modernity and postmodernity. In this growing body of work on past, present, and future patterns of change, the emphasis has been on understanding the ways in which western industrial societies are fragmenting and producing new forms of association and action. Modernity is identified with periods of change from the Enlightenment onward and through periods of industrialization in the nineteenth century that brought about enormous social upheaval. By the twentieth century, it "became a progressively global phenomenon" (Hall et al., 1992:2). It is, more precisely, "constituted by political processes (the rise of the secular state and polity), the economic (the global capitalist economy), the social (formation of classes and an advanced sexual and social division of labour), and the cultural (the transition from a religious to a secular culture)" (p. 2). (See also Giddens 1991.)

The notions of fragmentation and of continuous social change permeate the characteristics of modernity in ways that are not substantively different from the idea of modernization. What we have, then, is an account of large-scale social change where the older, more traditional ways of doing things are superseded by different and newer social structures and cultural factors. One pertinent example particularly applicable to Western European societies is the demise of older, class-based structures surrounding specific work and community structures—such as mining communities and trade unions—and their replacement by newer types of

associations based on, say, consumption, gender, or cultural groupings. In this newer context, politicians can no longer simply rely on traditional values or allegiances like class to garner loyalty. New methods need to be used to engender loyalty, and new forms of communication are therefore required to make contact with the remnants of traditional support as well as the newer structures that bind citizens together. Socialist politicians would, in this scenario, have to connect with their traditional bases of support, such as miners and working class individuals, but also with other groupings, such as working women and salaried workers.

This transformation of society will inevitably privilege those who can effectively connect with as many disparate groupings as possible in an electoral contest. Hence, one can argue, new ways of communicating need to be found to make that contact in such a way as to not alienate supporters and potential supporters. Herein lie the foundations for modern campaigning in modernized societies: Campaigns must compete for the voters' attention and interest and for access to channels of communication outside of primary groups. Such election campaigns are carried out mainly through channels of mass communication, with the accompanying requirements for professionalization and personalization. Here one can see quite clearly the link between the modernization process and development of individual elements of modern campaigning. Because modern campaigning is characterized by its use of techniques developed in the United States, here one can also clearly see the link between modernization and Americanization. It is not surprising, then, to find the suggestion that the more advanced the process of modernization in a country, the more likely one is to find innovations in campaigning being adopted and adapted; that is, the more modernized, the more Americanized.

There is one other change that the modernization/Americanization process allegedly brings in its wake: the negation of ideological considerations in electoral contests. Because political parties have to appeal to many more separate groupings of interests, they cannot afford to be dogmatic (i.e., ideological) and risk losing support or alienating potential voters. It is arguable that this is precisely what has happened to the British Labour party during its last decade of "modernization." Similarly, European socialist parties have adopted social democratic credentials and played down the more socialist ones. Even in Greece, we can observe moves by political parties to occupy the center ground. During the period between 1974 and 1981, Pasok managed to establish itself as an entirely new radical party with a new identity and no ties to its socialist past. As the 1981 elections approached, Pasok cultivated the image of a moderate and pragmatic party, and the emphasis shifted from the socialist transformation of Greek society to the need for comprehensive change. The party and its leader, Andreas Papandreou, skillfully played the themes of political liberation and social justice and emphasized the need for modernization and change.

Such change notwithstanding, the real task must be to connect these devel-

opments with both the exploration of modernization and the themes of Americanization. It could certainly be argued that modernization—the transformation of society—has forced political parties to redefine their purposes and to review where their support comes from. This was graphically illustrated by Tim Delaney in his account of the 1979 general election in Britain, when he noted that the Labour party could no longer simply show a photograph of a man working at a lathe to illustrate the conditions of the working classes of the time (1982:27). As societies change, even become modern, images of society need to be reassessed. The point is that modernization impacts the way we communicate with each other face-to-face and via the mass media because the two are linked. As Graham Murdock has suggested, "the constitution of modernity is inextricably bound up with the development of modern communication systems" (1993:525). He goes on to propose that

> the organization of communications is not only constituted *by* the general dynamics of modernity but is constitutive *of* them, and that as we move to the present it comes to play an increasingly central role in shaping both institutional and cultural formations and the textures of everyday life. As a consequence, we cannot theorise modernity without taking formations of communications centrally into account (pp. 522–23).

Yet to argue that modernity and communications are constitutive of one another and that communications is shaping everyday life ("media-centredness" by another name?) is a far cry from connecting modernity/modernization to Americanization. Moreover, one of the crucial aspects of modernity is that it is not only a globalizing force but also that societies are "shaped by both 'internal' and 'external' forces. The West forged its identity and interests in relation to endogenous developments in Europe and America, and through relations of unequal exchange . . . with 'the Rest'" (Hall et al. 1992:2).

This would suggest that as societies continue to make and remake themselves, they take from their surroundings and they continue to transform themselves in complex ways. The process is neither unilinear nor monocausal. As before, there is a need for proper exploration of societal change in a way that is not reduced to a seemingly straightforward account of the causes of changes in the nature and content of political communication practices.

Conclusions

In reviewing studies in this field, it becomes apparent that there are two major interpretations of the processes at work. The first is a fairly straightforward account of the American influence on electronic electoral practices across the world; given the numerous examples that can be referred to, it is unlikely that

this interpretation will cease to have any currency. If anything, it will continue to be in use as long as the latest American practices, such as political communication via the Internet, find a place in other countries (as the use of the Internet has found a place in the United Kingdom). What is regrettable, though, is that a recitation of examples often stands in the way of exploring whether the organization of U.S. social and political life makes it a particularly suitable setting for the use of the practices described above—practices that may not always travel easily into settings in which different features dominate. The intriguing question, though, is whether even these examples actually signal much more than a simple transmutation of practices.

This question is crucial in the second interpretation of Americanization, which offers a more theoretically informed account of the way changes in social structures bring about changes in communication practices, which are, in turn, shaped in part by the American influence. This interpretation is more difficult to deal with because it combines social analysis with an analysis of communication practices, whereas in fact the two may be constitutive of one another. For example, it can be argued that one of the things now commonly experienced is a sense of government ineffectiveness in the face of not dissimilar economic, social, and political problems. Although the roots of these problems are many and complex, the media and political actors continue to interact in traditional ways: the former questions while the latter assumes the mantle of responsibility and control.

Yet it is abundantly clear that neither of these roles are what they used to be. The media question political actors, but they also put them on the defensive and sometimes force them to act in haste. For their part, political actors respond as if they *can* steer the ship of state. Both sets of actors seek the support and trust of the public. With the electronic media so dominant, it is not surprising that they are used to justify and support political actions. In other words, what we may be seeing are responses to problems that derive from the very nature of modernity, rather than some process that is linked to Americanization per se.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. A number of forthcoming books will, it is hoped, address this point. These include Dennis Kavanagh's *Election Campaigning* (Oxford: Blackwell) and Maggie Scammell's *Designer Politics* (London: Macmillan). A brief and not entirely satisfactory account of the relationship

between Britain and the United States can be found in Scammell and Semetko (1995). In general terms, though, there remains a gap in our knowledge of the trade in political *and* campaign communication practices between Britain and the United States. Even Briggs's exhaustive history of British broadcasting (1979, 1995) only hints at contacts and travel between the continents and fails to follow up with an in-depth analysis.

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