

RESEARCH

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**PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES AS A PROMISE OF POLITICAL ACTION:  
WHEN SATIRICAL IMPERSONATORS HOLD POLITICIANS  
ACCOUNTABLE**

**LOS ATRIBUTOS PERSONALES COMO PROMESA DE ACCIÓN  
POLÍTICA: CUANDO LOS IMITADORES LES COBRAN LA  
PALABRA A LOS POLÍTICOS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Despite being well recognized for its impact, the specific logic guiding the production of satirical impersonation of politicians remains insufficiently researched in the field of political communication. This article aims at unveiling the ideas those artists use to conceptualize their job and, on that basis, enriching the theoretical notions present in the field. This study stems from the observation of the production process of *Polònia*, a tv program based on the impersonation of politicians that is broadcast weekly in Catalonia, Spain, from 2006. Data consists of interviews with some impersonators and the analysis of how this show represented the political negotiations conducted to form a government in 2015. Central in this production process is the personal traits of each politician, out of which, impersonators make their own impressions to craft their imitations. Then, in the sketches, *Polònia* shows if politicians are consistent with the impression they bring about with their personal traits. Satirical impersonation holds politicians to their own form of accountability: If a politician inspires a given way of being with their personal performance, he or she must be consistent with that in the daily political struggle. The personal is a promise of political action which, if

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not fulfilled, sends the politician to irrelevance. This centrality of the personal is discussed in comparison with its conceptualization in political communication literature.

**KEYWORDS:** Political impersonation – personal performance – Polònia – Catalan conflict – political humor – infotainment – personalization

## RESUMEN

Pese a su impacto, la lógica que guía la producción de imitación sátira de políticos y políticas es aún poco investigada en el campo de la comunicación política. Este artículo devela las ideas que estos artistas tienen sobre su trabajo y, a partir de ellas, busca enriquecer las nociones teóricas presentes en el campo. El estudio emerge de la observación del proceso de producción de Polònia, un programa de imitación de políticos transmitido semanalmente en Cataluña desde 2006. Se incluyen entrevistas con algunos imitadores y se analiza cómo se representó una negociación política para formar gobierno. Un elemento central de la producción satírica consiste en observar a los políticos desde sus rasgos más personales y, a partir de ellos, los actores y actrices se forman impresiones con las que construyen sus personajes. Luego, en los sketches, los sátiros de *Polònia* muestran si es que los políticos son o no consistentes con las impresiones que causan con su personalidad. Los sátiros exigen su propio tipo de accountability político: Si un político inspira una forma de ser con su performance personal, debe actuar así en el tráfigo político diario. Lo personal es una promesa de acción política, que, si no se cumple, condena al político a la irrelevancia. Esta centralidad de lo personal es discutida en comparación a su tratamiento conceptual en el campo de la comunicación política.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Imitación política – performance personal – Polònia – conflicto catalán – humor político – infotainment – personalización

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to expand our knowledge about humorous genres in political communication, in particular, the satirical imitation of politicians. It arises from an ethnographic study that observed the production process of the Polònia program, which, since 2006, has weekly presented a satirical account of Catalan and Spanish politics based on the imitation of the main political figures of both countries. The literature in political communication has extensively studied the phenomenon of political satire in general, although it has not focused particularly on the imitation of political figures. And when it has done so, it tends to be interested in its effects on the evaluation of leaders, but they fail to account for specific and defining aspects of the genre. This study tries to know how the impersonators of this genre

conceptualize and carry out their work and how such ideas are related to the predominant theoretical notions in the field of political communication.

As a general observation, it can be said that the work of the imitators of Polònia discusses ideas about the role of personal aspects of politicians in their communication with citizens. These artists build their accounts of politics from those personal aspects that define the individuality of each politician. According to the participants, such personality traits connect politicians with certain social stereotypes present in the popular culture in which they operate. Once artists detect that connection between the real politician and a stereotypical idea, they subject it to the pressure of political contingencies. There, the impersonators show whether or not politicians are consistent with the stereotypical ideas that their personal performances evoke. The case analyzed in this article shows two politicians who were unable to act accordingly with what they inspired with their personality, hence the failure of their political management, their loss of relevance as leaders in Catalan politics, and their disappearance as characters worthy of being imitated.

This idea that the personal has a role to play in the destiny of a politician enriches the notions with which this aspect has been studied in the field of political communication. In this area of studies, the personal has been understood as a risk to democracy, as an instrumental projection, or as a cultural performance. The work of the studied comedians coincides with those who argue that the personal has a performative dimension, that is, that it implements certain ideas present in the culture, but also suggests that these personality aspects may constitute a promise of political action. If that promise is not kept, the satyrs consider it a political failure, as is the case here analyzed.

## **2. OBJECTIVES: TO KNOW THE LOGIC OF SATYRIC IMITATION**

This article seeks to know how those who produce political humor conceptualize their own work and then insert those ideas into the field of political communication. To formulate the problem, we resort to the notion of "media logic", and with this, we seek to shed light on what we could call "the logic" of political imitation. In the original formulation of Altheide & Snow (1979), media logic has to do with "how the material of a medium is defined, selected, organized and presented, as well as the grammar of that medium". The characteristics of this grammar, according to the author, tend to go unnoticed by those who use it either to produce content or to consume it (Altheide, 2016). The "logic", then, is manifested in a set of "rules or codes, to define, select, organize, present, and recognize information as one thing different from another" (Altheide, 2004, p. 294). This notion of media logic allows us to delve into what is proper to a genre and, as Altheide says, what makes it different from something else, although it remains unnoticed even by its creators.

Although satire is recognized as of great importance for political processes, these rules or codes that its producers hold about their work remain little explored for academic research. Much of the research on humor and satire in the field of political communication has been inspired by the notion of infotainment. Its fundamental

thesis is that the humorous genres that emerged on American television in the 1990s would have broken the barriers between information and entertainment in what would be a reinvention of journalism (Baym, 2005; Brants, 1998). This argument is developed especially from studies focused on programs such as *The Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report* (Baym, 2005, 2014; Baym & Jones, 2012; JP Jones, 2010) that seemed to be a novelty in the United States of that time.

Although the word infotainment, specifically, has been falling into relative disuse, its concerns and the way to define the phenomenon continue to predominate in the field. By understanding humorous genres as an evolution of journalism, research has favored the measurement of their cognitive effects, that is, the quantity and quality of information that exposed audiences receive (Bal et al., 2009; Baumgartner & Lockerbie, 2018; Boland, 2012; Brewer et al., 2013; Ferré-Pavia et al., 2016; Ferré-Pavia & Gayà-Morlà, 2011; Holbert et al., 2011; Ryabinska, 2020). Some of these evaluations are even carried out using conceptual tools taken from journalism studies (Bailey, 2018; Boukes, 2019; Shao & Liu, 2019). This type of study has constituted the main current of research on humor and politics and thanks to it, the knowledge about the role of this genre in the formation of opinion has been expanded and they account for its extension and relevance in various contexts.

Beyond the cognitive effects, another line of research has focused on describing the main characteristics of the content offered by humorous genres related to politics, as well as its use by audiences. "Intertextuality" (Tsakona & Chovanec, 2020; Tsakona & Popa, 2011) has been revealed as an essential characteristic of the genre, which allows a parody to be understood only in relation to the broader context from which it extracts meaning. Richardson et al. (2013) sought out different genres, beyond the news, to which audiences go to form their opinion on the political future. There they found, among many others, satirical imitation as a place that shows "politicians as the embodied expression of political ideas and values." The use that audiences make of these formats to create subversive discourses in authoritarian contexts has also become evident (MO Jones, 2017; Kulkarni, 2017; Wiggins, 2019), but also that audiences are no longer so convinced of continuing to consume comedy politics when it becomes more militant (Baumgartner, 2021).

Thanks to all this we know very well that the different versions of political humor play a role in the political life of a community. Likewise, we know how relevant it can be in impacting the formation of public opinion and the evaluation of political figures (Flowers & Young, 2010; Michaud Wild, 2015). The problem is that the primacy of the notion of info-entertainment has tended to focus its concern on its cognitive effects and, in general, different genres of political humor are taken as the same thing, be these imitations of politicians, memes, or news shows. This article, on the other hand, seeks to delve into the ideas that its creators use to define their work, without a priori applying conceptions that are alien to the genre. Following Altheide, the objective is to know the rules and codes that constitute the logic of the satirical imitation of politicians.

### **3. METHODOLOGY: *POLÒNIA* AND IMITATION ETHNOGRAPHY**

This study does not focus on the effects of humorous content, nor its reception by the audience, but on the common meanings that its creators hold about their own work. It seeks to know what constitutes 'the logic of political satire', in particular, of the imitation of politicians. The relevance of this genre has long been demonstrated in political communication studies, but we know little about its production and less in the words of its own creators. This is where *Polònia* appears, as the Catalans call this television show broadcasted every week by the public television channel TV3 since 2006. It consists of imitations of politicians through which they offer a humorous account of both Catalan and Spanish current affairs. The study was carried out between 2015 and 2018<sup>2</sup>, years in which *Polònia* stood out as the most important political television show in Catalonia in terms of audience (Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya, 2017, 2018).

Given that what is sought to reveal are those naturalized ideas that configure what is logical for producers of this genre, the study is carried out through an ethnographic approach including interviews, participant observation, and qualitative analysis of documents. This article is based on interviews with imitators of *Polònia* and the analysis of 10 scripts. The interviews were open and semi-structured conversations with members of the production who stood out as especially knowledgeable about the topic of interest (Jorgensen, 1989) and sought to reconstruct the moment of observation of the politicians. The qualitative analysis of scripts sought not only a description of their formal characteristics but also focused on understanding the meanings of these "documents" (Bell, 2014) to gain understanding about them and generate empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). The results presented below arise from the combined analysis of the data obtained in each instance. That is, neither the interviews nor the scripts by themselves explain the results, but rather emerge when both are combined and the relevant literature is added.

### **4. RESULTS: PERSONAL PERFORMANCE, POLITICAL DRAMA, AND THE CHALLENGE OF BEING CONSISTENT**

For imitators, personal aspects transform politicians into living incarnations of social stereotypes. This constitutes a defining feature of how these artists construct their narrative of political events. For the imitators, the display of personal aspects by politicians is a natural situation of their activity and they do not see in it a risk for democracy, as the research on personalization warns. Whether this display of individuality is a mask made for tactical purposes or a genuine projection is not a question the impersonators ask themselves. What is relevant is the consistency that manifests itself in contingent political action. The personal, then, fuses politicians with stereotypes present in the culture, therefore, they constitute a significant

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<sup>2</sup> The interviewees requested a five-year embargo on their interviews, to avoid that their reflections on politicians could affect their work, as well as the prestige of the *Polònia* program. After that time, the author has the informed consent of each of the participants to publish their names as well as the information provided.

performance. The challenge impersonators see is for politicians to stay fused when they have to enter a political battle. This section shows excerpts from interviews with two actors from Polònia, Bruno Oro and David Olivares, as well as the director of *actors*, Xavier Ricart, to describe the observation they make to build their imitations. Oro and Olivares imitated, at the time of the interviews, Artur Mas and Antonio Baños, two Catalan politicians whose characters will be analyzed in the following 10 scripts from Polònia.

The observation of a politician to imitate them consists of capturing their individuality, what makes them unique from others. "They all have something, don't they? We all have something, something that you, me, and no one else transmits. You keep that, that is how we build our characters", says Xavier Ricart, director of actors and supervisor of the creative and staging process of Polònia. The actors Bruno Oro and David Olivares agree with this idea of looking for what makes the politician to be imitated unique, and add that, given the limited production time of the show and the intensity of political work, these artists tend to stay with a first impression and do not scrutinize to verify if this idea that was made is consistent with the biography of the original politician. Although they are not included in this article, the topic of the first impression without contrast is manifested in the other 28 interviews with imitators of Polònia. The personal functions as an impression and not as a cognitive inspection of politicians.

These personal aspects of politicians are central from start to finish in Polònia's production process. To understand the specific novelty of how these comedians understand the role of these elements, it is necessary to review how "the personal" has been conceptualized and studied. The notion of 'personalization' of political communication warned that the personal lives of politicians have gained prominence over their careers, their ideological affiliation, or public policy proposals (Balmas et al., 2014; Langer, 2011; McAllister, 2007; Rahat & Sheafer, 2007) and that this would threaten democracy (Blumler, 1992; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1994, 1998). Both assumptions are still up for debate. Some cases confirm and others deny the growth of the personal in media content (Mughan, 2000; Rahat & Sheafer, 2007; Wattenberg, 1998; Wilke & Reinemann, 2001), nor can it be affirmed that the personal perverts the relationship of citizens with the political system (Baum, 2003; Bennett et al., 1999; Brants, 1998; De Vreese, 2005; De Vreese & Semetko, 2002; Zaller, 2001).

For the imitators of Polònia, the question as to whether the display of personal aspects is good or not for democracy does not exist. For them, it is naturalized and instead of regretting it, they use these elements as input for their work. At the time of this interview, Bruno Oro had been in Polònia for five years imitating the then president of the Generalitat of Catalonia, Artur Mas. Their impression of the original was that of being the representative of a conservative Catalonia, but not moralistic, austere, of correct, courteous, and respectful treatment. Artur Mas evokes a middle class forged in the poverty of post-war Europe, that "if I saved, then I could fulfill some very sober dreams, a vacation, perhaps," says Bruno Oro. Xavi Ricart, director of actors, adds that Artur has something about those families that sent their children

“to university with a lot of effort and that gave them access to culture, social networks, languages. Everything with effort”. Emotional restraint is also recognized in that “problems are discussed inwardly, without making much noise, because, well, you couldn't do whatever you wanted, it was Catalonia at the height of Francoism”, adds Xavier Ricart. For Bruno Oro as for Xavier Ricart, these conditions would have given a very paternal sense of leadership to Artur Mas's generation. “From there come many models of family sobriety that do not waste money. There I see a patriarchal thing in him that is good with power and that has been accentuated since he became president (2010)”, says Bruno Oro. For these artists, Artur Mas's impression is that of someone who is very good with power and authority and whose sobriety is more noticeable in the context of corruption that flooded his party (CDC) at least since 2005.

In the case of the politician Antonio Baños, who will end up being Artur Mas's rival in the following months, the description is still built from impressions and not from verifiable facts. “He seems like a very accomplished man and satisfied with his life. Due to social strata, he resembles Artur Mas, but he is from another generation, from when the children could already choose what to do with their lives without following the father's pattern”, says Xavier Ricart. This impression of being freer -or more liberated- would also be expressed in the fact that Antonio Baños transmits certain sexual fulfillment with a less self-conscious experience, with more exploration. “That whole generation transmits fewer inhibitions, in general, and is more defiant to authority”. David Olivares, an impersonator of Antonio Baños, complements this personal vision with an appreciation of his political group. “They are people who go very calmly through life, like very satisfied. On the one hand, it is pleasant, because they are not in the ambition for power, but it can be unpleasant when they are arrogant”, says David Olivares. This is manifested in Antonio Baños and “his attitude that I know the truth, my colleagues know the truth, it is you who are not prepared for our truth.” “They have an air of superiority, but calm,” says David Olivares.

Imitators not only do not verify whether or not the politicians to be imitated are how they are perceived, but they do not care. When asked if the politicians seem authentic to them, the answer was always that it does not matter, because if they are, then they hit the right key, if they are not, then at some point they will make a mistake that will accuse them. And that will be comedic material. This disregard for the genuine contrasts with another line of research that has considered the role of the personal in politics in a less normative and more utilitarian way. Here, the interest moves from the content and effects of the media to the authenticity of the strategic use of the personal that politicians make. Central in this approach is the concept of “person” in the sense of the Ancient Greek theater, that is, a mask worn by an actor to represent a character. David P. Marshall defines a “person” as “the extension of the self publicly produced from our representations in the media and projected for the daily fabrication of a visible identity” (2016). Marshall's studies focus on the world of celebrities but the idea that public figures use their personal lives to make masks that they project to others has shown validity in understanding politicians (Corner, 2000; Finlayson, 2002; Higgins & McKay, 2016; Langer, 2010).

However, this research perspective does not explain how imitators approach politicians, who do not care if there are manufactured masks or not. They just take them.

With these impressions, the artists of *Polònia* set out to construct the characters. They get an idea from what they get from a politician. Neither in these interviews nor the other 28 artists on the show was any verification of such impressions mentioned. This is the raw material for a political impersonation character. The personal, then, seems to have less to do with what the politician projects, but with what he provokes the imitator. No one, either, reflects on whether these aspects can affect democracy, as the normative perspective says, nor does anyone verify whether these personal projections are genuine or tactical. For the imitators, what is relevant is that "the air" politicians "transmit" make them incarnations of stereotypical groups in Catalan society. *Polònia's* creative process is not driven by a normative or utilitarian attitude about the personal. It is closer to an approach that could be called "interpretive" in which various authors have analyzed how politicians navigate this indeterminacy between their personal being and their political being. Rather, this kind of study has seen how the personal and the political, the emotional and the rational "can be fused and combined in a variety of discourses" (Coleman, 2015; Van Zoonen, 2006; Van Zoonen & Holtz-Bacha, 2000). Does this mean that impersonators have a naive attitude towards this display? No. Impersonators subject politicians to satirical accountability that requires consistency in their actions.

#### **4.1. The patriarch and the rebel: drama in ten acts**

For the imitators of *Polònia*, the display of personal aspects by politicians is a significant performance. These artists see politicians as active agents who try to be the best representations of different social idealizations. In this sense, their approach is more similar to that developed by cultural sociology, a field in which the difference between the personal, the political, the public, and the private is discarded. All these categories appear "fused" by successful and significant personal performances (Alexander, 2004). Here are the research works of Jason Mast, which propose that the private affairs of politicians are far from being a mere strategic display of intimacy to project an artificial mask. Rather, they are the place where the audience understands democratic values, experiences cultural structures, and an imagined community asserts itself (2006). That is why politicians struggle to project stable images of power and legitimacy throughout dramas that have to do with their privacy (2012). From this approach, even a minimal gesture can be significant for political processes, since it can make a politician become the incarnation of broader collective representations (Berezin, 2017) or re-signify an entire community (Rauer, 2006).

Certainly, the concept of performance in the social sciences is older than this "culturalist" derivation and had already been used by Erving Goffman (1956). One difference is that for him, the cultural context is what Ann Swidler (1986, p. 273) defined as that "tool kit" of symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews that people can use to solve problems. In Alexander's conceptualization, a social actor does not use

the symbols of culture but is one with them. There is no instrumental relationship but rather a "fusion" of the social actor, the cultural background, and the audience (Alexander, 2004). In politics, this means that the politician is obliged to "become the broad expression of the states of mind and the meanings of the democratic life of a nation" (Alexander, 2010, p. 18).

As shown in previous interviews, satyrs understand politicians and their personal attributes as a performance that carries out certain ideas present in the culture. In Alexander's words, they assume politicians to be "fused" with certain ideas. The challenge that the satyrs give the politicians is to maintain that fusion in the political contingency. Their consistency and political destiny are at stake here, according to the imitators. To illustrate this challenge, we present the analysis of 10 scripts that show Antonio Baños and Artur Mas, face to face.

The political dynamics in Catalonia ended up forcing Artur Mas to seek the support of Antonio Baños for his re-election as president of the Generalitat of Catalonia. Mas's party, CDC, won the Catalan elections in September 2015 but did not win an absolute majority for its inauguration in the local parliament. His party, CDC, and his left-wing ally, ERC, won 62 seats, but 68 were needed. The anti-capitalist party CUP, led by Antonio Baños, was not in coalition with CDC and ERC, but they were also independentists, so the possibility of an agreement existed. Had that been the case, the CUP would have cast its 10 votes in parliament. However, CUP leaders, including Baños, rejected Artur Mas, whose figure was associated with welfare cuts and a corrupt party. CUP wanted to support CDC in exchange for a social plan and effective measures against corruption, but the mere presence of Artur Mas became an obstacle. This drama is presented through the analysis of the 10 scripts that show how the negotiations were developed, according to Polònia's version.

The first sketch is *Combate Pel Cinturó Roig* and it was recorded the week before the elections. It is a very short piece that appeared after a longer sketch in which unionist leaders fought in a boxing ring. Artur Mas appears watching comfortably from the recording station, relaxed and laughing at the distance of those "four losers". He is also relaxed in the *Romeva Sparring* sketch, aired during the same episode. There he walks with his partner on the electoral list, Raül Romeva, who complains because, since he was a candidate, he has had to receive criticism for tax cuts and the corruption of the previous Artur Mas government, of which he was not part of. The character begins to change two weeks after the election for the Parliament of Catalonia when the original Artur Mas has not yet formed a government. In *Mas Sobreviuré*, the character comes from a sketch in which his allies try to betray him. For the first time, Artur Mas of Polònia is angry and frustrated but vows to survive. He also throws words for the leaders of the CUP: "lazy", "four lousy", and looks for a dance partner, nobody wants to get involved, and gets frustrated. From now on, Artur Mas will be permanently on the brink of despair.

For the following sketch, it is important to remember that the *Junts pel Sí* coalition united two of the major separatist parties in Catalonia (ERC, left-wing, and CDC,

right-wing). Oriol Junqueras was the president of ERC and was always considered the second member of the coalition, that is, the replacement of Artur Mas. In *A Junqueras Se Li Escapa El Riure*, the characters of these two politicians try to film a sketch, but they fail because Junqueras cannot clearly support Mas. Mas, exasperated, demands that Junqueras take the situation seriously and leaves the set indignantly. The frustration grows weeks later when not only his external allies are disobeying him, but also his co-religionists. The former Interior Minister of Artur Mas, Felip Puig, gave a speech in which he hinted at the impossibility of a coalition government with the CUP. In the sketch *Felip Puig Indignat*, Artur Mas comes from a recording in which, once again, he argued with his allies in *Junts pel Sí*. The character is already angry and on top of that, he meets Felip Puig. At this point, Artur Mas of Polònia quickly runs out of patience. He berates Puig for angering the CUP and risking their support. Later, Puig proposes he make a demonstration of authority before the CUP, but Mas rejects him because "they have me by the balls." Eventually, he again fails to gain the support of the CUP, bites into his rage and is unable to articulate words.

Artur Mas of Polònia is angry and frustrated, he is no longer relaxed like the first weeks and is powerless against the CUP. Not only is he not being obeyed, but he cannot even give an order, and above all, Puig appears as a temptation to represent the traits of the authoritarian patriarch, but he cannot. At this point, he has understood that the problem is in those "hairy communists," "lazy and lousy" of the CUP. The interviewed actors agreed that paternal authority is a central element of the impression evoked by Artur Mas, but weeks go by, and his character cannot exercise it. Nobody obeys him and he recognizes his helplessness.

One month after the election, another inauguration session was expected on November 10<sup>th</sup>. However, the CUP did not support Artur Mas and postponed his decision until the party assembly on November 29<sup>th</sup>. In the following script, the figure of Antonio Baños emerges in front of that of Artur Mas and it will be seen how more and more pressure for an agreement will fall on him. This begins when the CUP announces that it will veto the continuity of some ministers of the Artur Mas government. For the first time, the CUP takes the initiative and establishes non-negotiable minimums. This can be seen in *Consellers Vetats*, when the character of Artur Mas faces Baños for this veto. The first time that Artur Mas addresses Antonio Baños in the sketch is to give him an order, which Baños immediately disobeys and returns him a list of even more banned ministers. Artur Mas tries to teach Baños about political realism and he responds with blackmail, without showing respect for his authority to which he adds sarcasm. Later, and after several disobediences, Mas wants to end this with a blow of authority, but he could do nothing more than shake his toupee, in a gesture of emotional restraint of the character.

On the same day that *Baños Arrimadas* was filmed, Artur Mas's second investiture attempt was expected in the Parliament of Catalonia. Mas proposed to the CUP to form a coalition government and offered a motion of censure against his own government within 10 months. Despite these concessions, he did not win the support of the CUP and there was a real possibility of repeating the elections. In this sketch,

the character of Antonio Baños comes from another recording and meets Inés Arrimadas, president of the Ciudadanos party, the largest unionist party after the September 2015 elections. The character Baños begins with an arrogant linguistic correction to Inés Arrimadas and takes advantage of showing off his intellectual baggage by unnecessarily citing Saint Augustine. He even mocks the voice of Inés Arrimadas and her obsession with the figure of Artur Mas. He's definitely a sarcastic comment character, but he starts to feel the pressure and begins to express disgust with the question about his support for Artur Mas.

Artur Mas and Antonio Baños meet again in *Junqueras Desapareix*. This is the first sketch to air in episode 381 and shows Artur Mas and Oriol Junqueras waiting on set and reviewing their scripts. Despite his defeat in Parliament, Artur Mas is in a good mood and is very kind to the characters in the studio, especially Oriol Junqueras who voted for him to be elected. What bothers Mas is the mere presence of Antonio Baños and he gets angry as soon as he knows that he will have to record with him. Baños enters the scene with a sarcastic laugh and is defiant with Mas. Artur Mas no longer restrains himself and makes fun of the CUP. He is no longer a self-controlled man, now he takes the initiative with certain sarcasm and even orders Baños to shut up. Mas does not feel with his hands tied as in previous weeks. In this sketch, Oriol Junqueras shows doubts between supporting Artur Mas or returning to his leftist roots and negotiating with the CUP, but finally, and reluctantly, he supports Artur Mas. Mas acts pleased, Baños shows his frustration and leaves the scene annoyed.

In this sketch, the supporting character must be examined. Oriol Junqueras was president of ERC, a traditional left-wing party in Catalonia with long-standing separatist ambition. Junqueras signed a coalition with Artur Mas's right-wing CDC party to secure the 2015 local elections and together push for a pro-independence referendum. The character of Antonio Baños tempted Junqueras to break that promise and withdraw his support for Artur Mas. Baños tells Junqueras: "Let it be noted that you are leftist." For the character of Baños, being a leftist is incompatible with voting for Artur Mas. Junqueras hesitates between supporting his ally Artur Mas or returning to his leftist roots and negotiating with the CUP. Anyway, Junqueras, "a little against the grain" as the script indicates, finally supports Artur Mas. Baños is best seen handling a power situation from the bottom up but is easily frustrated when he can't get the support of his teammates. Mas is pleased when he is obeyed. This sketch suggests that Baños's character is reading the conflict as a confrontation between left and right-wing and not between separatism and unionism.

One day before the second investiture attempt, the singer Lluís Llach asked the CUP to support Artur Mas. Llach was a singer-songwriter and part of the Nova Cançó, an artistic movement with musical expressions that emerged in Catalonia in the late 1950s and early 1960s in opposition to the dictatorship of Francisco Franco. Since then, Llach has cultivated a profile as a singer and activist, first against the dictatorship and more recently in favor of Catalan independence. He won a position in the Parliament of Catalonia in the 2015 elections and that day he published an opinion column urging the CUP to appoint Mas and not risk the independence of Catalonia.

In *El Cobrador del Mas*, the character of Lluís Llach appears chasing Antonio Baños through the Polònia recording studio. Llach annoys Antonio Baños by singing his songs to insist that he support the investiture of Artur Mas, especially after the right-wing leader made concessions to the CUP. Although they failed to obtain support, they did transfer the pressure on Antonio Baños. In this sketch, you can see the reaction of the character of Baños when he has to make decisions. A week after the failed investiture, he is angry from the start. Llach annoys him with his songs and Baños responds by twisting his support to "a posh", but he takes up his song and Baños can't take it anymore and is willing to do anything to get rid of him. At this point, Antonio Baños is not happy with this situation, he is no longer the sarcastic and defiant character who had control of the situation two weeks ago, in *Consellers Vetats*. In both this sketch and in *Junqueras Desapareix* (included in the same episode) Baños seems to be good at dealing with the authoritarian and frustrated Artur Mas, but when it comes to finding the support of Oriol Junqueras or resisting pressure from Lluís Llach, he is easily frustrated. Furthermore, he again shows that his problem is with supporting a "posh", even if this puts independence at risk.

At this time, Catalonia was suffering from a political blockade. After two failed investiture attempts on November 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, Artur Mas continued to make concessions and the CUP remained locked in its refusal to appoint Mas as president. There was no other option but to wait for the CUP general assembly to be held on November 29<sup>th</sup>, in which all party members would vote for the investiture. Thus, 883 voted to "seek an alternative to Artur Mas", 574 for new elections, and 434 chose to "accept Mas". This resulted in a mandate for party leaders to continue negotiating for Artur Mas to resign. A new assembly was organized for December 27<sup>th</sup>, which meant another month of waiting. In this scenario, the former CUP deputy, David Fernàndez, published an opinion article suggesting that his party should consider the possibility of appointing Artur Mas to continue with the independence process. Fernàndez joins Junqueras and Llach in insisting that the conflict cannot be read in terms of left and right, but is rather about independence.

The same day this opinion article was published, the *Mas-Fernàndez* sketch was recorded, with Artur Mas happily reading the good news. Artur Mas has just recorded a musical sketch in which he gives the CUP an ultimatum: either they name him or there would be another election in which the CUP would lose seats. He appears walking on the Polònia set and is so happy that he wants to give David Fernàndez a hug, who rejects him. He now sees light at the end of the tunnel, but when Fernàndez asks him for a "little patience" he can no longer control himself, he shakes his toupee and leaves the scene angrily.

Finally, the political pressure became unbearable for Artur Mas and Antonio Baños and both had to give up what they considered most precious. Antonio Baños had said that being leftist was incompatible with supporting Mas, but this idea became irreconcilable with the independence project. He ended up leaving his seat as a deputy in the Catalan Parliament after the CUP assembly decided to continue rejecting the investiture of Artur Mas. The real-life Antonio Baños said that he could no longer defend this position and resigned.

Original Artur Mas also interpreted the assembly's decision as an ultimatum and had no choice but to resign. After both resignations, their characters in *Polònia* showed them erratic, confused, lost. In *El Trofeu de la CUP*, Baños is late for a party meeting, when he enters the scene he collides with the furniture, speaks nonsense, and raises his right arm -not the left- to say "Strength." In *Artur Mas Truca Puigdemont*, the character sighs his frustration after learning of the CUP's decision. "So, the problem is me", he had to admit and expel his last sign of authoritarian trait when trying to call his former Secretary of the Interior, Felip Puig, to replace him and make the victory of the CUP "bitter". However, he dials the wrong number and calls the mayor of Girona, Carles Puigdemont. Both the character of Baños and that of Mas lose prominence in *Polònia*, from then on, their appearances become sporadic and are replaced by new leaders.

Throughout the 10 analyzed scripts, it can be observed how the flow of political events affected the features of the characters involved in the drama. At first, Artur Mas is confident, enjoying the campaign, and optimistic about the result, but two weeks after the elections, he is already frustrated by the lack of support and has words of disdain for the CUP members. Although he still has some optimism, his temper is broken because no one, including members of his party and government, is doing what he wants. He must acknowledge his powerlessness, especially when Antonio Baños takes the initiative and vetoes Mas's decisions. Baños enters the scene sarcastically, defiantly, and, to a certain extent, enjoying his position of power over the 'posh' Artur Mas. This only increases Mas's frustration: he is angry at everyone, but at the same time he is forced to exercise self-control. The pressure is mounting to make an authoritarian show of power, as Puig tells him. After the failed investitures in November and the concessions made by Artur Mas to obtain the support of the CUP, the pressure passed on to Antonio Baños and this takes the character of *Polònia* to his limits. He gets angry faster and loses his sarcastic and defiant attitude. Whenever he's asked to support Artur Mas, Baños seems fed up, exasperated, or willing to do anything in exchange for a little peace of mind. Mas now dares to face him, but Baños always manages to corner him with a defiant attitude. However, Baños now loses his own control and Mas clings to any possibility of support to end up frustrated again. Ultimately, both politicians appear as mere political zombies, unable to embody any of the attributes associated with them in the initial description.

## **5. DISCUSSION: IN THE LOGIC OF SATIRE, THE PERSONAL IS A PROMISE**

For the producers of *Polònia*, the personal aspects that politicians project implicitly carry a promise of political action. Those traits that define them in their individuality make an impression on the studied comedians, both those cited in this article, as well as the rest of the cast. In light of how the role of personal aspects in political communication has been studied, this idea is novel. For satire imitation, the personal is neither a danger to democracy, as posited by the literature on personalization, nor a mask fabricated for tactical purposes, as studies concerned with the construction of the political person maintain. Personal attributes constitute a personal performance. *Polònia*'s comedians teach us that the personal aspects of politicians make them

living versions of social idealizations present in the culture. For satyrs, however, that connection is not simply an impression, but they have the illocutionary force of causing a promise that must be kept in contingent politics. This makes imitations a kind of living organism, which suffers, rejoices, gets tired, celebrates, and gets frustrated, and in which the satyrs' evaluation of the contingent action of the original politician is materialized.

Using terms from cultural sociology, the parody that Polònia offers about the fate of Mas and Baños could be interpreted as that the politicians could not remain "fused" (Alexander, 2004) with the cultural symbols that they evoke with their personal performance. Imitators see them clearly associated with certain symbolic representations that they describe as social stereotypes. One explanation for the failure of both politicians is that the social stereotypes described by the imitators "structure expectations" about the type of political action that politicians would take (Coleman, 2012). In the 'logic' of Polònia, Mas and Baños, consciously or unconsciously, could not do what they promised in their personal performances. They had volunteered to be a patriarch, to exercise authority, to be a tough guy, a true leftist, etc. Following Jason Mast, neither Baños nor Mas projected stable images of power and legitimacy throughout the flow of analyzed episodes (Mast, 2006). Instead of an authoritarian display of power, Mas ended up making a concession to the CUP; Instead of being a true leftist, Baños ultimately supported the "posh" Mas. Either they didn't keep their implicit promises or they couldn't find a way to make them compatible with the independence process. Or worse, they did not understand the nature of the drama they were part of -independence- so they continued to act as if it were another in which their roles were valid or acceptable.

The logic that guides the production of Polònia is a call to review the categories used to conceptualize political humor. In particular, to overcome the use of the notion of infotainment and its fundamental assumptions for the analysis of any kind of parody of political activity. The imitation analyzed here suggests that the idea of a cognitive effect, that is, of information delivered for the formation of public opinion, reduces too much the possible inputs to the phenomenon. Research carried out in the field of political communication on humor conclusively shows that there may be an effect on the assessment that audiences make of political figures based on the consumption of these genres. But these comedians seek more verisimilitude than veracity (Álvarez Fuentes, 2019), that is why the information they send to their audiences is not verified, nor is it verifiable, it is only consistent with the impressions made on them by the original politicians. Perhaps the effect of satire does not go through the delivery of information, such as journalism, but rather through making us see the connections between the political person, the political action, and the cultural framework in which they unfold.

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