

CHAPTER SEVEN. TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

[...] the political realm rises directly out of acting together; the “sharing of words and deeds.”

HANNAH ARENDT, *The Human Condition*

Issues related to the public sphere certainly occupy a vital place in reflection on contemporary society, mainly because the term “public sphere” tends to be associated with questions of civic society, freedom of expression and political participation. Transformations of the public sphere are more or less directly related to the very heart of democracy. One could also note that – just like in the case of transformations occurring in the realms of family and work – this sphere also appears to be often diagnosed as facing crisis. This has been articulated, for example, by Seyla Benhabib, who writes: “Undoubtedly, our societies are undergoing tremendous transformations at the present. In western democracies, under the impact of corporatization, the mass media and the growth of business-style political associations, like PAC’s (Political Action Committees) and other lobbying groups, the public sphere of democratic legitimacy has shrunk” (1992, 112).

The conviction that the public sphere is in crisis permeates the three main currents in philosophy of politics distinguished by Benhabib: first, the agonistic model of Hannah Arendt, which originates in the republican concept of civic virtues; second, Bruce Ackerman’s model of public dialogue, which originates in the liberal tradition; and third, Jürgen Habermas’ model of a discursive public sphere. Despite the fact that each of those currents defines the category of the public differently, it is easy to notice that all of them take a certain normative pattern as their point of departure. The noblest forms of such models would be invariably located somewhere in the past: in different periods of European history, depending on the current. Thus, the public sphere becomes incorporated into specific myths of the golden age, which are on equal footing with the myth of the lost primal community, the myth of a consolidated pre-industrial family, or the myth of work rooted in religious values, i.e. understood as a creative and meaning-making activity.

At least for that reason it could be said that the concept of the public sphere clearly features an additional component carrying value judgments. The existence

of the public sphere – naturally, in the form close to the model assumed by a given author – would be implicitly regarded as something good and desirable. Therefore, any deliberations on the changing public sphere demand – already at the very onset – that this more or less decidedly identifiable normative reference be revoked. To an equal extent, however, they demand that we consider the very sense of the concept since it is far from unambiguous. This is expressed by the historian Philippe Ariès, one of the editors of the monumental study *A History of Private Life*. In the introduction to the third volume, he confesses that he used the public/private distinction for many years in numerous analyzes, assuming that it would correspond to the distinction between the intimate (i.e. that which is hidden from the eyes of others) and that which is there for everyone to see, but remained unaware of a different possible approach. It has taken him a lot of time to recognize that some “conceived of the public/private dichotomy differently.” As he notes, “a second aspect of the public/private opposition had escaped me because I have been alienated from political history. The word ‘public’ also refers to the state, and to service of the state, whereas ‘private’ (or *particulier*, as one used to say in French) referred to everything outside the state’s purview. For me, this was a new and most rewarding way of looking at the question” (1989, 9).

These two approaches, or aspects of the public/private opposition, also appear in sociological discussions. It could seem that, in the case of analyzes focusing on the transformations of the public sphere, the simplest solution would be to clearly subscribe to one of them. This would make it possible to precisely demarcate the field of enquiry while avoiding accusations of disregarding another, equally important aspect of the issue. However, the very fact that double meanings of the public/private opposition do coexist, as noted above, can suggest that they may be linked in a way that could prove to be vital from the perspective developed here. Thus, let us first examine the various shades of the meaning of the two terms.

7.1 Semantic aspects of the public/private opposition

The public/private opposition appears already in classical Latin. The semantic core formed in this context survived throughout the Middle Ages – including the era of “barbarians”³⁰⁸ – and was preserved in local languages. It can be traced in nineteenth-century dictionaries of French and English, and has survived to

308 We mean here the period of departure from Roman law in favor of common laws.

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this day, offering the basic semantic intuitions in European languages. In Cicero's Latin, the term *privus* denotes that which is specific (particular) and private; to act *privatim* means to be doing so at one's own place, at home³⁰⁹ – not as a *magistratus* (official) but as an ordinary citizen, i.e. on a different legal ground. Furthermore, *privatum* denotes one's own means, things for one's own use.³¹⁰ *In privatio* refers to making something in isolation, at one's own home. Thus, the original sense of the term "private" refers not to the individual as an isolated unit but to a person belonging to a "house community," while the sense of the term "public" points to a higher-order collectivity, i.e. the political community of the *polis*, tribe or state. *Res publica* therefore encompasses that which is not the private property of any group and consequently cannot be legally traded or exchanged on the market.³¹¹

"The Latin of chroniclers and charters characterizes as *publicus* that which falls to the sovereign, which is part of his regalian rights or which falls within the jurisdiction of magistrates charged with preserving peace and justice. [...] The *publicus* was the agent of sovereign power, the *persona publica*, responsible for acting on behalf of the people to defend the rights of the community. As for the verb *publicare*, its meaning was to confiscate, seize, *remove from private use or ownership*" (Duby 1988, 5; emphasis added). The meaning of the term *privatus* broadened, encompassing not only that which belongs to the family, but also everything that lacks a festive character. For example, in the Rule of Saint Benedict, *privatis diebus* means "weekdays." "The notion of the festival will prove to be important in what follows. We shall be looking at ceremonies and staged spectacles, at the gestures that people made, the words they spoke, and the way they presented themselves to others. Words associated with privacy were not applied to this kind of festive behavior but reserved for more homely activities, especially those prescribed by rule for monks" (5). Such activities would have a specific function in a given community. In a monastery, monks would hold certain sets of prerogatives – rights exclusive to all members of the closed

309 It is important to remember that "home" denotes a separate legal territory, not the lack of law.

310 Hence, *res privata* can find itself *in commercio* and *in patrimonio* – i.e. it can become an object of trade, exchange, inheritance; *res publica*, on the other hand, remains *extra commercium* (outside trade) and cannot become an object of exchange.

311 Similar semantic intuitions can be found in the classical definition of the public good – its essence would consist precisely in the following: everyone can use it and access to it cannot be restricted in any way.

community separated from public life by means of monastic enclosure. All of its members enjoyed this *privitas*. Therefore, *privitas* denotes in this context everything that is happening within an isolated community regulated by its own rules of behavior.

Littre's nineteenth-century dictionary also points to home-related themes as constitutive elements of the original sense of the term *privé*: "private" would mean "tamed" or "domesticated," e.g. *un oiseau privé* refers to a domesticated bird. "Private" is therefore connected to ideas of familiarity, intimacy and attachment; it belongs to the group of concepts related to family, home, interior, but also confidentiality. After all, the word "private" also shares affinities with the adjectives "secluded," "secret" or "reserved."³¹² The scope of the term *privé* also includes the concept of a "particular person" (*privé* means *particulier*), to whom something may belong as his or her property, therefore being somehow "reserved" and made inaccessible to others. Two quotations from Littre's dictionary are particularly characteristic in the context of the public/private opposition: "those who rule make more mistakes than private people" and "nothing is private in the lives of great people as everything belongs to the public good." In turn, the concept of the "public" is defined in Littre's dictionary as "[t]hat which belongs to an entire people, that which concerns an entire people, that which emanates from the people" (Duby 1988, 3), i.e. that which is of common use – things that are not only open and universally accessible, but also overt, visible, "for all to see."

As it becomes apparent from the analysis of the original meanings of the public/private opposition, these terms did not initially refer to the distinction between the individual and the state, but they referred to the distinction between *two kinds of communities*: the domestic, local one bound by friendship and tradition, and the political one tied by relations of power and law. What is more, within each community there existed a space where certain kinds of behavior would be made "common:" in the former, it would be shaped by particular habits or traditions, while in the latter – by universal law. In this original interpretation, the key issues are not related to the sole existence of the public sphere, but include the *balance* between the public and the private, their mutual relations, the mechanisms of making things "public" or "private," and finally, those spheres of life that are either lifted into the limelight from the realm of privacy or withdrawn into this realm and in time made intimate.

312 According to Littre's dictionary, "Private life should be lived behind walls" (after Duby 1988, 3).

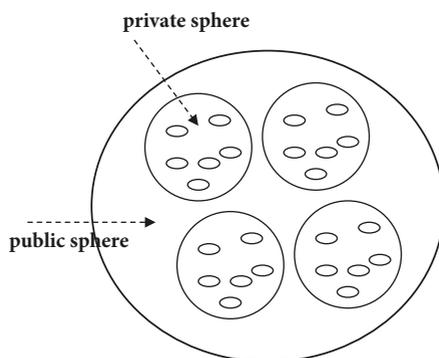


Fig. 7.1: Private and public sphere

At the same time, it needs to be emphasized that the terms “private sphere” and “public sphere” are not only relative but also invariably refer to communities located on different levels of the hierarchical organization of society. In the original sense, the “private sphere” would be related to the household community, while the “public” one – to that of the state, which would mean that the public sphere is nested inside a number of private ones that constitute, for those who partake in collective life, the primary common space. However, the household community – or any other local, particular one – also contains a certain public sphere, in which individuals are “submerged.” The difference between the level of household communities and the level of the political community would lie only in the following: in the original sense, the *private sphere is the space of intra-group integration*, whereas the *public sphere is the space of inter-group integration*.

One could therefore say that the public sphere is “the group of groups” – a space inside which the particular becomes the general. In this perspective, great significance is given to the principle of including “private” groups in the public sphere, which determines the balance between these two levels of integration. Theoretically speaking, the inter-group space can be occupied either by all members of these groups, or only their representatives. In the former case, boundaries of lower-order groups are dissolved and they are reduced to the narrow sphere of intimacy or mores.³¹³ In the latter case,

313 This is the origin of controversies around parental rights regarding children: the more individual rights are gained by the latter, as guaranteed by public institutions, the less “private” the family becomes and the fewer rules operating inside it have a particular character derived from tradition or mores.

certain members of the lower-order groups are excluded from participation in the public sphere. For example, it was fathers of families (*patres familias*) that constituted the Roman political community, while women, children and slaves remained outside the public sphere. Therefore, heads of large families acted as a bridge between the private and the public, ensuring the balance between the two realms and securing the stability of the entire complex social order.³¹⁴

The semantic tropes found in contemporary interpretations of the private/public opposition initially seem to be entirely different. This stems from the fact that the authors of currently developed theoretical models³¹⁵ focus primarily on the concept of the public sphere, often implicitly assuming that the private sphere constitutes the domain of individual people's actions and encompasses everything that is *not* related to others who belong to broader societal categories. Thus, in more general terms, it would remain an intimate matter of private preferences. Nevertheless, in these models there also invariably emerges the question of individuals being rooted in lower-order groups.

For Hannah Arendt (1998), the Greek *polis* or the Roman *res publica*, which she regards as the original model, are spaces where individuals can reveal their specific characteristics: one's moral greatness can not only be discerned and acknowledged by others but also become part of a shared tradition, setting up new standards of behavior and forging new values. "This is a competitive space," writes Benhabib, "in which one competes for recognition, precedence and acclaim" (1992, 93). At the same time, however, in Arendt's view the public sphere also has – as Benhabib calls it – an "associational" character: it can emerge in all places where people work together upon agreement or as a result of persuasion, and where centers of coordinated action are created.

According to the liberal model, in turn, the public sphere acquires a "legalistic" character. Benhabib defines it as a space of rights and principles, thanks to which "different primary groups, about whom we only know that they do not share the

314 The quoted example aptly illustrates not only the irremovably relational character of the pair private/public but also the fact that the rules determining transitions from one to the other constitute the keystones of socio-political order. The question of balance between levels of integration is also related to individual participants in social life. As Norbert Elias noted, "in the transition to new level of integration [...] there are conflicts of loyalty and conscience which are at the same time conflicts of personal identity" (2001, 179).

315 We employ here the typology developed by Seyla Benhabib (1992).

same conception of the good, can ‘resolve the problem of coexistence in a reasonable way’ (1992, 96). However, such a “reasonable resolution” would require to exclude from public discourse those moral questions which – out of their very nature – cannot be settled; their place would be taken by accepted procedures or normative premises of public dialogue (e.g. the principle of equality), which “all political participants find reasonable (or, at least, not unreasonable)” (97).

It is worth noting, however, that in the liberal model – as underlined by Will Kymlicka (2002) – the public sphere is the realm where groups coexist, not individuals. Its primary function is to create an infrastructure facilitating constructive dialogue that would bring pragmatic profits. The question of a “good life” would be resolved in the private sphere, inside groups, while the public one would be the place for settling questions of justice and social choices understood as an optimum mode of aggregating preferences rather than a way of reaching consensus in social discourse. The public sphere would be thus a space in which, on the one hand, various groups can coexist peacefully, while on the other – a common direction for action is negotiated.

Finally, in the third model distinguished by Benhabib – one developed by Jürgen Habermas (1989) – the public sphere is conceived as a space located between the state apparatus and social groups. Inside it, reasonable discourse is possible without violence. While Arendt argued that it was precisely the development of a “social sphere” between the family and the state (a sphere of social interactions that mediate between the two) that caused the downfall of the public sphere,³¹⁶ for Habermas its emergence is the very moment when the public sphere was born. According to him, its demise would be rather associated with the extension of the state’s prerogatives.³¹⁷

According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere, as distinct from its ancient predecessor, had a particular character: its participants would not act for the benefit of the political community to which they belonged, but for their

316 Whereas household communities or, to a lesser extent, local ones constitute a miniature of the political community, “groups of interest” assembled as a result of interactions occurring in the “social sphere” have a completely different character. In their case, the common good has a “club-like” rather than public character.

317 Strictly speaking, the crisis of the public sphere was caused by the political influence of larger social groups gained as a result of reforms extending the right to vote (introduced in Britain in 1867 and 1883). This reinforced the position of state because the poorer parts of society, which successfully campaigned to obtain compensation for unequal economic opportunities, have led to the development of interventionist policies.

own profit. However, since they occupied the same social position, it was possible for them to reach agreement and establish goals whose fulfillment would be in everybody's interest. In Habermas' model, therefore, the public sphere's key components include the concept of equal status among members and the principle of rationality. The justification of postulated premises would consist in the process of formulating them as they need to be the outcome of a discussion based on the criterion of rationality, i.e. the principle that it is not the authority of power but objective rightness that determines their importance. It remains unclear, however, what would be the significance of the condition of members being rooted in private communities of local, family or religious character, which belong to a completely different order than the one related to social stratification.

Regardless of the differences between the three models, they all share the conviction that it is precisely the public sphere – where particular individuals and groups meet – that constitutes the essence of collective life because it provides a space in which crucial choices are made, ones that determine both the basic rules of social life on the inter-group level and the principles of peaceful coexistence, coordination and cooperation, creating a framework in which individuals can “reveal” themselves by emerging from the realm of private life. All of them are also informed by normative ideas such as the open character of the public sphere, the transparency of its organizing principles, the equality of those who participate in it (secured by suspending their private status in order to grant them a more general identity as citizens) and the rationality of discourses developing within it.

Despite their highly normative character, in each model one can find a jarring note, namely the question of excluding certain groups or issues from the public sphere. The problem disregarded by Hannah Arendt in her nostalgic praise of Greek democracy is that neither the Greek *polis* nor the Roman *res publica* were open to all. In fact, women, slaves and metics did not enjoy the status of citizens in them. As non-citizens, not only were they excluded from decision-making processes regarding the political community, but they were also subject to the laws governing the internal sphere of *oikos*, against which there was no appeal. In Arendt's perspective, the public sphere is invariably related to the question of participation and exclusion – the unconditional or solely conditional (licensed) openness of the space that lies outside the private sphere.

As for the liberal model, in turn, its criticism would focus on excluding certain moral issues from public dialogue, specifically ones related to the good life. They would be left to the private sphere, i.e. groups in which dialogue is not subordinated to public rules and procedures. It could happen, therefore, that solutions reached in the private sphere violate certain general principles and

individual rights. At the same time, however, any interference with the private sphere, made in the name of individual rights, could violate the very basis of the existence of lower-order groups.³¹⁸

Finally, in Habermas' model the public sphere reaches its perfect form in the period when participation in it is limited to representatives of a single social group, namely the bourgeoisie. Surely, as Benhabib demonstrates, Habermas' locating of the model of public sphere in the first period of the development of the bourgeois society does not preclude the possibility of extending it by embracing further groups in the rational discourse. However, Habermas himself sees the extension of the right to vote as the beginning of the crisis of this sphere because the broadened circle of citizens came to include groups whose class interests were contradictory and impossible to reconcile. Thus, in the new social reality – similar to the contemporary one – it ceased to be possible to uphold the concept of a rational discussion that would allow reaching consensus.

This is a kind of “aesthetic” defect found in the most laudable models of democracy, namely that they endorse solutions that exclude a number of groups or social issues from public life. Still, this “aesthetic” defect is far less important than the “theoretical” one which arises from the fact that the public sphere cannot be considered in separation from its complementary concept of the private sphere regarded not in terms of individual intimacy but in terms of intra-group spaces. This dilemma was already pointed out by Hegel, who underlined that the law can be only personal, making the individual its subject and consequently a participant in the public sphere. However, if it were indeed the case that individuals themselves create the public sphere, the state would deal with a mass – an inorganic, disordered collectivity. Thus, individuals need to be subordinated to certain circles, groups or communities, among which the family is the most important one, and whose internal space – the “private sphere” in the original, historical sense of the term – does not constitute a subject of the law. Therefore, the condition of the existence of the public sphere would be the existence of citizens being rooted in quasi-private groups whose values and interests they could represent in relation to the state. It is precisely at this point that we encounter the contemporary understanding of the concept of the civic society as an entity that lies at the foundation of a democratic state.

The above understanding of the concept of the public sphere conforms to a particular semantic aspect identifiable through lexicographical analysis, namely

318 As in the case of taking children away from their parents due to poverty, “inefficiency” of care, or on suspicion of violating children's rights.

one indicating that this sphere constitutes an inter-group space, a sort of a meta-level that acts as a place for the integration of diverse groups, not the individual members of a given society, who were extracted from it. Moreover, one could also easily demonstrate that although individuals are the main actors in the public sphere in models developed by Arendt and Habermas, even in these theories individuals represent greater communities. This is not only because their actions and decisions affect the position of those who are excluded from the public sphere yet remain tied to its full members through family or economic bonds, but also because it is the quality of the private sphere that ought to be regarded as the source of their unique features and competences (which are assumed to exist by Arendt³¹⁹) or the character of their particular interests (emphasized by Habermas).

Therefore, the public sphere – as the domain that determines the rules and goals of collective life – needs to be complemented not with a private sphere of individual decisions but with an inter-group space in which individual members of the society are rooted and from which they derive their ideas of a “good life.”

7.2 The concept of the public sphere

The above survey of meanings related to the concept of the public sphere shows that it is rich in associations and offers many intuitions, among which the foremost are: (1) generalizing and sharing choices and behaviors within (2) organized space, entrance to which is regulated by (3) general criteria or rules of passage, which create (4) a “meta-group” of an abstract (general) identity, which goes beyond the private (intra-group) life-world of individuals. Analyzing the historical transformations of meanings related to the concept of the public sphere can also help demonstrate the existence of two processes which inform a different distribution of emphasis in accounts of phenomena related to it. The first concerns the disappearance of private shared spaces.³²⁰ Public spaces of the “lower order” (such as house, street, neighborhood, workplace) have begun to

319 In this perspective, the morality of private communities becomes the source of public virtue. Even though at first glance the idea that the best models of living together (developed in the private sphere) permeate into the public sphere seems utopian, it corresponds to the theories of Auguste Comte, Adam Smith and even Charles Darwin, who has expressed (in a passage quoted in Chapter Four, note 16) the conviction that long-term success shall be secured by those human communities that are capable of developing moral virtues among their members to a greater extent than others.

320 In fig. 7.1. they are represented by circles inside the greater whole.

be the meeting place for individuals who do not share any “local” sense of community or a “local” common good.³²¹ The second process, historically parallel, regards the extension of the state’s authority over the entire public space, which has been opening up along with the disappearance of “local orders.” As a result of this process, individuals have become the only “particularity,” while the state – the only creator and guardian of the public sphere.

Therefore, the question arises whether – given the richness of associations with the term – there actually exists something that could be regarded either as an element shared by all the diverse ideas and theories developed around it, or at least as a condition necessary for the emergence of the public sphere, regardless of the details specific to its various accounts. If we were to assume that the overriding function of the public sphere is to establish and continuously coordinate actions in larger collectivities comprised of individuals and social groups, then its necessary condition would consist in creating and confirming common knowledge about what other people feel, know, do or plan to do (Chwe 2001).³²² After all, actions in the public sphere can be coordinated only under the condition that individuals are capable of attributing to others knowledge which they possess themselves, and predict their behavior on this basis.³²³ Thus, in order to grasp how the public sphere functions it is crucial to understand social *processes of forming common knowledge*.

In the perspective developed here, the public sphere is therefore a *space facilitating public disclosure of knowledge, intentions and sentiments*, either in the form of behavior (actions) or verbal communication³²⁴ by making them public and thus constituting common knowledge, co-intentionality and co-feeling. It needs to be emphasized that common knowledge assumes not only that everybody knows

321 It is this aspect of transformations that is pointed out by Richard Sennett (1992) in his discussion of the conditions for the emergence of the “public man” and his later “fall.”

322 This definition refers to the theory of common knowledge understood as a condition for coordinating actions. As Suk-Young Chwe writes (2001), knowledge of a certain message does not necessarily facilitate coordinated action – it is also necessary to know that others received the same message, understood it in the same way, and intended to act in accordance with that particular information.

323 Drivers move in a coordinated manner not only because all of them know traffic regulations and signs but also because each of them additionally assumes that others know them and will act in accordance with that knowledge.

324 Just like language, behavior reveals emotions, intentions and knowledge, but does so in non-verbal ways.

the same thing but also, additionally, that everybody knows that others know this, and that the latter know that all the rest know this. Next, co-intentionality assumes not only having knowledge of other people's intentions regarding a certain action plan, but additionally having the intention that is a part of this plan. Finally, co-feeling assumes not only experiencing the same feelings but also the conviction that others feel the same (Tomasello 1999).³²⁵

It is in this *public community* of convictions, sentiments and intentions that one ought to seek the source not only of the regularities that create the concept of the society as a system, but also of the idea of the common good as an overriding normative principle governing the decision-making process in the public sphere. Thus, participation in the public sphere invariably entails a component that ethnomethodologists have termed knowledge taken-for-granted: the conviction that others understand signs in the same way, know the same rules, hear and see the same things, and so forth.³²⁶ This also entails the conviction that there exists a certain state of reality that is beneficial for all participants in the public sphere – it is only by assuming this view that it becomes possible to expect cooperation from others acting in the public sphere. Finally, such participation presupposes an internal compulsion to act in a certain way due to the consciousness of a common knowledge shared among the people who constitute the auditorium, i.e. the “audience” of individual behavior.

Now, let us draw attention to the fact that, given such a view of the public sphere, it becomes to a certain extent identical with the concepts of community and sociality. One could even say that – in light of the discussion in Chapter Two – the essence of the “foundational holism” (which constitutes the basis of sociality) was the making public of individual thinking, e.g. in the form of cave drawings, or through the possibility of experiencing the same emotions while participating in shamanic rituals. Similarly, Linnda Caporeale, whose theoretical

325 This is perfectly illustrated in the well-known fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen about the emperor's new clothes: although all people in the crowd who witness the emperor's procession individually do see (and know) that the ruler is naked, none of them are certain whether others see the same thing. It is only the making public of this knowledge by the little boy's cry, in combination with eye contact, allowing to observe other people's reactions, that renders this distributed cognition common and thereby facilitates the coordination of actions.

326 One's own knowledge and knowledge about other people's knowledge (meta-knowledge) also constitutes an important element of phenomenological sociology, analyzing so-called “constructs of the first and second order.”

model is presented in Chapter Four, argues that the proper function of *deme* is the creation of shared knowledge, which constitutes the basic condition for the realization of the fundamental task of the base community: the coordination of individual actions.

These similarities should not come as a surprise because – as we have already demonstrated – every community creates its own, “private” or “local” public sphere, which bears the same characteristics as the public sphere in superior collectivities. At the same time, this similarity facilitates grasping the circumstances of the latter’s development – as a space of integration and inter-group coordination, it emerged at that stage of historical development in which, along with the numerical growth of the primal communities, there arose the necessity to construct a political order on top of the social one. This was related to the rise of the state – a concept that, as we have indicated in Chapter One, is frequently confused in sociology with that of society, despite the fact that those two entities function in different dimensions of reality and refer to different mechanisms of generating common knowledge as the basis for coordination of actions. The state employs primarily formal institutions, especially law, whereas processes of socializing human action are founded mainly on the informal institutionalization of behavior, which is thus transformed into habits and traditions.

These differences are the subject of the next chapter – the present discussion focuses on broader characteristics of public sphere, which manifest themselves regardless of whether it assumes a more “local” or more “universal” form. They could be described by indicating three fundamental functions performed when knowledge, sentiments and intentions are made public, both in local communities and higher state collectivities.

Certainly, the most primal and simultaneously fundamental function is the coordination of individual and collective actions in a way that raises the degree of *integration* in the entire social system. In this respect, it is essential for each member to know his or her place and task within the broader community. Many tools are used to achieve this goal: elaborate ideological systems as well as parables, sayings and proverbs that are part of common knowledge. On the one hand, therefore, these are visions of order, in which each estate has its own ascribed function in the organic social whole; class ideologies that assign to each collective normatively specified tasks; or concepts of individual rights. On the other hand, there are tools such as popular literature, films and proverbs like “children should be seen and not heard” or clichés like “women’s vocation is to bear children.”

In the area of integration, the most fundamental task performed by the public sphere is not only to turn distributed knowledge into a common one but also to

legitimize it so that it can become indubitable and taken-for-granted.³²⁷ One could also say that integration occurs primarily by way of broadly understood education and the creation of what Pierre Bourdieu has called “habitus,” which constitutes a set of dispositions to act within the framework of structures and institutions in the superior system. This goal is served not only by journeyman institutions or ones facilitating general education but also by establishing and celebrating religious and state holidays³²⁸ – the goal of which would be to develop and sustain a sense of the collective “We” superior to both individual and group identities.

The second vital function of the public sphere is to *mobilize* the population in order to accomplish goals whose achievement requires the cooperation of a greater number of people, e.g. taking revenge on another tribe or family, proper maintaining of irrigation canals, constructing dams, defending the state against enemy invasions, or – conversely – enlarging it by territorial expansion. Conceived in this way, the function of the public sphere would boil down to generating engagement and participation, which become the basis for cooperation, whereas the fundamental space for its emergence would be a tribal or political assembly, a meeting of allies, or a discussion club. In all three cases, the goal is to generate common knowledge (e.g. what everyone thinks and proposes to do) in order to decide about the joint course of action in the course of a more or less rational debate.

Regardless of differences between theories of the public sphere, all of them view it as a space that is crucial for social life in its political dimension: one where agreement is reached with regard to goals that bind all interested parties. Thus, key aspects in the area of mobilization include not only the release of emotional energy by reinforcing a belief in the common cause but also the selection of the mode in which decisions are made in the process of public discourse and construction of action plans in accordance with a broadly accepted concept of the common good. It is in this last category that the realm of politics is located as an area of decision-making and citizen participation. A vital role in mobilizing society is also played by public rituals whose essence is to “generate” an audience that legitimizes existing structures of coordination, especially those that

327 It is not essential, however, that individuals see it this way – it suffices that they believe that others do not doubt it.

328 An identical role is played by family celebrations, which not only “publicly” renew bonds between people but also confirm the roles they play within the framework of a “private” community.

embody power relations. The passage of the royal procession not only reminds of, and makes present, the authority of power, but also – by creating an audience – generates common knowledge and sentiments. Every public ritual – be it Gaudeamus, knighting or the opening of the Olympic Games – performs a similar function: it restores a sense of the common good and a community of sentiments, consecrating all actions undertaken in the name of the community.

Finally, the third vital function of the public sphere is to *facilitate* individual and collective actions. After all, the public sphere is also the space of coexistence, in which the actions of particular individuals are woven together. Their coordination demands not only sharing knowledge but also establishing and obeying rules that would facilitate the accomplishment of personal goals for everyone, or finding satisfaction by acting in that field. A case in point here would be a public road used by riders or drivers, or a bath house and cinema, which attract those desiring to bath or entertain themselves with films. The organization of these spaces is supposed to ensure conflict-free and effective sharing of a certain good (road, bath or film) in such a way that individuals do not endanger others, violate their rights, or diminish their chances of pursuing desired goals, etc.

In this sense, the public sphere secures, facilitates and sustains the coordination of actions, mediating between individuals and determining trajectories of their behavior. Clear traffic regulations and signs, alternating bathing days for men and women, or numbered seats in the cinema are all mechanisms of control, which force individuals to accept public roles. These mechanisms and common knowledge (in the sense specified above as the knowledge about everyone else knowing what one knows) are the condition for sustaining the coordination of actions and, by the same token, the condition that needs to be met if individuals are to achieve their particular (private) goals. The public sphere is constituted through various techniques of generating common knowledge (trainings, courses, tips from other people or learning from them), rules of access or licensing individuals (ticket, library card), and organization of physical space (signs, numbered chairs in public halls, etc.). Its main function is to minimize the probability of conflict, collision or disturbance among individuals using the same space for their own goals.

To guarantee collision-free space, it is necessary to obey rules and procedures, and simultaneously suspend private identities in favor of public roles. Regulations secure a peaceful and harmonious joint movement of individuals, whose individual actions are coordinated even when they are completely independent of each other.³²⁹ More than that – any attempts at making such actions common

329 In this context, the contemporary driver's knowledge that it is advisable to pull over upon hearing an ambulance siren would correspond to the knowledge of a medieval

could endanger the audience itself, e.g. in the case of hooligans on stadiums, quarrels between spouses while driving on a motorway, or the conversion of a café into a drug den. In all these cases we deal with the invasion of particular identities, which transform public sphere into a private one. Thus, the rules that facilitate actions in the public sphere primarily aim to block the expression of knowledge and sentiments as well as to cool and formalize contacts. One emotional outburst on a motorway could lead to a pile-up, and one insubordinate audience member is enough to transform a film screening into a brawl.

However, lack of collisions does not exhaust the entire space of coexistence created by the public sphere. It can be also filled with positive emotions as a place “where people who do not know each other can meet and enjoy each other’s company” (Ariès 1989, 9). Coexistence in public space can also have a festive and celebratory character, giving a sense of “revealing oneself” to others and presenting one’s individuality. A good example of this would be a stroll on a promenade at a holiday resort. As the interactionists emphasize (cf. Goffman 1967; Collins 1975), presence of many individuals in a single space constitutes a point of departure for the development of complex interactionist rituals whose goals include the confirmation of individuals’ position with regard to others.

It needs to be added that the development of this specific function of public sphere – i.e. facilitation of individual actions – is a civilizational invention that does not go very far back in the history. As Norbert Elias demonstrates (2000), the use of the public space for individual actions was based, for a long time in history, on direct regulations, or the “law of the stronger,” which would apply when particular interests come into conflict. According to Sennett (1992), the impulse that prompted the development of modern public life in London and Paris – the largest Western cities in the middle of the eighteenth century – was the appearance of “aliens:” thousands of young people arriving from remote parts of England and France in search of employment. The myriad of immigrants dispersed in London and Paris, without any social roots, alongside the new middle class which was engaged in an exchange of products rather than their production and which did not have enough time to develop its own professional ethos (both categories partially overlapped). All these people did not yet have a defined social identity. The effect of this was the emergence of specific patterns of social interactions (especially since their intensity was greatly increased) among people

citizen, who understands that it is best for him to find shelter at a wall when a procession on horseback is approaching.

who would not know each other's status. The culture of public life was based at that time on the assumption that, in the public sphere, one plays a certain role rather than presents his or her identity.³³⁰

The above description of basic functions also allows to indicate those shared features of public space that are necessary for the making public and common of sentiments, knowledge and intentions.

First, public space is by definition *accessible* so as to make it possible for new participants to join in out of their own will – not on the basis of drafting or nominating. Let us note that the public character of a given space does not require the kind of accessibility that would be completely unhindered. After all, for example, only registered members can use public libraries. However, the public character of these institutions is determined by the type of limitation – anyone who fulfils certain criteria can register as a library member. Other public spaces also utilize certain modes of licensing, qualifying, ticketing or restricting access (e.g. one cannot walk naked in the street). The idea of universal, free and unrestricted access to the public sphere is not even realized in the space of home to the extent that other household members always have to be taken into account. One could adopt a similar perspective with regard to the “exclusive” character of the Greek *polis* or the bourgeois public sphere, indicating that the evolution of the conditions of access to the public sphere was one of the vital factors in determining the historical transformation of the political variant of the public sphere.

Second, public space is always a space of *making something apparent to others*: revealing oneself or something (one's competences, reasons, opinions etc.), even when this simply means “being exposed to the public view” as in the case of enjoying a walk or travelling by tram. In the original sense, making public means communicating to the public the ideas, reasons, information or arguments formulated or created by various groups or individuals so that they can be known to other members and become the subject of discussions. As

330 As Sennett emphasizes, public life, which blossomed in the mid-eighteenth century in the capitals of Britain and France, was based on the universally shared assumption that a certain distance exists between personal identity and the role one plays in public situations. This conviction allowed people to play with one's identity, as part of which they would create themselves. According to Sennett, the equating of one's self-image presented in the public with one's true nature was the main symptom of the crisis of public life. Its first signs, Sennett argues, can be observed already in the mid-nineteenth century. The equating of the role with identity subjected individuals to social control (cf. Foucault 1979), as people assumed that, based on observation of a person in the public, one was able to judge who that person really was.

Linnda Caporael indicates (1995), making things public always provides grounds for spontaneous group action. Cries signaling that a dam or a tram is broken can cause the actions of passers-by or fellow travelers to acquire a common direction. Transformations of the strictly technical means of making things public, which has occurred along with the development of mass communication, are therefore an important factor determining the historical changes of the public sphere.

Third, public space is always somewhat *organized*, not only in the sense that there are rules and signs aiding a larger number of participants to coexist inside it and identify the more or less clearly defined boundary between the public and the private, between what can be revealed to the broader public and what ought to remain a “bedroom secret.” It is also organized by virtue of the fact that formal institutions operate inside it, whose main task is precisely to make knowledge common and public, and take decisions in the name of the entire collectivity, later supervising their implementation.³³¹ The basic institution of the public sphere is naturally the state, along with all of its branches. However, institutions of this kind can be also created on the grassroots level out of the initiative of particular individuals or social groups, or on the basis of their agreement. The crucial property of public space – one that organizes its functioning – is the (often situationally constructed) division into leading actors and audience.

The theory of public sphere developed here proposes to treat it as a space where actions are coordinated by way of making sentiments, knowledge and intentions public and common. This allows one to discuss its historical transformations somewhat differently than the classical theoretical models presented above. If the public sphere is regarded as constituted by a particularly understood space, a “meta-group” recruited in some way, and specific technologies of making public, it would become easier to point out those of its changes that are related to the emergence of mass media as a new technology, mass society as a new type of “meta-group,” and cities as well as other modern forums on which people meet as new forms of public space.

Doubtless, the transformations of public spaces, media and “meta-groups” bear consequences for both the way in which the three main functions of the public sphere are realized, and for the effectiveness of its deployment in establishing or sustaining the coordination of social actions. Thus, since the frequently underlined demise of the public sphere is described by indicating symptoms of

331 The counterpart of such formal institutions in “local” communities would be – for example – the division of roles in the family or the informal authority of the “council of elders” or most distinguished family members.

crisis in the domain of the coordination of actions – both in terms of social integration (sense of similarity and sharing one's fate with others), mobilization (participation), and facilitation (sense of control over one's actions) – this does not have to mean that we are facing a real crisis of the public sphere. All it might prove is that currently operating institutions, rules of behavior and actors have lost their power of generating common knowledge, intentions and sentiments in favor of other spheres – developed in the former's shadow – where coordination is established and sustained.

Let us therefore examine in detail the transformations of the public sphere in human history.

7.3 From tribal to political community – traditional societies

Although the earliest tribal communities did not make any distinction between the social and political orders, this does not mean that we cannot speak in their case of the existence of such a space for action that would correspond to the public sphere understood in the way proposed here. As we have already noted, generating common knowledge is the basic function of *deme*, comprised in this particular case by the entire tribal community. These communities also had to take decisions with regard to all their members (e.g. about declaring war on neighboring tribes) and create adequate means of mobilization and control, which would prevent the problems of “social idleness” or “free riding,” invariably emerging at all sites of collective action.

As scholars researching such communities unanimously emphasize, probably the clearest feature of the public spheres they produced is their total inclusiveness. Decisions were taken in them with the participation of all adult members of the community gathered at a large assembly; moreover, they would be taken unanimously. Claude Lévi-Strauss shows that some communities also developed specific rituals whose task would be – to use the terminology proposed in this study – to facilitate actions of this type. “When an important decision has to be taken, a kind of ritual combat is organized a day or two days before so that all old quarrels are liquidated in fights,” community, he concludes, begins from cleansing itself of all grounds for disagreement, “and it is only when this has been done that the refreshed and rejuvenated community, having rid itself of all differences of opinion, is in a position to take a decision which will be unanimous and thus express common good will” (Charbonnier 1969, 35).

Regardless of their subject matter, these decisions are subordinated to the general image of the world, which coordinates both the process of making such choices and the everyday activities of such communities. Despite local variations,

this image is – in its basic forms – always the same. It is saturated with the presence of the sacred and based on mechanisms to which keys are held by gods, demons and secret powers. Thus, if the well-being of both the entire community and its individual members relies primarily on such powers, influencing them is possible only through religion³³² or, more precisely, through religious rituals aimed to win the favor of gods and gain mastery over the secret powers that rule both nature and the fate of individuals.

While analyzing the role of religion in the integration of the collectivity, Peter L. Berger draws attention to the fact that the legitimization of a given vision of reality cannot be limited to sustaining belief in it as part of collective actions, even when this is supported by disciplining measures. As he succinctly puts it, “[m]en forget. They must, therefore, be reminded over and over again” (1967, 40). Ritual is the key means of “refreshing their memory.” Its power rests chiefly in that “[a]gain and again it ‘makes present’ to those who participate in it the fundamental reality-definitions and their appropriate legitimations” (40). Ritual restores “the continuity between the present moment and the societal tradition, placing the experiences of the individual and the various groups of the society in the context of a history (fictitious or not) that transcends them all” (40–41). At the same time, it gives the feeling – by reassuring or convincing – that others share the same reality as we; in other words, ritual helps not only to refresh common knowledge but also to *confirm that it is common*.

Thus, ritual does not only aid memory. Its fundamental and oldest function is – as we demonstrate in Chapter Two – to establish emotional bonds between community members, or – strictly speaking – to create that community.³³³ This was already emphasized by Durkheim, who wrote that “the cult really does periodically recreate a *moral* entity on which we depend, as it depends on us. And this entity does exist: it is society” (2001, 258; emphasis added). According to Durkheim, ritual has two crucial features that enable it to realize this function. First, it is performed in the presence of a larger group gathered in one place. Referring to the terminology used here, one could say that rituals constitute a

332 Durkheim draws attention to this when he writes that “at least the manifest function of the cult is initially to regularize the course of natural phenomena” (2001, 259).

333 It is symptomatic that Berger completely disregards this function of rituals. Both *The Sacred Canopy* and the book co-written with Thomas Luckmann contain no references to social bonds. This becomes clearer if we recall that the interpretative paradigm, to which both works have contributed significantly, focuses on individuals as the main social actors, and on cognitive processes as the basic mechanisms guiding their actions.

way of making public the vision of the world, at the same time allowing people to observe each other as well as each other's reactions and reactions to these reactions, etc. "Their first effect, then, is to bring individuals together, to increase contacts between them, and to make those contacts more intimate. This in itself causes a change of consciousness" (258).³³⁴

Second, ritual transports us from the realms of the profane into that of the sacred not only because it is related to beliefs in the narrow sense but also because it somewhat "suspends" everyday reality along with all of its down-to-earth existential problems. Solving such problems is subordinated to the self-interest of individuals, setting them in an irresolvable conflict with other members of the community. As a result of such suspension, thoughts are focused on social things: "[e]ven the material interests that the great religious ceremonies are meant to satisfy are public in nature, and hence social. The whole society is interested in the abundance of the harvest, in timely but not excessive rainfall, in the regular multiplication of the animals" (259).³³⁵ Due to the public character of

334 Changes in the contents of consciousness caused by the physical closeness of people gathered at the same place were indicated by Durkheim's contemporary – Gustave Le Bon. In *The Crowd. A Study of the Popular Mind*, he writes: "The sentiments and ideas of all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes. A collective mind is formed, doubtless transitory, but presenting very clearly defined characteristics" (2001, 1–2). Unfortunately, due to the very suggestiveness of the claims made in this work, it has shaped the image of the crowd as an entity that is – by its very nature – irrational and subject to uncontrollable emotions. It also affected research on phenomena occurring in larger gatherings of people, subordinating them to an analysis of the internal dynamic of collective behavior and the means of manipulating it.

335 In contemporary sociology, one of the few concepts in which the coexistence of individuals in a single space would be regarded as an initial condition for the development of elaborate rituals of interaction is the theory of Randall Collins. He begins with a Durkheimian analysis of religious ritual but assumes that "[t]he bonds that unite human beings are fundamentally the same as those that unite other animals. The only difference is that humans have symbols that can invoke unseen realities and hence carry the past into the future. Religious and other moral ceremonies thus serve to attach the animal bonds of emotion to symbols which enable people to carry their solidarity in their heads even when they are not together physically" (1975, 95). Thus, just like Berger, he sees ritual primarily as a kind of "mnemotechnic" tool: it would help one remind him- or herself that something links them to other members of the community. By the same token, this entails a complete disappearance of the specific function of ritual which, according to Durkheim, is to create the concept of the common good.

rituals, they allow not only generating common knowledge but also intentions and sentiments, thus renewing or recreating the very basis for coordinated social action.

Religious rituals are therefore a means of sustaining the idea of the *common good*, which grows out of the totality of social praxis, and is set within an image of reality that is specific to a given community. This idea constitutes the basis for *integrating* a system of coordinated actions. Due to its relations with the basic factors determining lifestyles, the common good is something that every member of the community wishes to come to existence, regardless of any existing divisions. Let us note that the common good, if understood in this way, is not identical with a “community of values” and cannot be reduced to accepting a “normative system” common to all community members. It is something concrete, tangible, and definable in terms of clear, specific states of reality – i.e. as abundant crops, turning away of plague, courage in facing enemy – ultimately resulting in the rise of well-being as well as an increase in the community’s significance and, consequently, in the significance of all its individual members.

The rise of chiefdoms and states as “management” or administrative units – caused by further population growth, certain demographic processes, or conquests – unleashed processes that invariably began to fragment the initial “totality” of the original community, which concentrated in itself all dimensions of individual existences. It was a split into rivalling clans and separate factions – not just individuals but groups of warriors, clerks, specialized craftsmen – developing a *praxis* that differed from what was experienced by other members of the tribe. The right to make decisions was centralized, just like the right to use violence. Access to certain information was limited only to the chieftain and his closest associates.

Still, it is the religious system that integrates the community into a superior unit. On the one hand, it incorporates all emerging divisions into a coherent image of the world, in which they become functionally justified. On the other, the very existence of these divisions is thus legitimized. The religious system is also a means of sustaining social identity, which – along with the shared language – is based on some kind of a cult of ancestors, which secures the continuity of the collective “We” on various levels of the superior collectivity, and helps control the forces of nature. The fundamental way of making common knowledge public is still the ritual, in which the figure of the ruler, who acquired divine status, begin to play an increasingly important role.

The transformation of certain chiefdoms into states, which occurred along with conquests as well as consolidation, only seemingly changed this state of affairs. Despite certain similarities to modern states (centralized power, often

based on bureaucracy, specialized administration, separation of trade, existence of cities, etc.), ancient empires were basically a more or less loose confederation of communities based on clans or extended families, which served as the basic point of reference for identification and integration of most people. The organization of cities was also based on a family system. As Max Weber shows in his compelling analysis of the phenomenon of urbanity, ancient cities were primarily fortresses as well as administrative and cult centers established with the help of local people, most often coerced by force of arms. Nonetheless, the group of forced settlers “retain[ed] the membership in its former local and clan associations” (1978, 1245).

One could therefore say that, despite further differentiation of ancient societies,³³⁶ it is still easy to point out what they believe to be the common good. After all, the well-being of all – godlike rulers and their clerks, warriors and priests, as well as all other folk – depends primarily on the still unconquered forces of nature. Influencing them is possible only by way of religion. As Hans Georg Wunderlich suggestively demonstrates, using the example of Egypt, this was the main aim of elaborate cults of ancestors, which produced monumental constructions admired to this day. In Ancient Egypt, the dead pharaoh was typically regarded as an earthly incarnation of Osiris, the god of vegetation and of the dead. Therefore, it was requisite to erect a funeral monument that would correspond to the creative powers of the whole people. Failure to do so, Wunderlich observes, “would bring down dire punishment upon the whole country. Above all, it might mean a failure of the Nile flood and hence the end of vegetation, which was directly dependent on Osiris and his earthly representative. Of course, the masses of people [constructing the monument] had to be guided, but force was not involved. The inner coercion of religion was effective enough” (1974, 333).

Naturally, identifying and acknowledging common good does not preclude conflicts between rulers and their subjects. The existence of such conflicts in ancient states is confirmed by numerous mentions of rebellions against excessive rents imposed by particular rulers. However, questioning of specific decisions

336 One needs to remember, however, that this process of differentiation had a relatively narrow reach. Jacek Kochanowicz reminds us of this: “Despite the impressive development of cities, religion, art and intellectual life, the ordinary masses in these societies – some 80 per cent of all people – were constituted by illiterate peasants living on the verge of starvation and working in a pre-industrial economy aimed at survival. Upper classes lived off wars and taxes, basically exploiting peasants, i.e. supporting themselves with redistribution” (2003, 467).

does not entail undermining the ruler's right to make them, his special role in upholding divine order, or that divine order itself. Even if it is violated by actions of particular individuals, this does not mean that the entire community fails to understand what *proper* behavior is. Were someone to forget about it, early legal system provided for strict punishment, which would immediately refresh that person's memory.

Let us note that, along with the transformation of tribal communities and chiefdoms into state organisms, the mode in which common knowledge was made public also changed. Strictly speaking, it was enriched with new techniques, unknown in earlier forms of social organization. This was related primarily to the invention of writing. Initially, as Lévi-Strauss shows, it was used "for inventories, catalogues, censuses, laws and instructions; in all instances, whether the aim was to keep a check on material possessions of human beings, it is evidence of the power exercised by some men" (Charbonnier 1969, 30). Although knowledge of writing was not widespread, in Sumer – where the earliest written documents were found – it was known not only by priests and professional writers but also, at least to some extent, by tradesmen and administration officials.

Writing greatly accelerates the popularization of common knowledge about ways of acting established within the community. This is because it does not require personal interaction when transmitting information. Additionally, it diminishes the risk of distortions, which may occur in verbal communication. Naturally, in societies using solely oral methods of passing down tradition, special techniques of memorizing even very long texts were developed, but this was limited primarily to texts of fundamental importance for the collective identity of a given community, ones documenting its history and customs (laws). Moreover, the making public of a given canonical text would always demand the physical presence of a person specialized in memorizing it.³³⁷ The invention of writing makes it possible to overcome such limitations.

First of all, writing facilitated faster transmission of information to the broader public. It also made it easier to integrate various communities, dispersed in a larger area, into a single political and economic organism, especially when accompanied by an efficient system of territorial communication. Already in the first millennium BC, the Assyrian Empire could boast an elaborate system of

337 As Karol Modzelewski demonstrates (2004), before Salic law was codified in writing, it was stored for many generations in memories of select members of the local community, who also performed the function of judges. The same was true for other legal systems used by peoples of the "barbaric Europe."

relays of horses and postal roads, which allowed governors of individual provinces to maintain close everyday contact with central authorities (Saggs 1962, 234). Diplomatic correspondence also rapidly grew in volume, covering not only relations between rulers of neighboring states but also the protection of life and interests of one state's "citizens" living on the territory of another. On the basis of preserved letters one can suppose that authorities made efforts to lend the public space such character that would help it facilitate the development of trade (protection of caravans, maintenance of crossings, development of water communication, etc.).

Law played a very important role in these efforts. In the Code of Hammurabi,³³⁸ we can naturally find regulations regarding actions taken in the private sphere (adultery, mariticide, beating of father by son). However, just like the Salic law, these provisions not only regard relations between members of an increasingly diversified social world (i.e. free people and slaves, owners and leaseholders, partners in trade ventures, men and women, parents and children), but also order actions in the public sphere (i.e. with regard to corrupt judges; severe punishment for stealing temple property; unlawful felling of trees; lease regulations; construction and renovation of houses; regulations introducing something reminiscent of "group responsibility" for doctors and construction workers, etc.) (cf. Saggs 1962, 196–228). One could therefore say that these codices constituted a mechanism of adapting rules of behavior to the changing reality, which began to be comprised not only of the space regulated by rules of coexistence within communities (included into codices) but also public space, which is, in a sense, "no one's." In this way, by imposing a common framework of actions in the intergroup space, they would become means of political integration.

Up to a certain moment, the world of Greeks and Romans was a continuation of earlier historical societies. The myth of the golden age, presented in one of the oldest Greek works of literature, the long poem by Hesiod, contains traces of elements characteristic for tribal communities (Graves 1992, 36). However, in Hesiod's Greece humans found themselves already excluded from the golden age; moreover, they had already moved past the epoch of kings, and existed – as Pierre Vidal-Naquet shows – "only by means of agricultural labor carried out in

338 The Code of Hammurabi is younger by entire three centuries than the oldest known example of written law, which also comes from Babylon, specifically from the period of the reign of King Ur-Nammu of Ur (2111–2094 BC). In later findings, we encounter the same problems that ancient lawmakers repeatedly attempted to solve.

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the heart of the familial community, the *oikos*” (1986, 2).³³⁹ This is part of more general historical changes that transformed Greece in the period after the fall of Mycenae and the great migration.³⁴⁰ The subsequent period of cultural and political revival greatly extended the scope of this “family.” “In the fourth century, the concept of Hellenism continues to be cultural: a Greek is someone who has received a Greek education, which someone born a barbarian is capable of acquiring” (Vidal-Naquet 1986, 4); in other words – a Greek is someone who behaves like a Greek. Some two centuries later, however, the difference between Greeks and barbarians began to be emphasized in stronger terms by referring to the opposition “between the slaves of law and the slaves of a despot” (4).³⁴¹ Crucially, however, between the world of the *polis* (denoting the collective “We”) and the world of barbarians (denoting the “aliens”) there emerges *ethnos* – a Greek community in terms of dialect and culture yet one that could not organize itself into a city-state and became subject to the rule of tyrants (Żelazny 2004, 25).

The rule of law is, therefore, the special invention made in Greece which was later raised in Rome to the rank of an organizational model that is still in force today and regulates the relationships among citizens. The inter-group space of

339 The meaning of the original Greek term – as Maria Rogaczewska helped us establish – is much richer than what we associate with the concept of family today since it indicates a place where one returns, and one’s natural environment, where he or she can flourish. It is also related to the concept of the “ecumene,” which denotes a community both in territorial and cultural terms (today – in the spiritual sense).

340 Wunderlich (1974) developed a very interesting theory, according to which the roots of the modern Western European civilization ought to be sought in the specific transformations of the cult of ancestors in Greece, which morphed into the cult of heroes. In this view, heroes (who were born out of gods and mortals) became models for their worshippers, who could make attempts at imitating them (after all, gods cannot be mimicked). The basic edifices in this “cult” would be theatre, where scenes from the lives of dead heroes were staged, and the stadium, where bodies were exercised so that they could achieve feats matching those of heroes. The twilight of the cult of ancestors and religiosity as such (only as late as in the Hellenic period of Greek history) is indicated also by Anna Świderkówna (1978, Chapter Ten). Cf. also Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s discussion of the changes in how the Greeks conceived time (1986, 39–52).

341 This change was inseparably linked with the development of Greek philosophy, which preceded it and flourished in the period between the fifth and fourth century BC. However, it is important to stress that its broader reception, even in a society where all citizens could read and write, took around two centuries.

integration was subjected not only to customary but also to formal regulation created in a bottom-up way through the collective will of all citizens.³⁴² Along with the rule of law another process began: the centralization of executive and judiciary power. The power that was formerly dispersed among local communities crystallized in the form of political institutions. This meant the birth of the public sphere in the form we recognize today, i.e. as a specialized sphere, separated from the social order and programmatically independent from it. It is also in Greece, and then in Rome, that we can trace the first “test of strength” between the private sphere (of great families) and the public sphere. As we have indicated in the chapter on the transformations of family, both in Athens during the classical period and in Rome during the Republic legal reforms were introduced in the area of marriage, inheritance, and citizenship, which put those families at work for the state’s political structure: on the one hand, the status of citizen gave fathers new prerogatives inside the family, but on the other made them guardians of the public order.

In other words, heads of families were “extracted” from the communities and given new privileges; their power was augmented insofar as they maintained loyalty to the newly emerged group of politicians managing public matters. Thereby, however, the level of the community lost the rights regarding its internal public sphere, and group responsibility was replaced with individual one. This means that societal self-control was severely limited. Conditions for gaining citizenship, granting rights and holding strictly public roles, as well as awarding privileges or material benefits, became means of strengthening central power.

However, the rule of law concerns mainly the political order. Although the application of law – which evolved, in Greece and particularly in Rome, from customary specific norms into an elaborate abstract system³⁴³ – certainly affected the perception of reality (especially in circles of people with better education³⁴⁴),

342 However, it is important to remember that there were restrictions regarding the status of citizens. The right to vote was denied to women, children, slaves, and foreigners.

343 As Marek Zirk-Sadowski indicated to us, besides moral duty Roman law distinguished legal duty, while besides physical persons – legal ones. Further, the introduction of an abstract concept of property facilitated discerning the role played by concepts in developing the image of the world. Apart from Greek philosophy, law was thus the area, in which the transition from the language of action to the language of reflection first began (cf. Chapter Three).

344 As Joseph Vogt points out, the process of Romanization of the provinces conquered by Rome occurred not only by way of granting local notables the status of Roman citizens, but primarily through the promulgation of Roman legal concepts and practice. It was

most people would still consider the essence of that reality primarily in religious terms. The social order of both these state organisms was firmly reliant on the work of slaves or half-slaves, while the extended family remained the fundamental organizational unit.³⁴⁵ As Weber emphasizes, “[Greek] [d]emocracy was initially unable to abolish the organization of the citizenry into sibs (*gentes*) and the superordinated phratries and phylae [...] [i.e.] purely personal cult associations” (1978, 1245). Also within the economic order, the basic sources of income for the population would still be located in agriculture and trade.

One could therefore say that, both in Greece and the Roman Empire, the system of cohering and integrating the state’s community was based on two major pillars supporting the organization of life both in the inter- and intra-group space. The first was law, which is no longer rooted only in tradition but also in a specific conceptual system ordering the image of the world. The second was institutionalized religion, with origins in a more or less syncretic system of beliefs. Despite that each of the two – law and religion – concerned a different sphere of life (the profane and the sacred, respectively), they were complementary and supported each other, developing and simultaneously legitimizing the image of the world and the concept of the common good related to it. The public sphere would be divided into two relatively independent yet complementary institutional systems – political and religious – which were made to fit through community’s social organization. It was in the extended family, phratry, or phyle that religion and politics would be rejoined, both in the personal sense (with the head of the family representing both orders in his community) and in the behavioral one (in joint rituals).

Thus, given all the important differences introduced by the rule of law, life in Greek and Roman societies was still a continuation of the older, tribal organization of community.³⁴⁶ The first departure from this thousands-year-old system of creating and sustaining the moral universe of the community came with the rise of Christianity. In contrast to the religions that preceded it – whose basic function was to collectively influence the forces of nature, on which the fate

law that legitimized the power of Caesars and made service to the state the primary obligation of all citizens (Cf. Vogt 1967).

345 It did not necessarily have to mean real kinship. Weber draws attention to this when he writes that “an association with claims to legitimacy could rest only on the basis of the traditional, ritually oriented organizational forms [...] or at least had to create such a basis *by fiction*” (1978, 1246; emphasis added).

346 Greek democracy constitutes a crucial modification of the tribal assembly, but it is still only a modification.

of the entire community depended – Christianity sets entirely different tasks before its believers – tasks assigned to individuals and not to social groups. One could put it even more strongly by saying that the common good was replaced in Christianity with “the good of the individual” because, unlike good crops, salvation cannot be secured with collective efforts of a family- or territory-based community.

What is more, Christianity has “extracted” individuals from their former family relations. “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29). They were offered instead to participate in a new community – one no longer based on an ethnic group, but on a more universal system of beliefs³⁴⁷ accompanied by an entirely redefined realm of *praxis*. The aversion and suspicion that the early Christian communes met with in the Roman Empire were caused not only by the difference of their beliefs but also by the difference of their practices. After all, the Roman religious system was eclectic enough to incorporate elements from all kinds of religions practiced at the time (which it actually did). Practices specific to Christianity, however, not only prevented believers from revering Caesars as gods but also led them to question various dimensions of social differentiation, fundamental for the image of the world accepted in the period. One needs to remember that the first Christian communes gave equal rights to all their members regardless of whether they were rich or poor, free or enslaved, barbaric or “civilized,” men or women.³⁴⁸

In the early stages, Christianity closely resembled an ethos-based group in the sense given to this term by Tadeusz Szawił (1982), which combines the existence of a well-articulated normative system with the subordination of everyday practices to it. “The distinguishing feature of an ethos is the unity of beliefs and social action” (171). This is exactly this unity that differentiates ethos from other types of normative systems, such as those contained in the traditional

347 However, Zbigniew Mikolejko has drawn our attention to the fact that in Christianity’s early years it was not certain whether this religion would not be permanently related to an ethnic community. During the Council of Jerusalem there was a dispute between those willing to keep Christianity within Judaism (James the Less), preserving its laws and traditions (e.g. circumcision), and proponents of a more universal vision (Saint Paul). The leader of the Church, Saint Peter, initially leaned towards the former position and only later embraced one closer to the latter.

348 Just like men, women were entitled to perform a strictly religious function in them, serving as deaconesses.

understanding of culture. It constitutes one of the main values for members of an ethos-based group, becoming the source of positive self-assessment of a given group on the background of the broader collective, or – as we would put it today – the source of its social identity. Although in the course of later historical transformations Christianity lost that characteristic, it would never abandon attempts at subordinating the sphere of *praxis* to religiously defined norms of behavior, which found fullest expression in Protestantism, born in the sixteenth century.

There were two convergent processes that determined the evolution of Christianity in the later periods of its development. First, it began to institutionalize itself, developing a separate mode of social organization, one parallel to the Roman state. After edicts issued by Constantine, it acquired the status of state religion.³⁴⁹ Such “cohabitation” of the state and church structures is a novelty in the history of societies. This is indicated by Marcel Simon, who writes that “pagan priests formed a single unity with the state, and were basically officials managing religious life. Their privileges did not disturb the unity of the state. Christian clergy, on the other hand, formed a separate hierarchic organization, providing support to a community distinct from that of the state” (1992, 226). The struggle between the papacy and the empire during the Middle Ages, and the incessant clashes between “the good of the Church community” and “the good of the state community” became a significant factor shaping the degree of integration in societies which developed at that time.

Second, while extending its institutional influence, the Church was forced to adapt to the reality of *praxis*, which, in fact, changed dramatically after the fall of the Roman Empire. Its Western territories were occupied by peoples who were still stuck at the stage of tribal organization, with families or clans constituting the basic social unit and exerting full control over the lives of their members, as well as taking group responsibility for their actions. This neighborly-territorial community “would cope quite well with everyday economic problems and

349 Along with the rise of the number of believers and the intensification of centrifugal tendencies that tore the Empire apart in the first centuries CE, the Church became the only organization that had its own centrally bound structures in all provinces. Competing rulers began to regard this as a means of integrating the crumbling state organism. The tolerance edict issued by Emperor Galerius in 311 CE, which abolished the persecution of Christians, argues openly that in exchange for the Emperor’s generosity, “Christians ought to plead with God that auspiciousness be granted to Us, *the state* and themselves, so that the state itself could flourish in all aspects as they lead their peaceful lives at the hearth and home” (Simon 1992, 214; emphasis added).

the protection of traditional order, bringing crime under control and settling disputes, but could not manage more serious military threats on its own. Waging war, negotiating peace and forming alliances belonged to the tasks of the higher-order political community, i.e. the tribe itself, usually comprised of a dozen or several dozen local communities” (Modzelewski 2004, 348).

However, this kind of a higher-order political community had a specific, virtual character. It would not constitute a permanent, independent structure functioning before or after the tribal assembly. Nor did it have at its disposal any executive, administrative or controlling apparatus necessary to enforce the decisions made at the assembly. Therefore, while local communities would be incapable of confronting outside threats without coordinating their actions at a higher political level, the tribe “would not function without neighborly relations because it lacked administrative instruments for protecting peace, mobilizing levy in mass, collecting means for paying political tributes, or organizing construction works to fortify towns and make clearings” (349).

Lack of independent, specialized structures of power and administration leads – as Jan Baszkiewicz argues (1999) – to the dispersion of control, power and violence among communities that keep each other in check. In combination with the principle of group responsibility, typical for barbaric Europe transferring power to lower-order groups was a perfect tool for maintaining relative inter-group balance. A mutual control system effectively blocked any designs on excessive territorial expansion onto shared wastelands, or attempts at increasing political influence.

The basic institution of the public sphere is the assembly, which can occur on three different levels of tribal organization: local, tribal, and supra-tribal. During assemblies of the higher order, the elderly presented the point of view negotiated earlier within a smaller circle. The assembly – “the basic institution of the community, regardless whether formed by neighbors coming together or representing a federation of tribes, always functioned on the same rules” (Modzelewski 2004, 357) – is the most primal form of the public sphere.³⁵⁰ On the one hand, disputes are settled during the assembly, which refreshes the “common knowledge” about common law; on the other, it serves as a place for

350 It is worth mentioning here that the specific infrastructure of this form of public space – the shape of the square, ritual attire, and ceremonial character – allowed it to perform the role of generating and sustaining common knowledge. When individuals are shaking spears to indicate acceptance for a particular decision, they can see others doing the same thing; further, they know that others see them, and so on.

taking decisions regarding matters pertaining to all neighboring communities (or tribal ones at assemblies of the higher order). Moreover, it always has a sacred dimension, which manifests itself in the choice of its site, its principles of peace and non-violence, and the crucial role played by priests, who were responsible for divinatory practices whose results would often affect the decision-making process. Religious ritual constitutes an integral part of the process in which agreement is reached and judgments passed; “the tribe was a community which conceived of its bonds in terms of the sacred” (Modzelewski 2004, 402).

The assembly was not a place where voting would occur: it was a place where *unanimity was expressed*. Although it seems easy to indicate pragmatic reasons for the emphasis on unanimity, e.g. the fact that – since the local community had to enforce on itself the fulfillment of obligations undertaken during the assembly and everyone had to accept it³⁵¹ – this principle also had a sacred dimension. It was not only the people who had to be unanimous but also gods – any disparity, even in the case of a prophecy, was a bad omen. The principle of unanimity also constitutes a logical complement to the principle of group responsibility.

These basic principles of socio-political organization were retained in the first period after the fall of the Roman Empire, which was accompanied by the destruction of all those structures that bound its population into superior wholes. As Karol Modzelewski has demonstrated in his compelling analysis of the political system of “barbaric Europe,” in the period between the fifth and the tenth centuries the dominant organizational form in Europe were still the territorial and neighborly communities. “They satisfied the basic demands of everyday life and work; simultaneously, by protecting order, administering justice, and performing defensive functions they created the basic conditions for the functioning of larger political communities: first tribes and later states” (2004, 343). These units, which still functioned in accordance with quasi-tribal, collectivist principles, were provided with the institutions of the new supra-local political power, which developed in constant battles, and of the Christian Church. This occurred not only in the newly Christianized areas but also in Merovingian and Carolingian Gaul, whose structures were developed throughout the six centuries of the Roman rule, and at whose local center of life we find the urban commune (*civitas*). “[Bishop] Gregory of Tours feels like a citizen of Tour, speaks about

351 Moreover, in the case of passing judgment on someone, objection could set in motion a spiral of violence: if someone did not accept the sentence, then he or she could consider the burning of the guilty party’s house as an unjustified act demanding revenge.

fellow citizens and contrasts them with the citizens of Berry, Mans, Anjou, Bloi, and so on” (Lelong 1967, 14).

The quasi-tribal character of “barbaric” Europe also manifests itself in the fact that the kin-based community was still the basic kind. Based on blood relationships, both in the male and female line (cognatic community), it would place each individual in a complex and slightly different web of dependencies. No individual would exist outside kinship community, just like they could not exist outside a territorial one. The sense of such punishments like political exile or excommunication would be closely related to this particular feature of early medieval society.

However, this world of neighborly and family communities soon began to transform, both under the influence of Christianity and due to processes modifying the very sphere of *praxis*. As Karol Modzelewski emphasizes, “the Christianization of the barbaric peoples was something much more than an intervention in the sphere of faith and cultic practice. [...] Baptism had the weight of a social revolution: it struck at the very basis of the traditional order in European tribes, shattering it and paving the way for a new order” (2004, 454). Just like in the case of the Roman Empire, Christianity “extracted” individuals step by step from traditional relationships, shaping a collective “We,” whose distinguishing feature is the community of faith – not the community of origin.³⁵² Paradoxically, however, shattering of traditional relationships helped other secular communities to emerge, which would fragment the original, essentially tribal “totality” into distinct worlds.

“The felling of Irmisul, and the dethroning of Svetovid or Perun was [...] a turning point because it caused the cultic unifying force to dissolve in the political organization of tribes. Deprived of their support in the pagan sacred dimension and the authority of prophecy, the lesser and greater tribal assemblies irreversibly lost their significance. At the same time, the king (or prince) gained prominence. Freed from any limitations imposed by the assembly and supported by the Church from the very start, the monarch would utilize traditional prerogatives of the grand relative, mighty warrior and great neighbor in order to transform himself from a tribal leader into a ruler governing a supra-tribal state. The place

352 This community of faith nevertheless draws heavily on metaphors of the community of origin (e.g. “God’s children”) and family symbolism. Figures of mother, father, son, and the patron saint use the firmly established sense of family community, at the same time reinforcing it. “The devout population came to resemble a vast household divided among numerous residences, each under a protection of a saint or the Virgin” (Duby 1988, 26).

of the traditional elderly council would be taken in this state by a group assembled around the ruler” (460). Both religion and the taking of decisions about common good were thus moved to a higher level that would be autonomous from society: on the one hand, to the state, and on the other – to the Church as an institution representing the universal community of the faithful. In both cases, new groups of “intermediaries” would emerge, mediating between the level of community and the level of state or religious institutions: lay and church notables as well as officials whose competences included none else than creating and managing the public sphere – parish, church, or a given area of jurisdiction.

However, the alliance formed between the emerging royal power and the Church, which was lifting itself from institutional chaos, did not last too long. Soon, both institutions began to compete for the kind of dominance that would allow subordinating the whole feudal society, which was a patchwork of various local communities of different tribal roots as well as of different languages and traditions, making communication between them very limited. In no way did it resemble the peoples of the “barbaric” period when various tribes would periodically unite in order to boost their chances for survival or expansion. The boundaries between the rising states remained fluid, while the populations of border villages would change hands. From the perspective of an individual, the local (neighborly-territorial) community was the only basic social category, aside from the family, in relation to which the concept of the common good could be meaningfully applied. One could even say that this community constituted a barrier protecting people from outside powers and “law,” which attempted to regulate the life of the community from a distance.

The claims of royal (princely) authorities as well as its mightiness are best illustrated by the symbolism developed in that period. Writing about the ceremonies that accompanied the arrival of a king at a city in the Middle Ages, Georges Duby points out that one particularly significant element was the handing over of keys to the city gates: “After all, the key strapped to a belt worn by a woman, or the lady of the house is the symbol of the other kind of power, the private and internal one, which is not less demanding than the public one, and likewise has little tolerance for resistance of individualism” (1998, 24). Such symbolism aptly underscores the struggle between private and public (royal) authorities, foregrounding their antagonistic relation. Royal and local authorities (whether familial or seigneurial) remain in conflict: the strengthening of the king’s position could occur only under the condition of undermining the position held by family heads in “private” communities. Under feudalism, there was no political level of inter-group integration – no self-organizing political public sphere that could create and sustain a sense of common good in the highly

differentiated motley of communities that constituted the state. At best, we can find legitimizing rituals and myths: the splendor of palaces and royal processions as well as ceremonious announcements of royal decisions performed – at least in cities – the function of generating shared sentiments and knowledge.

A similar role was played in the emerging Christian community by architecture and the design of churches as well as rituals and religious myths in general – something that Gurevich (1985) has called the mediaeval “popular culture.” The gravity, solemnity and rhythmical nature of collective prayer created a sense of a collective “We,” although not necessarily a sense of the common good.³⁵³ Besides customary rituals and folk traditions, religion played a significant role in constructing a sense of local identity. It could be considered as the basic public sphere under feudalism: not only due to the social dimension of denomination (the community of believers, spending time together in church, participating in the same rituals), but also because of the excellent organization and standardization of message. The rhetorical exposition of religion, cultic objects (rosaries, sculptures and paintings³⁵⁴) and oral traditions (songs, lives of saints) was relatively homogenous and uniform, which helped to generate common knowledge.

The fluid boundary between the private and the public became a problem for authorities, both secular and religious. On the one hand, private communities – noble families, local communities or heretical groups – appropriated public space, challenging authorities or seeking protection from them. As a result, entire villages were transformed into solidary neighborly assemblies closely tied with bonds of friendship. Abuses of power caused people to be wary of royal authority and curb it, apart from cases of particularly hideous crimes. On the other hand, power became privatized, dissolving in local communities. This affected not only the prince and royal officials but also the king himself; “his kingly powers came to be seen more and more as his private, personal, and hereditary property. This private appropriation of public power began at the top of the political hierarchy. As Fustel de Coulanges remarked long ago, *publicus* in ancient Rome meant that which belonged to the people; in Frankish Gaul, that which belonged to the king. The regalian power had become family property transmissible through copulation, through blood, to one’s offspring; at each inheritance it was either divided among the children ‘of the blood’ or held undivided by a group of brothers, like a house. Slowly the *palatium* or palace in which the sovereign rendered justice

353 Especially if we take into account the fact that Latin was the language of the liturgy.

354 One needs to emphasize here the highly conventional and symbolic character of sacred art in that period.

came to be seen as a dwelling place, affecting the meaning of certain words such as the Latin *curia*” (Duby 1988, 14). Just as “palace” became closed, becoming the king’s private house, so the “houses” of all those who would partake in the royal power, even to a slight degree, became open to the “public,” turning into palaces. Thus, the state began to resemble a private family organism, while family seats turned into “courts.” By the same token, the boundary between the private and the public became blurred, bringing disintegration into the state community.

Private life – not the individual kind but the one lived together with family or neighbors, based on mutual trust – thereby acquires a special meaning. “In the late Middle Ages, we find the individual enmeshed in feudal and communal solidarities, incorporated into a more or less functioning system. As part of a seigneurial community or a clan or bound by ties of vassalage, he (or she) and his family moved within the limits of a world that was neither public nor private as those terms are understood today or were understood at other times in the modern era” (Ariès 1989, 1). It is a world marked by strong divisions that nevertheless have a purely personal or affective character. As Johan Huizinga points out, the late Middle Ages was a period of struggles between various parties. These conflicts, however, did not have any political or economic basis except for envy of possessions, goods and familial fame. “Racial pride, thirst of vengeance, fidelity, are their primary and direct motives” (1987, 21).

One humble harbinger of processes that would completely transform Western world in the next several centuries was that new groups developed within the feudal society – ones united by a sense of the common good. We mean here, on the one hand, the gradual emergence of chivalry with its specific ethos (Elias 2000; Ossowska 1986), and on the other – the rise of guilds, which were established mainly by merchants. Although these “conspiracies” were fought by the Church, which saw them as a danger to public order, they mainly focused on mutual assistance in financial and defensive terms despite being sometimes capable of imposing their own economic laws (Rouche 1992, 431–432). In both cases, we deal with the constituting of a collective “We” not at the level of the entire local community, but within its specific segments – ones formerly comprising specific “task groups.” This process accelerated in the sixteenth century, which is generally considered to be the breakthrough point on the path towards modernity.

7.4 The public sphere in the modern society

Three parallel processes contributed to the transformation of the public sphere in the period between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries: the decay of

traditional local communities (family, neighborhood or guild) integrated around a particular task or a joint fate; the growth of the state, which became increasingly capable of performing its functions due to the efficient monopolization of means of violence and management techniques; and finally, the emergence of new kinds of “private” communities or *société*, which crystallized on the grounds of joint interests in circles gathering people of equal social status. All of these processes were combined, more or less directly, with the numerical and social growth of the “third estate.”

The decay of traditional local communities is elaborated on in detail in the previous chapter. In the present context, it would be only necessary to note that the economic processes which led to the rise of the modern bourgeoisie were accompanied by the undermining of the material position of court circles. The ever more glaringly anachronistic character of the courtly lifestyle – excessive spending, exaggeration of honor, long chains of revenge – created an opportunity or even necessity for state intervention. In France, Richelieu forbade dueling under penalty of death, introduced luxury tax, and developed official lists of noble families, which allowed verifying claims of belonging to the nobility. In cases of family disagreements, it was also commonplace for the royalty to support one family member in his or her fight with another.

The consolidation of state power was related, on the one hand, to the economic boom in the sixteenth century, from which the state greatly benefited, and on the other – to the support of the third estate, which provided royal authorities with financial means and assistance, helping them to gain independence from court circles. The flow of money strengthened control over the executive apparatus: whereas public functions previously had, in a sense, the character of private activities (i.e. one would wield power in the name of the king, but with one’s own means), the state extended complete control over the administration in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Processes of rationalization, described by Weber, were not only inspired but also largely realized and financed by the new social class.

Finally, the vital factor in the transformation of the public sphere was that representatives of the third estate would share not only their social standing but also broader interests. This is related not just to the group of entrepreneurs but also to the so-called middle class: “between the common people and the court was an intermediate zone, populated for the most part by people of culture, the minor nobility of office and the church, the middling sort of notables who in unprecedented fashion enjoyed staying at home and engaging in agreeable relations with a select ‘society’ (the very word that was used at the time) of friends” (Ariès 1989, 3–4). These circles formed, in the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth

century, a new kind of community: *groupes de convivialité*, within which a true culture of small associations was developed. In the eighteenth century, some of these groups transformed into statute-based institutions such as clubs or scientific societies, thus moving into the public sphere.

Jürgen Habermas strongly emphasized this process, making it a cornerstone of his communication-based model of the public sphere. Habermas draws special attention to the fact that socio-economic transformations were accompanied by the quick growth of institutions in the public sphere. Initially, club-like circles were places where literature would be discussed but with time they embraced political subjects.³⁵⁵ The rise of the novel created a community of readership, gathering people who would discuss currently published books. In Great Britain and France, cafés and salons began to be opened (the former on a mass scale at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth century), while in Germany – “table societies” and literary clubs. The characteristic feature of most of these institutions of the public sphere was that they allowed, on equal terms, people of different social status: ones with roots both in the middle class and in the aristocracy. Moreover, those who participated in discussions hosted by such clubs did not consider themselves a closed group but a part of the broader public.

One of the important subjects addressed during such meetings was the role of the state in its relations with the “civil society.” This last term would emerge³⁵⁶ in debates as a tool for articulating the growing differences between two modes of organizing social life: the social and the political order. More precisely, it ought to be said that it constituted an answer to the inclinations of absolutist

355 It is assumed that the revival of political criticism was facilitated by broad distribution of information in the press. Its birth was related to the development of capitalist economy in two ways. First, current information became valuable because it allowed choosing the most profitable market strategy. Second, by becoming a commodity, information came under the rule of supply and demand. The striving to maximize profits inclined the distributors of information to expand their clientele, contributing to the transformation of closed exchanges of letters into widely accessible papers of high circulation. With time, the press won some independence from the authorities and became not only a source of information but also a place where competing views would be presented, including the views of opposition (since the first half of the eighteenth century in Britain).

356 As we have already noted, the forming of the concept of civil society occurred, in England and France, parallel not only to the numerical growth of the third-estate “public,” but also to processes of, first, breaking the power of aristocratic families, and second, monopolizing of power by monarchs, the latter famously expressed in the words of Louis XIV: “I am the state.”

state to control the actions of its citizens. As the Anglo-Saxon liberals put it at the time, it was an attempt at limiting the functions of royal power to the role of a “night watchman,” while French republicans argued that monarchy ought to be abolished and replaced by a state that would express the “universal will.” In other words, the concept of the civil society was employed, first, to prove that the monarch – being the incarnation of state – is not the only collective agent of social life, and to demonstrate that decisions of an alternative agent, which manifest themselves in the actions of citizens, receive a stronger legitimization (due to their collective nature) than the individual decisions made by the head of the state. Second, it was meant to define the duties of citizens to the society and its agency: the new liberal or capitalist state.

Thus, at the foundation of the citizenship, as understood at the time, we find the project of state not as the domain of monarchs and appointed officials, but of society, which becomes the sovereign. In its name, violence was monopolized in the form of law, and new directions of social development were defined. Both of these tasks were supposed to be realized by democratically elected representatives. The new state was to constitute a plane of integration not only of local or family communities but also of action-focused communities. In other words, the state would be obliged to create a universal *social* association, meaning that it would need to take responsibility for forming a public sphere that includes the entire society.³⁵⁷

However, the realization of this project at the turn of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries was preceded by fundamental changes in the social order, whose extent and depth were not acknowledged by the period’s proponents of the civil society. In the process of shaping the modern society, individuals were uprooted from territorial and neighborly communities. Traditional ethos- and action-based associations would be dissolved too. Along with the consolidation of the power of the state, which embraced the duty of coordinating tasks previously realized by the above groups, their place was taken by legal and administrative categories that had the character of statistical aggregates rather than communities. With the passage of time, most of them selected their representatives in the form of professional associations, political parties and social organizations. However, they would represent interests or focus on tasks that remained

357 It is worth remembering that this new project of the public sphere was not – at least initially – a project of inter-group space, but of a space that would gather and integrate individuals; moreover, it would do so only with regard to those who fulfill specific criteria (qualification on the basis of wealth, education, sex etc.).

on the margin of the state's interest rather than create holistic moral universes that would subordinate the actions of individuals to a good of a given social category.

One could therefore contend that, along with the development of the modern society, the public sphere was becoming more and more accessible. However, instead of becoming a space where common knowledge, sentiments and intentions would be recognized, it became an arena for playing social conflicts off against each other. It lacks any overriding idea that would integrate the various social groups that were forced to become part of the ever-stronger state. Let us recall that the fragmentation of the traditional society into task-oriented subsystems – a process that unfolded parallel to the development of capitalist economy in the period between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries – was accompanied by the diminishing of its religious legitimization. The religious community established by Christianity began to crumble under the pressure of the Reformation, while the cultural community – under blows dealt to the religious vision of the world by the budding science.³⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the scope of achievements during the Enlightenment was too narrow to replace religion in its community-forming function. In other words, in the initial phase of the development of the modern society there was no clearly articulated idea that could lend internal meaning and coherence to the emerging new form of organization of social life and a sense of a collective “We” to the internally fragmented society. However, at the turn of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, *nation* became one such idea.

Just like in the case of the concept of society, it is widely debated whether nations exist objectively or are only subjective categories.³⁵⁹ Since the publishing of Benedict Anderson's seminal work (2006), sociology began to emphasize the “imagined” character of such communities, which does not change the fact that they are firmly rooted in linguistic and territorial collectivities consolidating already since the eleventh century (cf. Zientara 1985). It is in relation to this type of collectivities, originally called “peoples,” that Walter Żelazny (2004) uses the term “ethnic community,” indicating at the same time that the concept of nation is born when one ethnic group gains political dominance over other groups living on the territory of a given state. The “forging of nation” as a community,

358 Many authors emphasize that the printing press has had a tremendous significance for both processes. According to John B. Thompson (1995), this invention radically changed the social organization of symbolic authority, giving rise to processes of its fragmentation, which have reached their zenith in modern societies.

359 Cf. the survey of views on this issue in the book by Walter Żelazny (2004), especially Chapter Three.

and the role it played in the consolidation of nineteenth-century states, are perfectly captured by Anderson, which makes it unnecessary to address these issues at length here. We shall only emphasize that a significant role in this process was played not only by the invention of the printing press and the resulting homogenization of ethnic languages, which later supplanted Latin as the language uniting the religious community (a factor of crucial importance to Anderson), but also by the intensification of communication among people in the broadest sense of the term, including the development of postal services, roads, means of transport, etc. (cf. Thompson 1995).

The nineteenth-century state was, therefore, more national than civic in the traditional sense of the latter term. It created structures whose goal was to unify the nation. Among them a key role was played by schools, which were to promote a coherent model of civic attitudes by standardizing language, knowledge and manners, disciplining bodies, restraining dialects, and correcting accents. Between the consolidating structures of state and law on the one hand, and individuals and “private” communities (families, ethnic communities, professional associations etc.), on the other, a new kind of public sphere emerged. It would mediate between the level of the state and the level of various groups.

Moreover, it is important to point out that nation, despite its crucial position, was not the only subject of so-called secular religions, which began to emerge with time in the modern society. As Serge Moscovici writes, “the idea of them was one of the discoveries of the French Revolution, and Robespierre was the first to see them as a powerful way of regenerating a nation and an instrument enabling him to make a Republic replace the monarchy completely. Secular celebrations of Reason and the Supreme Being crowned the discovery” (1985, 354–55).³⁶⁰ Various ideologies developed in the nineteenth century (and in the

360 It is highly characteristic, however, that the leaders of the French Revolution referred to the concept of the citizen rather than nation, and that the search for an appropriate “secular religion” could sometimes assume caricatured forms. In a fascinating essay, Lynn Hunt indicates that the concept of the public has been rapidly expanded: “Dress, language, attitudes towards the poor, providing jobs in the city and on the land – all had become gauges of patriotism. What separated the private from the public man?” (1990, 14). Leaders of the Revolution were constantly worried about attire; endless projects of “uniforms” for citizens were developed, or at least ways of “marking” them as participants in the new space uniting all patriotically-minded Frenchmen. Since 2 July 1792, the Convention legally obliged all men to wear a tricolor bow; after 3 April 1793, the law was extended to include women. In May 1794, the Convention demanded from Deputy David, a painter, that he design a national outfit.

first half of the twentieth) elevated different kinds of collectivities to the rank of the “Supreme Being”: the working class, white people (whose cult we find in fascism), and the middle class as a group that combines all virtues necessary for the functioning of the civil society.

Just like regular religions, secular ones have three main goals. First, as Moscovici argues, “they create a total view of the world as a palliative to fragmentary and divided nature of all science and technology and indeed of knowledge in general”; in everyday life, he claims, people need “an overall view with a single cause (social class, race etc.), a universal principle (the class struggle, natural selection, etc.) and a definite picture of the human and non-human world. What secular religions essentially do is provide us with total view of that kind. They offer us a concept of the world in which every problem has its solution” (355). While maintaining an appearance of scientific approach – by retaining appropriate language and arguments – they recombine its elements, focusing primarily on social reality.

The second function of secular religions is to provide a moral code that allows to “harmonize relations between the individual and society and to reconcile the social and antisocial tendencies present in the former” (356). The only way to reach both of these goals is to socialize individuals in such a way as to make them identify with the collectivity. In this context, Moscovici recalls Freud, who argues that there are only two ways for a community to hold together: the use of violence or the creation of emotional bonds between individuals and community. We could just as well refer to the theory developed by Greenspan (presented in Chapter Two), which demonstrates the role of such bonds in socializing individuals.

Finally, the third function is to hide a mystery. “Each religion has its own. In its name it imposes rules and proclaims truths it does not explain” (357). Revealing it by some community member would spark violent emotional outbursts among others, making them panic disproportionately to the revelation. As Moscovici emphasizes, “most artificial crowds (armies, churches, parties) are in touch with a mystery of that kind. They have a whole range of ceremonies, emblems and passwords (one need only think of the freemasons) that protect it and attack any attempt to reveal it” (357). Such mysteries are meant to consolidate hierarchies and rituals developed around them, and to create degrees of initiation, whose gradual achievement determines the position of the individual in the community.

The process of replacing traditional, sacred visions of the world with images created by “secular religions” or ideologies was accompanied by a significant change. One of the crucial differences between the two kinds of the sacred is

the shift of accent from rituals meant to control nature, and order actions taken with regard to it, to rituals whose goal would be to primarily gain control over the social world and the relations between ever more numerous communities, usually of conflicting interests. This fundamentally changed the very concept of the common good whose establishing is served by these rituals. Whereas during tribal rituals the entire community could unanimously pray for rain and bountiful crops, in modern societies rain would become an “ambivalent” phenomenon, depending on what consequences it might have for farmers, stock market players betting on bad crops, or city-dwellers dreaming of sunny weather.

Among those secular religions, the one organized around the nation performed a special function: it was meant to subordinate the goals of individual communities – ones based on ethnicity, class or religion – to the superior goal of the national community, whatever it would be. In a diversified modern society, the interest of the nation is supposed to be exactly that which creates the common good. “Dying for one’s country,” Anderson notes, “which usually one does not choose, assumes a moral grandeur which dying for the Labor Party, the American Medical Association, or perhaps even Amnesty International cannot rival, for these are all bodies one can join or leave at easy will” (2006, 144). Even when the goal is not to die but to live for one’s country, invoking the national interest is an argument that cannot be possibly challenged by the interest of any, even most distinguished group.

7.5 Contemporary transformations of the public sphere

In the historical dimension, the creation of the modern public sphere is connected with processes that are well-documented by social sciences: the monopolization of violence, breaking of local communities’ power, the rationalization of management, the development of administration capable of registering and controlling the growing population, the standardization of language and knowledge and the increase in efficiency of communication. At the foundation of these processes, we find not only technological progress but also the development of sciences, including social sciences that objectivize the mechanisms of collective life and provide the “society,” or rather its individual members, with feedback about their behavior, attitudes and views.

This kind of community – organized around the concept of nation, certainly not without difficulty – began to crumble in the second half of the twentieth century. According to more and more scholars, one of the most characteristic features of our times is none else but the crisis of the nation state, the most general kind of community developed so far, one determining both collective and

individual identity. This process is supposed to be the consequence of synergy between many processes transforming contemporary life, which are usually gathered under the umbrella term “globalization.” As this word suggests, the main feature of these changes is the emergence of a new type of territorial unit, one that establishes the basic framework for economic, political, social and cultural processes on the scale of the globe, not on that of the state (Castells 2001a).

One effect of the breakdown of the significance of the national state as the basis for coordinating individual and collective actions is also the collapse of the capability to integrate and mobilize society through the existing public infrastructure: parliamentary elections, organizations of the “civil society,” or organizations representing the interests of various groups (trade unions etc.). The impression is that – just like in feudalism – the public sphere is privatized, displaying unclear and fluid boundaries between the private-turning-public (e.g. in the form of popular reality shows) and the public-turning-private (as in the case of ties between politics and business). This resembles the twilight of the Middle Ages, as described by its historians. One could also say that the trends culminating in the emergence of the kind of public sphere that was characteristic for societies of the modern type, reached their apogee and then froze in a form that increasingly often diverges from ongoing processes of social life.

The first of these trends was the *universalization of the public sphere*, which extended its reach to encompass more and more diversified groups. At the same time, it has had to become increasingly abstract, losing one important feature – the real experience of coexisting with others. The tribal assembly could physically gather all the elderly; today’s voting, in turn, takes place in isolation. Although each voter knows that many more people are doing the same thing on that day, and that they act in accordance with the same practical knowledge he or she has (i.e. about polling stations, candidates, ways of voting etc.), there is no physical possibility of feeling a part of the voting community, all the more so since all participants are also conscious of their vastly differing political inclinations and the conflicts this entails.³⁶¹

The universalization of the public sphere was achieved thanks to the development of communication technologies. On the one hand, without mass media there could be no democracy for all; on the other, however, the dependence on

361 It is worth pointing out that this trend is not limited to the sphere of politics. Its counterpart in the area of economy is the global market along with the abstract medium of money, while in the area of collective representations – the global village, along with its universal visual code (film), as first described by McLuhan.

media has vital consequences for processes of creating and sustaining common knowledge. The image of society in the broadest sense – as a “meta-group” to which we belong – cannot be possibly developed on the basis of direct experience. There are no real spaces where sentiments, intentions and knowledge would be made common. Although we know that many others are doing the exact same thing at a given moment – such as taking out money, buying food, voting, watching news on television – we do not have direct contact with them. We have no access to their reactions and we cannot observe their behavior. We can only learn through media about the collective effect of those actions in aggregated form as voting results, dwindling of bank reserves, or the rise of food prices. The only space in which individuals learn about each other, their views and behaviors, is the space of mass media. They produce the image of an abstract “society” to which we belong. Ultimately, the task of creating and promulgating of this image has been taken by the media industry, with all the consequences this entails.

The more abstract and separated from real experience the “meta-group” becomes, the more it is exposed to the risk of fabrication. As a result, “[t]he autonomous citizen, whose reasoned judgement and participation was the *sine qua non* of the public sphere has been transformed into the ‘citizen consumer’ of packaged images and messages, or the ‘electronic mail target’ of large lobbying groups and organizations” (Benhabib 1992, 44). In other words, instead of contributing their “private” social or cultural resources to the public sphere, its participants are to an increasing extent constructed, mobilized and managed by major commercial or political players.

The second trend, closely connected to the first one, is the progressing *abolishing* of “particularities” – the more individuals (social groups) the public sphere includes, the more abstract and general their shared identity has to become, the more standardized (shareable) the language of communication and common knowledge have to be, and the subtler (more civilized) their behavior has to be. One could therefore say that it is not only the community but also the individual that becomes more and more abstract. The more individualized we are, the more difficult it is to “reveal” oneself and come to existence in public space as a specific, particular person known by name and surname. The logical complement to universalization is the blurring of the boundary between private life-worlds: an autonomous subject equipped with individual rights cannot be a member of a community as long as it means being-shared-with-others and thus, being dependent on others.³⁶²

362 As Tönnies intuited, it is the reflexive identity that is artificial, general and non-unique. Here we encounter a harbinger of the postmodern paradox: one’s authenticity cannot be constituted reflexively (cf. Chapter Four).

The third trend, which results from the elimination of embeddedness in a “private” community, is the *generalization of the concept of the common good*. In modern societies, the integration of the population around the concept of nation represented by state subordinated any particular common good to the abstract “reason of state,” detached from particular conditions of individual and collective life. Along with the crisis of the nation state, we observe the dissolving of that which could mobilize individuals to take coordinated action. If it is not a common good for a particular community, only the abstract good of humanity remains.

All of these processes have contributed to the emergence of contemporary society, one no longer comprised of communities but of individuals – a society in which the state is “omnipotent,” while local public spaces have lost their intrinsic meaning and sense. The politicization of social life has caused the private sphere to shrink down to the intimate sphere, while public space has become a “no-man’s land.” One could stroll in a park without feeling any sense of unity with passers-by, while some people would be even afraid of others, or at least annoyed by their dogs or children. Negotiations between collective actors no longer express differences of opinions held by members of society. Parties and organizations, which were supposed to represent the interests of citizens, are actually beyond their control, and are playing their own game with the public administration. Results of elections are no longer a derivative of how society’s opinions are distributed, but they largely constitute an effect of rhetorical efforts made by politicians. What is more, the latter do not even attempt to convince citizens to embrace their views or understand them better – they merely try to mobilize short-term support during elections.

This fragmentary description, which gathers the most frequently voiced opinions, meant to support the thesis about the crisis of the public sphere (regardless of whether we accept this thesis or not), suggests one thing, namely that the political order that used to determine the shape of public life is currently drifting apart from the social order. More and more frequently, the latter assumes the form of a dis-order, thereby becoming a symptom of deep transformations occurring under the surface of the public sphere.