

## Nationalism and the Public Sphere

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POLITICAL DISCUSSION COMMONLY starts with the state. It is, indeed, the creation of states as quasi-autonomous organizations (or actors) that produces the differentiation of politics from other aspects of social life and of discourse.<sup>1</sup> As a result, it is not surprising that we are led to assume state-centered views of the constitution of political communities. Modern political communities are given their boundaries in the first instance by common subjection to a state. The outcomes of past struggles—conquests, inheritances, civil wars, revolutions, anti-imperial revolts—are ratified through administrative centralization and integration. States define political communities not only domestically but in relation to other states—for example, by issuing passports and visas, by sponsoring shared educational institutions that maintain linguistic homogeneity internally and heterogeneity externally, and by encouraging domestic and restricting foreign markets. Not all states are equally effective, but the effectiveness of some reinforces the assumption that states are the necessary objects of political communities, even where they are not their source.

There is, however, a paradox in the use of states to define political communities. States may distinguish political communities from each other in various ways, and states and their personnel may also occupy a great deal of the public

Earlier versions of parts of this essay have benefitted from discussion at the V Conversaciones Internacionales de Historia, University of Navarre; the Washington University Conference on Strategies of Explanation in Social Science; the Robert F. Harney Program in Ethnic, Immigration, and Pluralism Studies at the University of Toronto; and meetings of the Center for Transcultural Studies in Chicago. The Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences provided support for its completion. The author is also grateful for comments from Jean Cohen, Lloyd Kramer, Krishan Kumar, and Jeff Weintraub.

1. Different definitions of politics would make this statement problematic. If one followed Hannah Arendt, for example, in extolling politics as a vital part of the *vita activa*, and denigrating administrative authority as the mere management of the necessities of life, one would avoid linking politics too strongly to states, and one would see politics sharply differentiated from the social. By the same token, the social would then appear as a very inferior and unfree dimension of life—and this raises all the questions about the politicization of the social that have been at stake in the social movements of the modern era. See *The Human Condition*.

sphere within each. Yet in modern usage, states are not in themselves political communities.

A state is not merely a country, but also a specialized apparatus of rule. A state is thus distinct from the people subject to its rule. The Roman state was not equivalent to the Roman people even in the Republican era, and still less was the state of imperial Rome equivalent to the peoples of the Roman Empire. In empires and in many other historical forms of rule, the relationship between state and people has commonly been distant and/or arbitrary. Hereditary elites were sharply distinguished from those they ruled. "Peoples" came under one or another state as a result of the conquest of the territories on which they lived, but neither their character nor that of the state that claimed them was necessarily altered by this. Some ethnic or other relatively broad groupings might have special claims on office or special capacities to influence rulers, as for example Romans did retain a special political access even as imperial Rome became more far-flung and multicultural. The Mughal state in India thus favored Muslims and Urdu speakers and its British successor favored Englishmen and English speakers, but in neither case was being a member of the favored group a guarantee of jobs or power. These groupings were not coterminous with the state apparatus but had to relate to it through discourse or action; the state was not constituted by its relationship to any such broad category of people. In these and most other cases, the relevant political community was not "the people," nor even any very large segment of the people, but rather the networks of elites given voice and influence by heredity or administrative position.

This narrower political community gave social identity to the state. Even where the state was tyrannical, some such political community existed and carried on some level of discourse, offering advice to the ruler and working out how to interpret his directives. Such political communities were always at least somewhat differentiated: courtiers and noblemen spoke with different backgrounds, interests, perceptions, and strategies. But by itself, the existence of this sort of political community did not necessarily constitute a *public* distinct from the state. Take the scholar-administrators of imperial China. They acted neither to influence a state from which they were distinct (as did Roman citizens) nor in place of a differentiated state apparatus (as in certain periods the citizens of Athens governed directly). Rather, this sort of political community was contained within the state.

In none of the cases just mentioned was the relevant political community "the people" as a whole, not even the people of the most favored ethnic classification. It was always a narrower elite. But we can still distinguish between

those settings in which the political community was basically contained within the state and those in which it included a public conceptually and practically outside the state apparatus (even if many of the members of this public were insiders to the state). The extent and kind of distinction between the political community and the state is thus a crucial variable.

Also important is the relationship between the political community and the broader population. Modern states distinguished themselves from empires and other earlier forms of state largely by claiming and building a more intimate relationship to the populations they ruled. This was partly a matter of changing patterns of taxation, military mobilization, trade and production, and communications and transportation infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> The state penetrated more deeply into the daily lives of ordinary people, and did so more evenly throughout its territory. At the same time, three different sorts of ideological shifts made the relationship of people to state seem more intimate.

The first, and most recognized in political theory, was the extremely widespread influence of republican thought.<sup>3</sup> In this tradition, modern Europe saw itself as the heir of ancient Rome. Republicanism turned crucially on the notion of the public, and granted public discourse a powerful role, though it often retained a limited notion of the range of people constituting the political community that might carry on this public discourse.

Second, the Protestant Reformation encouraged a rethinking of the polity that emphasized the people—conceived first and foremost as God's chosen people or the people who shared religious revelation or understanding—rather than the public. Here the proper ancestor of modern Europe was not so much

2. Tracing these transformations in the nature and underpinnings of states has been one of the central tasks of historical political sociology, in different generations preoccupied, among many others, Max Weber, *Economy and Society* [1922]; Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (1953); and Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (2 vols., 1986 and 1993). Of course, the extent to which the categories of "the people" or "the public" become locally meaningful depends on other factors: internal connections among people, occasions for collective action, ideologies that root citizenship in popular consent or in the capacity of rulers to serve the interests of the people, and so forth.

3. For a compelling account of the role of republican ideas in a crucial early moment of modern political transformation, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*. Even modern monarchical states have been shaped by republican ideas. Of course, republicanism is not altogether new, as the example of Rome reminds us; Rome reminds us as well that transitions from republic to empire are also possible, and these have indeed occurred in the modern era, as, for example, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics without announcement constituted itself in significant ways as an empire, both internally (with relation to the non-Russian republics) and externally (with relation to Warsaw Pact dependencies).

ancient Rome as the theocratic communities of the patristic era.<sup>4</sup> It is thus no accident that the Puritan influence on the English Civil War should offer us some of the first really modern invocations of the people as the source of legitimacy for the state.

Third, ethnic, cultural, and localist solidarities began to be invoked as the basis of political communities. Versions of this tendency appeared alongside republicanism, as in the Florentine patriotism of Machiavelli, and alongside religious invocations of the chosen people, as in Cromwell's English nationalism. But it also marked a distinct mode of claiming loyalty or legitimacy, as was evident in the successes both English and French kings found in invoking the alien other to help in the increasingly broad military mobilizations of the absolutist era.<sup>5</sup>

In short, three different modes of claiming a broader political community, one outside the state apparatus, became influential. I am designating these by the names *public*, *people*, and *nation* (though it should be noted that in everyday political rhetoric each of these terms has been used to refer to each of the three concepts I am trying to distinguish).

These new notions of political community reflected an expansion in the scope of political participation and in the role of the state in various forms of social mobilization and regulation. They also figured centrally in a changed understanding of legitimacy. During most of previous European history, the notion that legitimate right to rule ascended from the people to the rulers had been subordinate to an understanding of power as descending from God and other authorities through the various ranks of the nobility to lower levels. Claims based on the "ascending theory" were generally directed against efforts to translate papal authority into state-building or against the efforts of monarchs to institutionalize central states.<sup>6</sup> In the early modern era, a conceptual revolution helped to reconcile ascending theories of legitimacy, rooted in recognition of the political rights of the public, the people, or the nation, with centralized state-building.

This transformed understanding of the nature of political community and legitimacy was linked to the growth of new ideas about nonpolitical social

4. And in this sense, we see more of the modern notion of the "people" in relation to the state in the early histories of both Judaism and Islam than in either the Greece or Rome of classical antiquity, however beloved these were by early modern political theorists.

5. Shakespeare's paradigmatically English King Henry IV devotes a good deal of effort to constituting the unity of his quarreling Scottish, Welsh, and regionally diverse English followers by reference to the undeniable foreignness of the French.

6. See Otto von Guericke's *Natural Law and the Theory of Society* and Walter Ullmann's *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*.



organization. These were articulated prominently in the early discourse of civil society. This term, adapted in part from an image of free medieval cities, referred both to the capacity of a political community to organize itself independent of the specific direction of state power and to the socially organized pursuit of private ends.<sup>7</sup> Self-organization might be accomplished through discourse and decision making in the public sphere, or through the systemic organization of private interests in the economy. The thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment emphasized the latter in their account of early capitalist markets as arenas in which the pursuit of private ends by individual actors produced in aggregate an effective social organization not dependent on the intervention of the state. The market was thus a model for claims to the capacity for self-organization, as well as the realm of specific interests to be protected from improper manipulation. But the claims of civil society could also be linked—especially after Locke—to rejections of the absolute authority of monarchs and assertions of the rights of popular sovereignty. These arguments placed a new emphasis on the social integration of society as such rather than merely on the aggregation of subjects. In such a view, the state no longer defined the political community directly, for its own legitimacy depended on the acquiescence or support of an already existing political community.

These changes powerfully shaped both political discourse and the most material sorts of politics for succeeding centuries, including our own. They were also crucial in the production of a discourse of “society,” for they made politics increasingly a sociological problem rather than just a matter of statecraft, princely wisdom, or sheer power understood solely in terms of relations among members of the state apparatus or its competitors. The political community had escaped the bounds of the state apparatus, and a new tension between the broad idea of the nation and generally narrower ideas of who constituted the proper custodians of the public good came to constitute more and more of political struggle.

In the present essay, I want to explore the close but complex relationship between the ideas of public, people, and nation. Each influenced the other from the time they took on their characteristic modern inflections. My major emphasis, however, will not be on the history of these ideas as such, but on the ways in which recognizing their interlinkage helps to shed light on the

7. Hegel looms too large in the most prominent recent general account of the political theory of civil society, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato's *Civil Society and Political Theory*. This obscures the importance both of Scottish/English and French analyses and of the extent to which the discourse from the beginning emphasized capacity for nonstate social organization. This discourse was, of course, a crucial forerunner to the constitution of sociology.

modern discourse of nationalism. Nationalism has appeared recurrently as one of the greatest challenges to the ideal of rational collective decision making through peaceful discourse that has joined the term "public" to the projects of republicanism and democracy. Yet in many ways nationalist ideas are presumed by the more "successful" democracies, and nation-building has been closely related historically to the very rise of public life that has helped make modern democracy possible.

Even in academic analysis, too easy acceptance of the view that nationalism is a problematic but fading inheritance from primordial history has obscured recognition of its centrality to our modern ideas of publics and more generally of politically salient identities. Most basic is the notion that there is some one people that constitutes the proper referent of public discourse and the ground of democratic claims to self-governance. On such a view, American public discourse is—or ought to be—about the public goods appropriate to the American people. This implies, among other things, that this people is sufficiently unified that it can be adequately represented by a single, authoritative public discourse. Such views work to privilege certain definitions of the public at the expense of others. Not only are certain speakers given wider attention, recognition, or influence; certain topics are defined as properly public and others as merely private. At stake throughout this discussion is the issue of difference—that is, of the extent to which discourse involving the notion of public or the identity of nation recognizes or represses the plurality of identities that shape the lives of individuals, communities, and societies. Nationalism thus becomes the most frequently troubling instance of identity politics writ large, but it is not the only one.<sup>8</sup> Similar issues are involved in many invocations of "legitimate" publics and nonnationalist representations of peoples.

### PROBLEMATIZING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

THE VERY DISTINCTION of public from private took on new meaning in the early modern era with the notion that outside the immediate apparatus of state rule there existed both a realm of public discourse and action that might address or act on the state, and the private affairs of citizens that were legitimately protected from undue state regulation or intervention. Persons existed in dual aspects, just as the private affairs of officeholders came increasingly to be distinguished from their public roles.<sup>9</sup> The notion of a public realm is accordingly almost always ambivalent, referring to the collective concerns of the political community and to the activities of the state that is central to

8. See Craig Calhoun's edited volume, *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*.

9. Like the separation of family finances from business finances, this is of course part of the Weberian story of modernization as rationalization.

defining that political community. This two-edged notion of the public inscribes its parallel notion of the private. The private is simultaneously that which is not subject to the purview of the state and that which concerns personal ends distinct from the public good, the *res publica* or matters of legitimate public concern.

The idea of "public" is central to theories of democracy. It appears both as the crucial subject of democracy—the people organized as a discursive and decision-making public—and as object—the public good. This complex of issues has recently become an object of intense critical theoretical attention, especially in the English-speaking world, partly because the English translation of Jürgen Habermas's major book on the subject coincided with the fall of Communism and attendant concern for transitions to democracy.<sup>10</sup> As Habermas develops the theoretical problematic of the public sphere, for example, the basic question is how social self-organization can be accomplished through widespread and more or less egalitarian participation in rational-critical discourse.

Yet, as analyses of the exclusion of women from public life have shown most sharply, conceptualizations of "the public" have also worked in antidemocratic ways. The issue of "democratic inclusiveness" is not just a quantitative matter of the scale of a public sphere or the proportion of the members of a political community who may speak within it. While it is clearly a matter of stratification and boundaries (for example, openness to the propertyless, the uneducated, women, or immigrants), it is also a matter of how the public sphere incorporates and recognizes the diversity of identities which people bring to it from their manifold involvements in civil society.

All attempts to render a single public discourse authoritative privilege certain topics, certain forms of speech, and certain speakers. This does not mean that the flowering of innumerable potential publics is in and of itself a solution to this basic problem of democracy. On the contrary, democracy requires discourse across lines of basic difference. But this discourse can be conceptualized—and nurtured—as a matter of multiple intersections among heterogeneous publics, not only as the privileging of a single overarching public. Nationalist thought, however, commonly rejects such notions of multiple and multifarious publics as divisive. The presumption that the nation is a unitary being is a staple of nationalist thought. And as such it seeps into deliberations on democracy and public affairs that are not explicitly nationalist. Yet where nationalism or any other cultural formation represses difference, it intrinsically

10. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989; originally published in 1962); see also Craig Calhoun's edited collection, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

undermines the capacity of a public sphere to carry forward a rational-critical democratic discourse.

The problem arises largely from an inadequate appreciation of the extent to which difference—what Hannah Arendt called “plurality”—is basic not only to human life in general but specifically to the project of public life and therefore to democracy.<sup>11</sup> Plurality is not a condition of private life or a product of quotidian personal tastes, in Arendt’s view, but rather a potential that flows in creative public achievements. Arendt accepted the classical Greek restriction on public participation precisely because she thought few people could rise above the inherent conformity imposed by a life of material production to achieve real distinction in the realm of praxis. But we need not agree with this exclusionary premise in order to grasp that the reason for a public discourse lies partly in the potential that various members will bring different ideas into shared intellectual consideration.

Part of Arendt’s point in linking the distinction of public from private to that of praxis from mere work or labor is to present the public sphere as something more than an arena for the advancement or negotiation of competing material interests. This image is carried forward in Habermas’s account, with its emphasis on the possibility of disinterested rational-critical public discourse and his suggestion that the public sphere degenerates as it is penetrated by organized interest groups. But Habermas’s analysis subverts some of his own purposes. To presume that there will be only different policies for achieving objectively ascertainable ends—let alone ends reducible to a common calculus in terms of a lowest common denominator of interest—is to reduce the public sphere to a forum of Benthamite policy experts rather than a vehicle of democratic self-government. This is clearly not something Habermas intends to praise. Yet it is not as sharply distant from his account of the public sphere as it might at first seem. One reason is that Habermas does not place the same stress as Arendt on creativity. He treats public activity overwhelmingly in terms of rational-critical discourse rather than identity-formation or expression, which somewhat narrows the meaning and significance of plurality and introduces the possibility of claims to expertise more appropriate to technical rationality than communicative action.<sup>12</sup> Part of the

11. Arendt’s exploration of the idea of a public sphere both influenced Habermas and stands as an important (and importantly different) contribution to this line of theory in its own right. See the comparison in Seyla Benhabib, “Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas,” in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*.

12. The last phrase of course borrows terms from Habermas’s later work that are not used in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

background to this problem lies in the very manner in which "public" is separated from "private" in the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century liberal public sphere which is the basis for Habermas's ideal-typical construction.

The liberal model of the public sphere pursues discursive equality by disqualifying discourse about the differences among actors. These differences are treated as matters of private, but not public, interest. On Habermas's account, the best version of the public sphere was based on "a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether."<sup>13</sup> It worked by a "mutual willingness to accept the given roles and simultaneously to suspend their reality."<sup>14</sup> This "bracketing" of difference as merely private and irrelevant to the public sphere is undertaken, Habermas argues, in order to defend the genuinely rational-critical notion that arguments must be decided on their merits rather than on the identities of the arguers. This was as important a reason as fear of censors for the prominence of anonymous and pseudonymous authorship in the eighteenth-century public sphere. Yet it also has the effect of excluding some of the most important concerns of many members of any polity—both those whose existing identities are suppressed or devalued and those whose exploration of possible identities is truncated. In addition, this bracketing of differences also undermines the self-reflexive capacity of public discourse. If it is impossible to communicate seriously about basic differences among members of a public sphere, then it will be impossible also to address the difficulties of communication across such lines of basic difference.

The public sphere, Habermas tells us, is created in and out of civil society. Thus, the public sphere is not absorbed into the state, but addresses the state and the sorts of public issues on which state policy might bear. It is based (a) on a notion of public good as distinct from private interest, (b) on social institutions (like private property) that empower individuals to participate independently in the public sphere because their livelihoods and access to it are not dependent on political power or patronage, and (c) on forms of private life (notably families) that prepare individuals to act as autonomous, rational-critical subjects in the public sphere. A central paradox and weakness (not just in Habermas's theory but in the liberal conception which it analyzes and partially incorporates) arises from the implication that the public sphere depends on an organization of private life that enables and encourages citizens to rise above private identities and concerns. It works on the hope of transcending

13. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 36.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

difference rather than the provision of occasions for recognition, expression, and interrelationship.

The resolution to this issue depends on two main factors. First, the idea of a single, uniquely authoritative public sphere needs to be questioned, and the manner of relations among multiple, intersecting, and heterogeneous publics needs to be considered. Second, identity-formation needs to be approached as part of the process of public life, not something that can be fully settled prior to it in a private sphere.

Recognizing a multiplicity of publics, none of which can claim a completely superordinate status to the others, is thus a first step.<sup>15</sup> Crucially, however, it depends on breaking with core assumptions that join liberal political thought to nationalism. It is one of the illusions of liberal discourse to believe that in a democratic society there is or can be a single, uniquely authoritative discourse about public affairs. This amounts to an attempt to settle in advance a question which is inextricably part of the democratic process itself. It reflects a nationalist presumption that membership in a common society is prior to democratic deliberations as well as an implicit belief that politics revolves around a single and unitary state. It is normal, however, not aberrant, for people to speak in a number of different public arenas and for these to address multiple centers of power (whether institutionally differentiated within a single state, combining multiple states or political agencies, or recognizing that putatively nonpolitical agencies like business corporations are loci of power and addressed by public discourse). How many and how separate these public spheres are must be empirical variables. But each is apt to make some themes easier to address and simultaneously to repress others, and each will empower different voices to different degrees. That women or ethnic minorities carry on their own public discourses, thus, reflects not only the exclusion of certain people from the "dominant" public sphere, but a positive act of women and ethnic minorities. This means that simply pursuing their equitable inclusion in the dominant public sphere cannot be either an adequate recognition of their partially separate discourses or a resolution to the underlying problem. It is important to organize public discourse so that it allows for discursive connections among multiple arenas.

Recognizing the existence of multiple public spheres is thus not an alternative to asking many of the questions Habermas asks about *the* public sphere, that is, about public discourse at the largest of social scales and its capacity

15. See Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," and Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," both in Calhoun's *Habermas and the Public Sphere*.

to influence politics. It simply suggests that these questions need to be answered in a world of multiple and different publics. It is a political exercise of power to authorize only one of these as properly "public," or some as more legitimately public than others which are held to be "private." In other words, determining whose speech is more properly public is itself a site of political contestation. Different public discourses commonly invoke different distinctions of what is properly "private" and therefore not appropriately addressed in the public discourse or used to settle public debates. There is no objective criterion that distinguishes private from public across the range of discourses. We cannot say, for example, that either bank accounts or sexual orientations are essentially private matters. Varying public/private distinctions are potential (and revisable) accomplishments of each sphere of discourse.

A great deal of the discourse which takes place in public, and which is accessible to the broadest public, is not about ostensibly public matters. I do not mean simply that people take very public occasions like television appearances to talk about what is customarily considered private, like their sex lives. I mean that many topics of widespread concern to the body politic—like childbearing and child-rearing, marriage and divorce, violence of various sorts—are brought into discussions that are public in their constitution but that do not represent themselves as public in the same way the newspaper editorial pages do, and are not taken equally seriously by most participants in the more authorized public sphere. These matters are discussed in churches and self-help groups, among filmgoers and on talk-radio, among parents waiting for their children after school dances and those waiting for visiting hours to commence at prisons. How much the discourse of these various groupings is organized on the rational-critical lines valorized by Habermas's classical Enlightenment public sphere is variable—as is the case, of course, for any other public discussion. But it would be a mistake to presume a priori that one can be rational-critical only about affairs of state or economy, and that these necessarily comprise the proper domain of the public sphere. Conversely, relegation to the realm of the private can be in varying degrees both a protection from public intervention or observation and a disempowering exclusion from public discourse.

Of course, the differences among public spheres are important. Neither Habermas's emphasis on state-oriented discourse nor his emphasis on discourse that attempts to work on a rational-critical basis is arbitrary. Including people different from each other while making arguments rather than the identities of arguers the basis of persuasion is crucial to the meaningful constitution of a public sphere (as distinct from, say, a community). Simply to treat all kinds of more or less public discourses as public spheres in Habermas's sense



would be to miss the center of his theoretical project. Unfortunately, Habermas invites some of this problem by employing a problematic distinction of public from private. This appears especially in his relegation of identity-formation (and therefore interest-formation) to the realm of the private.

Habermas presumes that identities will be formed in private (and/or in other public contexts) prior to entry into the political public sphere. This sphere of rational-critical discourse can work only if people are adequately prepared for it through other aspects of their personal and cultural experience. Habermas briefly discusses how the rise of a literary public sphere rooted in the rise of novel-reading and theater-going publics contributed to the development of the political public sphere, but he does not follow through on this insight. He drops discussion of the literary public sphere with its nineteenth-century incarnation, that is, as soon as it has played its role in preparing the path for the rise of the Enlightenment political public sphere. He does not consider subsequent changes in literary discourse and how they may be related to changes in the identities people bring into the political public sphere.

More generally, Habermas does not adequately thematize the role of identity-forming, culture-forming public activity. He works mainly with a contrast between a realm of private life (with the intimate sphere as its inner sanctum) and the public sphere, and assumes that identity is produced out of the combination of private life and the economic positions occupied in civil society.<sup>16</sup> Once we abandon the notion that identity is formed once and for all in advance of participation in the public sphere, however, we can recognize that in varying degree all public discourses are occasions for identity-formation. This is central to the insight of Negt and Kluge in their appropriation of the phenomenological notion of "horizons of experience" as a way of broadening Habermas's approach to the public sphere.<sup>17</sup> Experience is not something exclusively prior to and only addressed by the rational-critical discourse of the public sphere; it is in part constituted through public discourse, and at the same time continually orients people differently in public life.<sup>18</sup>

16. This of course anticipates Habermas's later distinction of lifeworld from system, which has been faulted for its failure to recognize the way in which families and other lifeworld institutions are organized through asymmetrical power relations including gender inequalities. See Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*; and Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices*, and "Rethinking the Public Sphere."

17. See Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *The Public Sphere and Experience*.

18. This formulation should be read as equally distant from Habermas and from the approach to experience common to many "new social movements," in which experience is made the pure ground of knowledge, the basis of an essentialized standpoint of critical awareness. See the sympathetic critique in Alan Scott, *Ideology and the New Social Movements*.

We can distinguish public spheres in which identity-formation figures more prominently, and those in which rational-critical discourse is more prominent, but we should not assume the existence of any political public sphere where identity-formation (and re-formation) is not significant.<sup>19</sup> Identity-formation and topical debate are hard to keep entirely separate.

Excluding the identity-forming project from the public sphere makes no more sense than excluding those of "problematically different" identities. Few today would argue (at least in the broadly liberal public spheres of the West) against including women, racial and ethnic minorities, and virtually all other groups clearly subject to the same state and part of the same civil society. Yet many do argue against citizenship for those who refuse various projects of assimilation. It is not just Germans with their ethnic ideas about national citizenship who have a problem with immigrants. The language of the liberal public sphere is used to demand that only English be spoken in Florida, for example, or that Arabs and Africans conform to certain ideas of Frenchness if they wish to stay in France. And for that matter, many other arguments—for example, that only heterosexuals should serve in the military—have much the same form and status. They demand conformity as a condition of full citizenship. Yet movement of people about the globe continues, making it harder to suppress difference even while provoking the urge. In a basic and intrinsic sense, if the public sphere has the capacity to alter civil society and to shape the state, then its own democratic practice must confront the questions of membership and the identity of the political community it represents.

Once we acknowledge that the definition of a political community is not immutably given by nationality or any other putatively natural or historically ancient factor, then we may approach it as a matter of civil society—that is, of the actual construction of social relationships (the alternative is to see it as a matter of pure will). It is not enough that we criticize "bad nationalism." Participation in a democratic public sphere obligates us to develop a good account of the identity of our political communities that faces up to necessary problems of inclusion and exclusion. This is not just a matter of letting "them" mingle with "us." A public sphere, where it exists and works successfully as a democratic institution, represents the potential for the people organized in civil society to alter their own conditions of existence by means of rational-critical discourse.<sup>20</sup> As a result, participation always holds the possibility not

19. Habermas's sharp exclusion of identity-formation from the public sphere is one reason why he is left with no analytic tools save an account of "degeneration" and "refeudalization" when he turns his attention to the mass-mediated public sphere of the postwar era.

20. In an era when political economy is in relative eclipse and discourse analysis and cultural studies are ascendant, it is worth reminding ourselves that the public sphere repre-

just of settling arguments, or planning action, but of altering identities. The "identity politics" common to "new social movements" is thus a normal and perhaps even intrinsic part of a successful, democratic public sphere. Even the very identity of the political community is at least partially a product, not simply a precondition, of the activity of the public sphere of civil society.

### SOVEREIGNTY AND POLITICAL COMMUNITY

THROUGHOUT MUCH OF European history, discussions of legitimate rule focused on arguments about divine or natural right, on questions of succession, and on debates about the limits which should be imposed on monarchs. When this was the case, the question of national identity either did not arise or was marginal. Reference might be made to a monarch's rule over a "people" or various "peoples," but only rarely before the modern era was any attempt made to treat sovereignty as "rising" from the people.<sup>21</sup> Calling such peoples "nations" initially carried no particular political significance. But when questions of sovereignty began to turn on appeals to the rights, acceptance, or will of "the people," this changed. Though the term "nation" (rather than "people") was not necessarily invoked, the modern notion of a popular will always assumed the existence of some recognizably bounded and internally integrated population. This led political theory to depend on social theory: it was necessary to conceive of the society which a monarch ruled, not just the territory or feudatories. Arguments turning on some notion of people or popular will were not introduced simply in response to the preexisting "nationhood" of various peoples—that is, as a result of their high extent of common ethnicity—but rather were linked to increasing state administrative capacity in the "absolutist" era, decline in the acceptance of spatially dispersed (as opposed to compact and contiguous) territories, and the growth of market relations.<sup>22</sup> They were also the products of political struggle and political thought.

sents only potential, because its agreements must be brought to fruition, or at least brought into struggle, in a world of practical affairs where power still matters.

21. It was perhaps in medieval Germany that the disputes between "ascending" and "descending" theories of sovereignty were strongest (Gierke, *Natural Law*; Ullmann, *Principles of Government and Politics*). Descending theories were epitomized by divine right legitimations of sovereignty. Ascending theories, on the other hand, foreshadowed the birth of the more modern idea of nation or people with their notion that sovereignty was a grant of the people to the ruler. Claiming that this notion was crucial to ancient Germany, and invoking Althusius, Gierke used it as a rationale for arguments against absolutist rule and the domination of state over society. In general, the emerging ideas of nation and public drew heavily on both Roman Republican ideas and the discourse of natural law.

22. Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*; Anthony Giddens, *The Nation State and Violence*; volume 2 of Michael Mann's *The Sources of Social Power*; Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.

The new sorts of claims on behalf of peoples figured prominently in and around the English Civil War, a conflict distinctively productive of theory. Even Hobbes offered a sharply novel version of the argument that absolute monarchy was justified by the fact that it served the interests of the people rather than solely by inheritance or divine authorization.<sup>23</sup> *Leviathan* was a book about the commonwealth, by which Hobbes meant the *res publica* of Roman law. There was no public to enjoy public goods, Hobbes argued, without the pacifying rule of a monarch. This transformed the several and separate individuals who were originally doomed to incessant war among competing private interests into a socially organized body, a people. So while monarchy served the interests of the people, they had no status as a society without the monarch and hence no group claims against the monarch. Similarly, in the language of this essay, Hobbes had little interest in the discourse among the people that might qualify them as a public.

But this does not mean that Hobbes had no conception of the unity of the people, their existence as *a* people. Hobbes is commonly misrepresented as a completely asociological thinker appealing only to the interests of discrete individuals. But he did have a notion of the body politic that both anticipated functionalism and reflected the organization of the cosmos as a system of resemblances in the manner that Foucault has described as typical of the period.<sup>24</sup> This is embodied not just in the text of *Leviathan* but in its remarkable frontispiece in which the Great Body of the State is depicted, down to the chain mail armor of hundreds of tiny people. Hobbes thus recognized social differentiation; he simply saw it as deriving its overall meaning and potential for peaceful continuity from the state. Similarly, Hobbes clearly recognized the existence of families, and of local relationships like the hierarchies linking small farmers to gentry, squires to knights. Social life at this level did not depend on the monarch in the same way as the social organization of large-scale collectivities: counties, regions, nations. Influenced like many others of the early modern era by the traditions of Roman law, he distinguished those sorts of relationships that might be established by private contract or connection from those entirely conditional on the institution of a public realm. The monarch or state might provide enforcement for the directly interpersonal relationships of the private realm, but it crucially brought into being the indirect relationships of the public realm; these existed only through its mediation. They were public, thus, not because of discourse among the different members of the political community, but because the state itself made them so.

23. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651].

24. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*.

Hobbes's argument transformed from within a tradition of seeing political community defined entirely by subjection to a common ruler. Instead of locating that subjection in a hierarchy of intermediate authorities (as, for example, the inhabitants of a given region might fall into a different political community with the conquest or shifting allegiance of a superordinate nobleman), Hobbes treated each individual as directly a member of the state.<sup>25</sup> The political community thus became the whole people, though this people was deprived of the political capacities offered to the publics of most republican theory.

Hobbes's arguments were challenged almost immediately by others who, despite their predominant liberalism, appear in retrospect to anticipate nineteenth-century ethnic nationalism. They attempted to show the priority of political community to particular power structures. The theoretical device of social contract thinking, for example, was expanded with the idea of a "dual contract" in which a first contract bound prepolitical agents into a political community and a second bound that community (more contingently) to a ruler or a set of laws. The main initial development was to locate more and more of the political initiative and basis for evaluation in the socially organized people. In the long run, such arguments were often integrated with claims to ancient, even primordial peoplehood as parts of nationalist political programs of various stripes. But "the people" at this juncture meant mainly the politically active elites. After the Glorious Revolution, for example, Locke published a political theory (written earlier) that appealed not only to the interests of the people as a collection of discrete individuals with different roles to play in the body politic (Hobbes's image), but to the citizenry as a body laterally connected through communication, a public.<sup>26</sup> This prefigured aspects of democratic theory, but was also well suited to the context in which Locke published it: a monarchical restoration (which the English perversely call their Revolution) which in fact accorded a leading role to a revitalized, open, and internally communicative aristocracy. It was arguably among this aristocracy that English nationalism had its origins, encouraging a conception of a political community strongly distinct from and able to challenge the monarch.<sup>27</sup>

25. Paradoxically, Hobbes's account also anticipated the tradition of civic nationalism associated most commonly with the French Revolution. Though Hobbes's theory supported monarchy rather than revolution, it suggested that any individual conforming to the institutions of political rule could be a member of the body politic. It was assimilationist rather than ethnicist.

26. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* [1689].

27. Hans Kohn's *The Age of Nationalism* remains perhaps the best treatment of this dimension of the origins of English nationalism. See also Liah Greenfeld's *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, though note that she gives remarkably little attention to the extent to which the aristocratic proponents of nation against king were opponents of the more demo-

With the rise of claims to popular sovereignty and republican rule, the notions of "nation" and "people" were increasingly intertwined. In the first place, claims to nationhood offered a cultural basis for the demarcation of potentially sovereign political communities. The importance of this underpinning was pervasive in democratic theory, though not always explicit. Locke, for example, took the existence of discrete "peoples" more or less as a given. His treatments of conquest focused on the legitimacy of the subjection of conquered peoples, not the possibility of their absorption into an enlarged nation. In general, democratic theory was written as though its province was simply to formulate procedures and arrangements for the governance of such communities, not to address their constitution as particular peoples. Discussions of constitution in democratic theory still tend either to imagine a world without established communities or to imagine that the boundaries of a political community are not problematic.

In the real world, however, peoples were and are always constituted as such in relation to other peoples and out of the refractory stuff of preexisting communities and claims to loyalty and peoplehood. Democratic theory can ignore this only because it tacitly assumes what certain nationalist ideologues (like Fichte) explicitly asserted: that everyone is a member of a nation and that such nations are *the* relevant political communities. In practice, however, there is often no obvious or uncontested answer as to what the relevant political community is. Nationalism, then, is not the solution to the puzzle but the discourse within which struggles to settle the question are most commonly waged (too often with bullets and bombs as well as words). As such a discourse, it marks nearly every political public sphere in the contemporary world as an inescapable, if often unconscious, rhetoric of identity-formation, delimitation, and self-constitution. Nations are discursively constituted subjects, even if the rhetoric of their constitution is one that claims primordality or creation in the distant, seemingly prediscursive, past.

It is only as nationalist discourse becomes institutionalized in a public sphere that "nation" or "people" are constituted as such. Thus nationalist rhetoric shapes the internal discourse of nearly every state, not just those marked by empire, alien rule, or ethnic conflict; it operates to constitute the nation (the public, the people) as a putative actor—the claimant to ultimate sovereignty—in relation to the state. "Nationalism," Gellner has thus averred, "is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent."<sup>28</sup> But as Durkheim noted long before, it

cratic assertions of the rights of Englishmen by Levelers, Diggers, and others. The notion of "nation" was not only elitist but repressive at its origins.

28. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 1.

is usually the apparent disjunction of people and state which brings the category of nation and the phenomenon of nationalism into play.<sup>29</sup> Grounding political legitimacy in notions of "the people" allows nationalists to assert a disjuncture between even a domestic government and its society if that government fails to serve the putative needs or interests of the nation. This rhetorical severing of state (or government) from society, in fact, joins the transitions of 1989 to the great modern revolutions more than any similarities in the social processes of transformation themselves.<sup>30</sup> But this rhetoric is paradoxically linked both to the sphere of public discourse within which intellectuals help to produce the national identity and engage in arguments about the public good, and to the nationalism that not only defines the society that is distinct from the state but often represses rational-critical public argument in favor of conformity to the national mission, destiny, or identity.

The issue arose sharply in the French Revolution of 1789. The development of an active public sphere, a strong exemplar of both rational-critical discourse and creative thought about matters of the public good, was a crucial precursor to revolution; and it flowered enormously in the early phases of the revolution itself, as public debate spread from salons and the National Assembly to innumerable neighborhood clubs and public gatherings.<sup>31</sup> Flourishing in print as well as oral debate, this public sphere presented "the people" as a capable political force to be counterposed to the king and to *ancien régime* elites more generally. But the very invocation of the people also threatened the institutions of the public sphere. It fueled both the illusory ideal of direct democracy and the rise of Jacobinism. The ideas of nation and sovereign people fused, encouraging the notion that the people ought to speak with a singular voice. Similarly, the people as assembled in public gatherings displaced both broader ideas of representation and occasions for reflective discussion.

Article 3 of the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* declared: "The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation. No body, no individual can exercise any authority that does not expressly stem from

29. Emile Durkheim, *Textes*, vol. 3, edited by V. Karady (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1950), pp. 179–80.

30. Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*.

31. Interesting uses of Habermas's public sphere concept to inform analyses of the French Revolution can be found in Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*, and "Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France: Reflections on a Theme by Habermas," in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*; and Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*.



the nation.”<sup>32</sup> Though the crucial term changed, the discourse of nationalism continued to dominate the construction of the comparable article in the Constitution of 1793: “Sovereignty resides in the people. It is one and indivisible, imprescriptible and inalienable.”<sup>33</sup> Such ideas linked the revolution directly to the tradition of Rousseau and the idea of general will.<sup>34</sup> Rousseau (like Ferguson in another tradition) also developed ideas of the social cohesion of the members of a nation far beyond Locke. His *Considerations on the Government of Poland* emphasized patriotic education capable not only of binding citizens to each other and imbuing each with love of *la patrie*, but also of making each a distinctively national person, giving each mind a “national form.”<sup>35</sup> Montesquieu’s appeal to the “spirit” of laws had presaged a modern discourse of national cultures and characters.<sup>36</sup> In the French Revolution, especially as it was interpreted on the European continent and celebrated in successive French political struggles, the nation had actively constituted itself as a sovereign being. One catch was that appeals to this sovereign being could often be deployed as “trump cards” against other loyalties and against critiques rooted in various internal differences among the members of the nation. Only the properly national interests could be legitimate or authoritative in the public realm; more specific identities—for example, those of women, or workers, or members of minority religions—could at best be accepted as matters of private preference with no public standing. Too often the pressure for national unity became a pressure for conformity even in private life.<sup>37</sup>

The rhetoric of nationalism is sometimes described as inherently “collectivistic” rather than “individualistic,” but this is a misleading opposition. The idea of the nation depends very much on individualism. It establishes the nation both as a category of similar individuals and as a sort of “superindividual.” As a rhetoric of categorical identity, nationalism is precisely not focused on the various particularistic relationships among members of the nation. But here a crucial differentiation among nationalisms arises. To what extent do nationalist rhetorics depend on the recognition of differences among members

32. See Jacques Godechot’s *La pensée révolutionnaire en France et en Europe, 1780–1799*, p. 116.

33. Godechot, *Pensée révolutionnaire*, p. 214.

34. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “The Social Contract” [1762].

35. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne* [1782].

36. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws* [1748].

37. See, for example, the insightful discussions of the ways in which nationalist ideologues have tried to impose certain standards of proper sexual behavior in the edited volume by Andrew Parker and others, *Nationalisms and Sexualities*; and George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*.

of the nation (both as individuals and as members of smaller collectivities) and thereby gain constitution through the discourse of this differentiated public? Or, conversely, to what extent do nationalist rhetorics posit the nation as a unitary people in which the identity of each is merged into that of the whole?

### THE UNITY OF NATIONS

NATIONALIST RHETORIC has generally stressed the essential similarity of the nation's individual members.<sup>38</sup> It is rare to find comparable emphasis on the constitution of the nation through the discourse of a public of highly differentiated members.<sup>39</sup> This is a crucial implication of the rhetorical appeal to presumed ancient ethnicity or peoplehood that was invoked in struggles over political sovereignty.

But of course this is not "mere rhetoric"; it reflects significant social changes in the modern era. The rise of the state and the capitalist transformation of trade and production relations had brought increasing integration to large collectivities of people. The raising of citizen armies had not only reinforced national identity against the nation's enemies, but brought together soldiers from different regions and occupations. Roads and later railroads provided an infrastructure that both joined the various parts of the nation and linked regions more strongly within state borders than across them. Proliferation of print (and later broadcast) media, schools, and administrative offices all encouraged linguistic standardization and both directly and through common language helped to produce national patterns of culture and behavior. This notion is rooted in positive historical developments; it is not ideologically arbitrary. Tocqueville, for example, wrote of how the eighteenth-century expansion of state administration had paved the way for the French Revolution by rendering France "the country in which men were most like each other."

Behind such diversities as still existed the unity of the nation was making itself felt, sponsored by that new conception: "the same laws for all." . . . Not only did the provinces come to resemble each other more and more, but within each province members of the various

38. See Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and Ethnicity," pp. 211-39, for further discussion of this issue of individualism and the categorical identity of nations. Of course, nationalist rhetoric has often employed organic metaphors like "body," but even when doing so it tends to emphasize both the direct bond between individual and nation and similarities among individuals.

39. Liberal variants were distinct from more extreme, repressive ones largely by the greater scope they granted to a private realm in which individuals might pursue different sorts of lives, and the lesser justification they saw for the nation to transgress this boundary between public and private.

classes (anyhow those above the lowest stratum) became ever more alike, differences of rank notwithstanding.<sup>40</sup>

As Watkins has shown, this extended even to childbearing. Fertility rates, which once varied from locality to locality, became strikingly uniform within nineteenth- and twentieth-century European nation-states.<sup>41</sup>

All these changes helped to create a new discourse of "public affairs," the affairs that represented the interests of the integrated nation. It was in this discourse, not in any material reality of exchange networks, that national economies, for example, were constituted. The description of the economy as a self-regulating system of exchanges, that is, did not in itself constitute the unity of domestic versus foreign trade. Such inner/outer distinctions were produced in a public discourse organized at the level of states, and then reproduced in state administrative policies and accounting procedures. In maintaining boundaries in this way, states were innovating, not simply protecting the interests of long-established national communities. So long as discourse (and identity) remained overwhelmingly local, most people invested relatively little concern in large-scale boundaries. Concepts like "the wealth of nations" or "trade surplus or deficit" could only be developed in a supralocal public sphere. It was precisely on the basis of the perspective afforded by the constitution of the British and French publics, and in works addressed to those publics, that Adam Smith and the physiocrats could constitute their competing accounts of how "national economies" work and relate. In these discourses, the national and the international were always intertwined. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries indeed saw an increasing organization of exchange relations and capital accumulation at the national level. But as mercantilist arguments suggest, this came at the expense of some international organizations and processes as well as at the expense of local autonomy. The innovation was driven largely by the emergence of spheres of public discourse which addressed the relationship between aggregated private interests and state institutions.

In France, a growing national integration was spearheaded by a central state of long standing. In Germany, the central state was added fairly late, on top, as it were, of a variety of regions more or less widely understood as "German" in their language and culture. But despite their differences, both French and German stories thematize nationalism as an aspect of amalgamation of disparate regions into a superordinate state. In the territories of the declining

40. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* [1856] (New York: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 103-4.

41. See Susan Cott Watkins, *From Provinces into Nations*.

Austro-Hungarian Empire, by contrast, nationalist discourse was generally invoked by separatists against the more central power. This is in part because the Hapsburgs self-consciously maintained an empire of the old style; they did not attempt to integrate their dominions into a modern nation-state. That is, they did not attempt to treat their subjects as more or less interchangeable members of the polity, to impose linguistic uniformity, to build an infrastructure rendering communication and commerce easy throughout the realm, to replace narratives of conquest with those of primordial ethnic commonality, or to base claims to legitimacy on the interests or will of "the people."

Imperial rule—in the Austro-Hungarian case or most other historical examples—is precisely *not* the attempt to forge a unity between nation and state. Empires are organized through the coexistence—albeit often hierarchically structured—of a number of distinct "peoples" or "communities." These need not enter into any public discourse with each other, nor indeed into many collective activities. Their economic relations are typically matters of market exchange, not cooperation in production, and while imperial armies may mobilize members of different ethnic groups, they are generally organized more on the model of mercenaries than citizen-soldiers.

Parts of empires can be transformed into nations by the creation of quasi-autonomous public spheres. This is as characteristic of metropolises as peripheral regions. As the Ottoman Empire declined, for example, it was just as novel a project to engender a national consciousness and project of state formation in Turkey as in Egypt, and early projects for pan-Islamic nationalism grew in the same soil. Among the most problematic settings are the frontiers between former or declining empires. The disastrous contemporary situation in the Balkans, for example, is not simply the result of ancient ethnic hatreds, nor entirely produced by the forced integration of Yugoslavia under Communism, nor conjured out of nothing by the ideological and military manipulators who have turned the discourse of nationalism into the project of ethnic cleansing. It is rooted in the long history of the region as a frontier in which neither of the relatively stable imperial regimes—Ottoman or Hapsburg—achieved clear hegemony. Local ethnic groups were not only divided by religion and military enlistment, they were in some cases resettled precisely to serve as buffers and prevent both sociopolitical and military consolidation. As empires receded from this frontier, they left behind not spatially compact and socially integrated nations but fragmented and interspersed ethnic communities. Pockets of Serbs, for example, were located in the middle of Croatian farm districts because their reputation as fighters made the Hapsburgs think they would

stiffen defense against the Turks. Even tiny cities like Mostar were miniature metropolises, housing a range of religions and ethnicities.

Once they were no longer ruled from distant imperial centers, however, the members of these different ethnic groups were called upon to form their own public discourses to organize collective affairs. In such cases, elites who were previously subordinates in larger imperial hierarchies helped to promote national culture (including language and literature as well as nationalist ideology) partly as a project that would put them on top of the new or newly independent nation. Either the new public spheres would incorporate diverse cultures into regionally compact polities—as attempted most recently by Bosnia-Herzegovina—or the public spheres would be defined on ethnic lines and offer implicit bases for projects of ethnic nationalist reorganization of territory and population—as in the Serbian counterpart. But note that in either case the institutionalization of a public sphere was at the heart of the project of defining the nation, whether in terms of the civic institutions of a territorial polity or in terms of ethnic unity.

In many other cases, imperial rule involved the appropriation or development of subordinate state institutions that encouraged nationalism by making the contrast between alien, imperial rulers, and indigenes powerful. Such contexts frequently nurtured ideologies that represented the colonized as unitary peoples joined by common membership in a single national category (not least because colonizers so frequently justified their rule by claiming that the locals were internally disunited and needed outside help to keep the peace). This representation of “natives” as a single category combined with the stunting of careers in the imperial bureaucracies to make ideas of legitimation by consent or participation of the governed attractive to colonized elites, thus further reinforcing links between the project of instituting a single public sphere and gaining national autonomy.<sup>42</sup> Rendered subalterns in such a situation, nonimperial elites might find attractions in the political strategy of forging closer links with peasants and others whom they could claim to represent as a nation against the imperial power. Not only were Western-educated elites frustrated by limited possibilities for upward mobility. Displaced by new regimes, even traditional overlords who might otherwise have supported other, more elitist, doctrines of legitimacy often adopted and/or reinvented the notion that legitimacy should depend on the will of those governed. This happened in both

42. See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Studies in Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories*; and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

India and China, for example, and in varying degrees in much of Latin America and Africa.

The “modernizing” elites who were active in the development of both early public spheres and anticolonial nationalist movements pursued similar projects in a variety of settings—increased literacy and freedom of publication, for example. In a wide range of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century contexts, for instance, they pursued nationalism and internationalism simultaneously in a way reminiscent of Europe’s “Springtime of Nations” and as part of a project of replicating Europe’s Enlightenment. This was true of such otherwise diverse movements as Spain’s “generation of 1898”; Turkey’s “Young Turks” and secular nationalists under Atatürk; and China’s student and intellectual protesters of May 4, 1919, and the “New Thought” movement. These examples suggest (a) how nationalism thrived as a modern discourse, not simply an ethnic inheritance; (b) how nationalism and the creation of cultural publics and political public spheres went hand in hand; and (c) how much global discourses and material factors affect these processes, helping to produce such similar movements nearly simultaneously in widely dispersed and culturally diverse settings. In anticolonial movements it is also especially easy to see the deep mutual interdependence of culture-forming, identity-forming, and political discourse.

Part of the story of the end of empire was the division of the world into formally equivalent national states, each of which was or should be sovereign. This discursive principle became normative well before the Hapsburgs and Romanovs were finally forced to abandon their very different sorts of states, and paved the way for the still problematic efforts to align states and nations within their former domains. But gradually, at least, older political organizations like empires, quasi-autonomous principalities, and free cities did give way to a more standardized system. This pattern was effected by international public discourse, not just by military power or diplomatic negotiation. By the second half of the twentieth century, it was clearly anomalous for any state to remain under the explicit political tutelage of another, and where such relations existed they were commonly subjected to campaigns to undo them.

But of course the equivalence of the national states recognized in this international public sphere is a formal property of the discourse not matched by material equivalence of power, internal organization, or loyalty of citizens. The discourse of nationalism demands that San Marino, two dozen square miles with 24,000 citizens, be seen as formally equivalent to China or the United States. It is, for example, a full member of the United Nations. The equivalence of states is emphasized especially in arenas like the United Nations, not only because the discourse of nationalism predominates, but because atten-

tion is paid to the whole system of states at once. Even in interstate relations where disparities of power and scale matter substantially, however, the rhetoric of equivalence is commonly observed.

This establishes, among other things, a new version of the old public/private division.<sup>43</sup> The international affairs of the presumptively equivalent states are public and addressable in the international public sphere while their internal, domestic affairs are treated as private. Attempts to challenge the formal equivalence of states by suggesting that international recognition should be linked to democratic institutions or by condemning domestic human rights abuses are as problematic within this division of public and private as attempts to intervene in families on behalf of the rights of children or spouses have been. Appearing as actions of the powerful against the weak, they have often backfired and rallied popular nationalist sentiments to the cause of elitist governments.<sup>44</sup> That the discourse of nationalism is available in an international public sphere for adoption in disparate settings is made clear by the history of anticolonial nationalisms.

In colonial (and postcolonial) settings, as in the West, the crucial question remains to what extent the constitution of a citizenry and the idea of nation reflect the notion of a differentiated public or that of a unitary people. What occasioned the issue was engagement with each other in common projects—those of self-rule or of resistance to colonialism. Colonial rule, like that of empires generally, allowed groups of people quite different and detached from each other to coexist and interact partly because it called on them to undertake no common projects not initiated by the state.<sup>45</sup> The creation of a political community called for new kinds of interrelationships, and something more than a “live and let live” cosmopolitanism. Faced with the challenge of building either anticolonial movements or postcolonial governments, diverse populations could follow, sometimes in combination, various paths: to separate

43. For many nationalists, moreover, it would appear that in a serious sense the sorts of politics that are domestically illegitimate because they prize interpersonal differences over national unity are legitimate in the international public sphere, since the differences among nations are as essential as the similarities of persons within nations.

44. For further discussion of the implications of the international discourse of nationalism—in effect an international public sphere constituting nations as members—see Craig Calhoun, “Nationalism and Civil Society,” pp. 387–411.

45. This is a crucial contrast between the empire and the nation-state, or, as Jeff Weintraub has noted, between the cosmopolitan city and the polis. In the cosmopolis or empire, since “heterogeneous multitudes were not called upon to be citizens, they could remain in apolitical coexistence, and each could do as he wished without the occasion to deliberate with his neighbors” (“The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction,” on p. 26 in this volume).



along the lines of their differences, to repress their differences, or to constitute their unity through discourse across the lines of their differences. One of the crucial questions of the modern era is how often and under what circumstances the third option—meaningful, politically efficacious public discourse without fragmentation or repression of difference—can be achieved.

### CONCLUSION

THE HISTORY OF NATIONALISM, in short, is not a story of the inheritance and expression of primordial ethnic identities. Nor is it a narrative in which purely arbitrary boundaries are imposed by sheer force of will on indifferent populations. It is, rather, an aspect of the creation of socially integrated political communities in which a large-scale, identity-forming collective discourse was possible.

This was partly a matter of ideological transformation, as the meaning of categories like “the people” changed with transformed understandings of the sources of political legitimacy. It was partly a transformation of material infrastructure, as new transport and communications technologies enabled people in disparate parts of polities to come into closer touch with their compatriots. It was obviously a matter of economic integration, and perhaps above all it was a matter of growing state administrative capacity. But it is crucial not to see the rise of large-scale collective identities like “nation” as simply a reflection of the growth of specific states or of state power generally.

The discourse of nations and nationalism was from its beginning linked to the creation of political publics. Such political publics took on their important modern character when they ceased to be contained within the realm of state administration, yet retained the capacity to influence the state. These publics were multifarious, not singular and integral at the level of states; to modify Habermas’s term, thus, we should understand the public sphere to be a sphere of publics. The identities of members were and are formed and revised partly through their participation in the public sphere, not settled in advance. It is this, above all, that has complicated the relationship of nationalism to democracy. For nationalist ideas fixed the most basic of collective political identities in advance of public life, and could and often have become sharply repressive of claims to various competing identities. Yet in so doing, nationalism was at least partly complicitous with democracy, not in simple opposition to it. For nationalism allowed the domestic public life of democracies to proceed with a tacit assumption of the boundaries of the political community, and democratic theory and discourse had—and has—little coherent answer to why such boundaries should exist.

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