2 Our Bourgeois Public Sphere

> We use the word bourgeoisie as an invitation to the reader to reflect critically upon the social origins of the ruling concept of the public sphere. Only in this way can the fetishistic character of the latter be grasped, and a materialistic concept be developed.
>
> (Negt and Kluge 1993 [1972], xliv)

In an effort to understand the origins, limitations and possibilities of contemporary public services it is essential to begin with an exploration of how these services fit within the "bourgeois public sphere" that first emerged alongside market economies in Europe from the 18th century. It is not the only public sphere in world history, and is far from uniform in its distribution, but it is the public sphere that most of us inhabit today and arguably the first to give birth to a universal notion of publicness that offers theoretical equity to all. Public services cannot be adequately understood outside this discursive and material reality.

This bourgeois public sphere is full of promise and contradictions, simultaneously offering access to a network of collective resources and an opportunity to shape the public good, while at the same time restricting who is admitted, who makes decisions and who benefits from common assets. It is a creation of, and essential to the interests of private capital, and suffers from the same larger structural contradictions of crisis, instability and inequity inherent to all capitalist systems (Fraser, 2015; Harvey, 1982, 2014; Schumpeter, 1928; Smith, 2010; Streeck, 2016).

The analysis in this chapter draws heavily on a highly influential book by political theorist Jürgen Habermas, entitled "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society" (first published in German in 1962 but only translated to English in 1989). My focus is on his early materialist understandings of the link between an emergent capitalist class and its inherent need to construct – and then distort and limit – a universal concept of publicness. As a tool for "theorizing the limits of democracy in late capitalist societies", Habermas' assessment of the bourgeois public sphere is "an indispensable resource" (Fraser, 1992, p. 109) and

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a "foundational" must-read for anyone interested in the meanings of public within capitalism (Hill & Montag, 2000a; Salvatore, 2007). Despite all that has been revised and corrected in Habermas' work his insights into the "paradoxical relationship between the public and the private have endured and remain essential to recent critical social theory and its understandings of the formations of public or counterpublics" (Mullaney & Vanhaelen, 2013, p. 1). And while it may seem improbable to draw a link between early notions of publicness in the salons of 18th century Paris and water provision in Nigeria today this is exactly the type of conceptual connection that this theoretical framework permits, and which allows us to understand both the origins and limitations of our contemporary public sphere.

But my reading of Habermas, like that of many others, counters his optimism about reviving a bourgeois "golden age" of publicness (Habermas, 1991, p. 32). His work has been attacked for "exaggerating the emancipatory potential of the idealized bourgeois public sphere" (Calhoun, 1992, p. 5), with Hardt and Negri (2009, p. 18) being dismissive of his "social democratic projects", arguing that his early work opened up the possibility of radical social transformation but that "notions of communicative reason and action have come to define a process that constantly mediates all social reality, thus accepting and even reinforcing the given terms of the existing social order". Hill and Montag (2000a, pp. 7–8, 3) refer to the "anaesthetizing effects of Habermas' work", arguing that he "seems to have provided 'modernity' with its theoretically sophisticated defense", including a "systematic denial and rationalization of the violence and barbarism of legal and constitutional orders" in the name of "rational discourse".

This is not to deny the relevance of rational discourse, but rather to ask whose rationality is dominant when it comes to notions of public. As Fraser (1992, p. 115) notes in her critique of Habermas' notion of an "ideal" public, it "fails to examine other, non-liberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres. Or rather, it is precisely because he fails to examine these other public spheres that he ends up idealizing the liberal public sphere" (Fraser, 1992, p. 115). Habermas' framework tends to exclude other world views, including "class, gender, or caste expressions [which] do not conform to his legitimized ways of contributing", ignoring in particular "the role of orality and visuality" in what constitutes public discourse (Reinelt, 2011, p. 18).

I agree with these criticisms and will take them up in greater detail when discussing alternative public sphere(s) in the second half of the book. But I do want to retain the historical materialism central to Habermas' original argument, wherein he exposes the emergence, transformation and contradictions of a bourgeois concept of publicness (and public services) in liberal, market-based economies around the world. This creation and conversion of a public sphere was not homogenous, linear or predictable across the emerging capitalisms of Europe – let alone the wider contemporary

world – but there is a pattern to the shift that reveals underlying material and ideological traits of a bourgeois public sphere and the conditions that have led to its ongoing tensions and contradictions, without which we cannot fully appreciate the constraints and limitations of liberal publicness in general.

This is not an inescapable storyline, however. There is substantial space for manoeuvre within our commoditized world, and there are expansive possibilities for new forms of publicness. Indeed, the contradictions of the liberal public order are such that it necessarily generates spaces of opportunity for marginalized people and organizations to resist and change it. How (and if) different actors respond to these hegemonic trends is central to my inquiries in Part 2 of the book, and in particular the extent to which it is possible to escape a liberal paradigm of publicness that traps us in a debilitating conflation of public and private interests. If we are to break from the dead weight of the present, we must know our past.

I begin this chapter with a review of pre-capitalist conceptions of performative publics (with a focus on early forms of "public services"), followed by an assessment of the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere, the contradictions that arose within it, the dissolution of a public-private divide and finally the development of a refuedalized public realm. My focus here is on early formulations of capitalist systems in Europe, but the aim is to highlight the underlying structural necessities of private accumulation inherent to all forms of capitalist reproduction and the ways in which these dynamics shape the formation of liberal notions of public. The resulting publics are invariably different in their cultural, political and social formulation, but the underlying dynamics and resulting constraints are largely consistent across time and place.

Pre-Capitalist Performative Publics

One of the primary reasons that early forms of public services were built and provided in relatively public ways was to create spectacle. As one contemporary observer of ancient Rome noted of the city's massive aqueducts at the time: "The whole terrestrial globe offers nothing more marvellous" (as quoted in Smith, 2007, p. 72). These aqueducts served important roles in the (re)productive activities of the city and were broadly (though far from universally) made available to the population. They formed a central part of the rhetoric of power in ancient Mediterranean societies, with Roman systems of water supply working through intricate networks of patronage with strong performative qualities: "While their patrons obtained glory, their citizens obtained good water" (Squatriti, 2002, pp. 11–12; see also Cespa, 2018).

Excellence – or *arete* to the Greeks and virtues to the Romans – was long assigned to the public realm, where one could distinguish oneself from all others. As Arendt (1958, p. 49) notes:

> Every activity performed in public can attain an excellence never matched in privacy; for excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always required, and this presence needs the formality of the public, constituted by one's peers, it cannot be the casual, familiar presence of one's equals or inferiors.

Water and other basic services in medieval Europe were similar in their performative roles, although one begins to see a marked withdrawal from the relative publicness of the classical period to more private spheres of activity. Post-classical Italy, for instance, saw a shift from public water supplies to overwhelmingly private ones as a result of the retreat of the state from this arena, especially after the 700s with the seizure of water resources by powerful landlords: "Their attempt to monopolize this resource and turn it into private property depended on the unwillingness and incapacity to perpetuate the Imperial Roman tradition of water as a public, common resource" (Squatriti, 2002, p. 3).

Publicly available services persisted through the Middle Ages, but European life became more highly segregated into public and private realms, with household activities being largely private in nature and political activities being public, with a relative separation of these productive and social spheres of society (Goodman, 1992; Helly & Reverby, 1992). While most family and business activities were conducted behind closed doors, political events were staged by ruling monarchs in public spaces (e.g. jousts) and open to most of the subjects under their control. However, these events were not by or of the people, and not intended to be equal in any way. They were representations of private, landed power, conducted in a public format. Although ostensibly intended to entertain and officially express gratitude to an indentured majority, the effect was to demonstrate and reinforce monarchic authority; to subdue and placate a potentially restive and rebellious mass.

This lack of political commitment to a more substantive public sphere in medieval Europe can be seen by the virtual absence of the word "public" during this time (*le public* in French and *Publikum* in German). Philosophers spoke of "the world" (*tout le monde*, *Welt*) or "mankind" (with its gender-specific connotations) but not of "public" as a political or social category (Habermas, 1991, p. 26). In fact, the first recorded English uses of the word date only from the 15th century (Sennett, 1974, p. 16). Shakespeare, as a case in point, scarcely uses the term in his writings (appearing only 48 times in all his plays). When he did use the word, it was typically in reference to a public spectacle (e.g. the crowning of Antony and Cleopatra), or as an adjective to set the scene (a "public place" or "public street"), bereft of political content.

This public-private divide begins to shift in Europe in the early 1700s with the emergence of the architecture of "the palace" and a transfer of public functions from the street to enclosed spaces such as private parks and palace

halls (with Versailles, in France, being archetypal of the genre) (Blanning & Blanning, 2002). Nevertheless, the pattern of representative publicness not only survived this change but became more prominent, with grand festivities being staged more theatrically for the common people, who were still out in the streets as "public" observers, but now physically separated from the festivities without the façade of participation. Even the royal bedroom becomes a public stage of sorts, with the bed now seen as an elevated throne, although "still dependent on the presence of the people before whom it was displayed" (Habermas, 1991, p. 10).

The Emergence of a Bourgeois Public Sphere

Activities outside this European feudal public sphere remained largely private in nature, with the *oikos* of the home economy dominating the productive and reproductive spheres. Private business networks also began to emerge, with the expansion of mercantilist trade, but this also took place largely behind closed doors. Communications for trading were private as well, such as the newsletters of merchants and early finance capitalists. Traders relied on this market news but were unwilling to share the information with others lest it compromised their competitive advantage (Raymond & Moxham, 2016).

Eventually, however, "commodity exchange burst out of the confines of the household economy" (Habermas, 1991, p. 28) and with this emerged a need for a larger, "public" sphere of communication and interaction. As commodity production (as opposed to the more restricted mercantilist practice of commodity trading) became more widespread and complex, industry-specific and firm-specific news was insufficient. There was a growing need for multifaceted forms of information to feed a complex social economy, leading to the creation of independent networks of news agencies and journalists not tied to any particular firm or production sector.

Here was the beginning of an independent but symbiotic relationship between private and public. As the potential for private accumulation expanded in a marketized economy so too did the need for more publicly available sources of information about this market. Owners of private capital began to push for a more autonomous public sphere, with the delivery of "factual" and "rational" information that was independent of monarchical oversight. The target audience was still limited to a relatively small group of early capitalists, and continued to be compromised by the feudal power networks within which it operated, but the structural pressures for a broader sphere of public forms of communication and information could no longer be contained by older aristocratic structures.

In this way, the material demands of an expanding market created the need for an equally expansive network of news (i.e. *public*-ations), largely in print format. And as these news systems expanded so too did a news industry, with the news itself becoming a commodity. It was in the interests of the writers and editors of these newsletters to charge for the information

and insights they provided, and to make it competitive against similar products. Gradually, there is an emergence of formal political journals and professional journalists, and although these early products were still far from universal – intended as they were for a literate, male, European business-owning elite – the size and scope of the bourgeois audience was expanding along with markets in general (Baron & Dooley, 2005; Espejo, 2016; Pettegree, 2014; van Groesen & Helmers, 2016).

Paving the way for this industrial news was a communicative (r)evolution in the arts, most notably in the form of literary, painting and musical debates, which were seen as relatively safe issues to discuss in a public way – i.e. less threatening to the material interests of a still powerful landed gentry. This was a de facto testing ground for the new bourgeoisie; an opportunity to see how far they could push their new discursive envelope while at the same time providing respectable occasions for segments of the landed nobility to cultivate links with this rising class of otherwise "vulgar" capitalists.

Much of this public discussion began in the coffee shops of England (in their prime from 1680–1730) and the salons of France (particularly the period between regency and Revolution) (Cowan, 2013; Laurier & Philo, 2007; Ray, 2004). It was a place for aristocratic society and bourgeois intellectuals to come together in relative parity: "sons of princes and counts associated with sons of watchmakers" (Habermas, 1991, p. 33). It was a public sphere insofar as it was not behind the gated walls of the nobles or the bourgeoisie, and not limited solely to the landed aristocracy. But it was still exclusive in terms of who had the prerequisites to participate, and male dominated. Although women often participated in these institutions – with more freedom and opportunity than in pre-bourgeois public spheres – their scope was limited and many women found themselves abandoned by men keen to participate in public debates without them (Landes, 1988; Spencer, 1984).

Wealthy shopkeepers would sometimes visit coffee shops several times a day, often engaging in fiery debates on the arts in a hitherto inconceivable public environment of opinion making and sharing between equals. It eventually became obligatory for artists and writers to present their new material at salons and coffee shops if they were to be taken seriously as public figures (Ray, 2004).

These cultural deliberations also quickly became commodities themselves, with pressure to make novels, paintings and music available to a broader, consuming public by slowly expanding the artistic news market to lower strata of the bourgeoisie, by aggressively packaging and selling these products to an emerging cultural consumer class. With this we see a fresh form of bourgeois cultural representation in an effort to expand and extensify the public realm, exemplified by the creation of art critics as a new social category (Wrigley, 1993).

But what started as debates on the arts eventually turned to more heady topics of politics and economics. Having cut their teeth in the coffee shops and salons of Europe, and emboldened by their ability to make their opinions

heard beyond their fraternal class, the bourgeoisie began to demand more from this growing public sphere. As topics for discussion expanded to include debates about commerce and exchange so too did the independent media begin to expand, leading to the creation of a "fourth estate". England was the first to introduce measures for a relatively free press – banning censorship of new public media with the Licencing Act of 1695 (Barker, 2014) – but others were to follow. Most of these liberalizations were gradual, but some, like France after its Revolution in 1789, came abruptly, with explicitly bourgeois laws on public communications effectively enacted overnight (Lefebvre, 2019). With increasing demand, public news became a growing commodity. Independent media owners became less politically motivated (and less nervous about offending royalty) and more profit conscious, increasingly dependent on advertising and market-friendly content for their clients (Baron & Dooley, 2005; Verhoest, 2016).

Importantly, ideological support for this expanding public realm came from liberal philosophers who argued that encouraging private individuals to engage in "rational" and "public" debate was the most effective way to develop wise governing principals and systems. The physiocrats declared that only *opinion publique* had true insight to make visible the *ordre naturel* (Habermas, 1991, p. 55). English philosopher Edmund Burke argued that "general opinion is the vehicle and organ of legislative omnipotence": "In free countries, there is often found more real public wisdom and sagacity in shops and manufacturing than in the cabinets and princes of countries where none dares to have an opinion until he comes into them" (Burke, 1826, p. 197).

Liberal political economists (from Adam Smith onwards) lent additional weight to these philosophical arguments, arguing that a common good could derive only from private individuals making decisions for themselves in a free and public marketplace, without the collusion of others, contributing to an enhanced level of happiness for all through the provision of quality, affordable products and job creation. In other words, the public interests of the bourgeoisie were said to be identical to that of the general population, arguing that the pursuit of private gain served a larger public good. With this theoretical argument in place the bourgeoisie began to articulate a moral philosophy of publicness that was inextricably tied to the market.

At the same time, the bourgeoisie began to make demands for representative political authorities that could manage – in a minimalist way – the private transactions of this public market. Here we see the beginnings of liberal forms of the state, ostensibly elected by the public, serving the public good and founded on principals of public opinion. But this was still a constrained notion of public, constituted by a business elite and an increasingly market-dependent aristocracy. These were not the opinions of the population as a whole but rather that of formally educated, property owning, male individuals, acting in the name of the public at large.

Figure 2.1 provides a graphic illustration of this discursive shift in English-language documents from 1500 onwards, first with the rise of the

Figure 2.1 Use of "Public" and "Private" in English-Language Publications between 1500 and 2008

Source: Google Books Ngram Viewer search by the author using a "smoothing setting" of 8 and English-language documents only. The y-axis indicates the relative frequency, in percentage terms, of the words "public" and "private" in documents over the period specified. (NOTE: A simultaneous search for the spelling "publick" mirrors that of "public" until the former begins to fall out of favour in the mid-1700s and disappears altogether by 1850).

use of the word "private" (uncommon in English until the emergence of an early bourgeoisie in the late 17th century), followed some 80 years later by a rapid rise in the use of the word "public", coinciding with a bourgeois push for an independent public sphere. Although limited to English, this Ngram chart provides empirical support for a theoretical argument about the emergence of an independent and politically "private" class followed by the rise of a politically expedient and structurally necessary "public" sphere.

Contradictions Emerge

Although more inclusive and transparent than the monarchic systems they superseded, this new bourgeois public domain quickly came to be seen as a façade, with a property-owning elite being the only people with sufficient autonomy to engage meaningfully in public debate. The exclusion of those without property was justified on the basis that these individuals had the potential to become propertied themselves one day, and that they would benefit from the rational laws being built and sustained for their enjoyment in the future (Baynes, 1989). In other words, it was a pedantic and exclusive form of public that had come into existence, offering the alleged benefits of universal membership without the advantages of universal suffrage.

By the mid-19th century many liberal theorists were openly admitting that the Burkean ideal had not been realized (Alexander & Peñalver, 2012). They witnessed the increasing inequalities of the newly marketized world around them and recognized that those without meaningful access to the public sphere could resort to force to achieve their objectives (e.g. street protests, strikes), thereby undermining the claim that rational debate by

private individuals would lead to a "civilized" and productive public realm. Friedrich Hegel (in Philosophy of Right) saw this as a recipe for anarchy, leading him to call for a more conservative political force to reign in these destabilizing liberal tendencies.

But the demands for broader public enfranchisement continued and could not be ignored if the ruling elite were to avoid further unrest and accusations of hypocrisy. It was necessary to resolve the tension between a theoretical commitment to a universal public and the bourgeois dread of sharing power. The eventual compromise was to argue for a restricted qualitative character of public input while at the same time expanding it quantitatively, exemplified by French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville. In Democracy in America, De Tocqueville (1969) used the example of post-revolutionary government in the United States to argue that public opinion has its limits, raising alarms as to the dangers of a "tyranny of the majority", pointing to "blind beliefs" in "uninformed opinions" by "uneducated" people that threatened to undermine the "rational" decisions of a bourgeois-led state. He admitted that property owners could also be "dogmatic", but his real target in these attacks were the working class, anti-colonialists and anti-capitalists. John Stuart Mill (1859, p. 379) supported de Tocqueville's exclusionary inclinations, although politely suggesting that "we mean no disparagement to them".

The problem was that the public sphere had grown unwieldy, allowing for too many theories and opinions to retain centralized control. To permit the average person to believe that their ideas were inherently equal to others was seen as dangerous, with potential for mob rule. As a result, public opinion was unceremoniously dumped from the liberal lexicon as the only legitimate source of rational law and reduced to "one power among many". The general public was henceforth to be tolerated, not celebrated.

If public opinion was now one power among many, there was need for mediation. It is at this point that more urgent calls began for an expanded and enlightened state, intended to help the general public make the most "rational" decisions from the array of public choices available to them. Mill's (1867, pp. 347–8) suggestion was to let "political questions be decided not by a direct or indirect appeal to the insight or the will of an uninformed multitude, but only by an appeal to views, formed after due consideration, of a relatively small number of persons specially educated for the task". It was not politically feasible to simply reinstate the old nobility to run these mediating agencies, but liberal proponents such as de Tocqueville (1969, p. 697) could propose "aristocratic bodies" of "educated and powerful" citizens to manage the bureaucracies. The eventual outcome (varying across place and time) was a newly constituted market-friendly cadre of bureaucrats and policymakers making choices on behalf of the general public. Rather than public opinion emerging from open and transparent debate, it became the task of an enlightened and delimited set of state officials, effectively handing power back to an educated, propertied class though the back door.

The challenge for the bourgeoisie now was to manage an ostensibly equal-opportunity public sphere, incrementally enlarged by an enfranchised populous. The answer was not simply a more enlightened state, but also a stronger, more active and more formative role for government; one that could intervene in and manage an ever more polarized, antagonistic and crisis-prone marketized society, while still appearing to be acting in the general public interest. This was a calculated and necessary response on the part of new ruling elites to the (increasingly powerful) demands of the poor and working classes for a fairer type of economy and better access to what was being produced, while needing to be seen to moderate competing demands and redistributing wealth (at least on the home front in Europe; the colonies were a different story (Ince, 2018; Williams, 2014)). The new liberal state was tasked with trying to maintain a semblance of equilibrium in an increasingly unstable marketized public sphere: "The more society became transparent as a mere nexus of coercive constraints, the more urgent became the need for a strong state" (Habermas, 1991, p. 144).

Dissolution of the Public-Private Divide

Disenfranchised groups used these liberal laws to create a collective voice for themselves in this new arena of public opinion, with labour unions, radical political parties, anti-colonial organizations and others acting as counterweights to the interests of private business. Where successful, they attracted counter-reaction from a bourgeoisie now willing to exchange some of their private clout for public political power, motivated by the necessity to maintain equilibrium in a private market system unable to self-stabilize.

Demands for better wages, safer working conditions, social security systems and the like were met with varying forms of reception – from violent repression to partial acceptance – but the trend was clearly towards a public resolution of previously private matters. Mediating these demands led to a slow but inevitable dissolution of the public-private divide that the bourgeoisie had initially built up to protect their private interests.

Having painstakingly built an independent public sphere to facilitate and legitimate a private business sphere, the bourgeoisie now had to collapse the two back together, obfuscating both in the process. From that point forward there has been a deep tension between what is done in an ostensibly universal public interest and what is done for private gain, with state interventions increasingly "guided by the interests of maintaining the equilibrium of the system which could no longer be secured by way of the free market" (Habermas, 1991, p. 146). Examples of this blurring of public and private realms were to be found in anti-trust legislation to regulate collusive business practices, state moderated wage consultations replacing firm-specific negotiations, a breakdown of the system of "private law" into social legislation and the formation of publicly-traded "private" companies that

increasingly took on state-welfare activities such as pensions and housing (Dunkley, 1981; Watson, 2003).

Legal scholarship on this blurring of the public/private divide is revealing. Although the emergence of the market "as a central legitimating institution brought the public/private distinction into the core of legal discourse during the nineteenth century", this distinction began to unravel as the dividing lines became less distinct (Horwitz, 1982, p. 1424). As Stone (1982, pp. 1445–6, 1506) notes with regards to efforts to differentiate private corporations and government agencies when it comes to legal decisions and liabilities: "Political incentives and market incentives are too entangled for us unambiguously to sort out organizations subject to the one from organizations subject to the other….It seems impossible to eliminate a large class of hybrids not clearly on one side or the other". As a result, "the boundaries between public and private, never clearly marked, have grown, with time, more faint and less valuable….Whatever lines may once have existed are closer than ever to obliteration".

Kennedy (1982, pp. 1352–4, 1357) takes the argument further, arguing that there has been a "collapse" in the public/private distinction resulting in a "continuumization" of the two poles; a situation in which people see entities and actions as "not absolutely one thing or another". The end result is "loopification": a process by which "one's consciousness is loopified when the ends of the continuum seem closer to one another…than either end seems to the middle….when one seems to be able to move by a steady series of steps around the whole distinction, ending up where one started without ever reversing direction". As a result, "one simply loses one's ability to take the public/private distinction seriously as a description, as an explanation, or as a justification of anything". In effect, ontological difference between the public and private spheres had been obliterated.

Even the family was de-privatized to some extent by the emergence of welfare states, as individual family members became socialized by extra familial authorities. For Arendt (1958, p. 38), the emergence of society

> from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has also changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen.

A Refeudalized Public Realm

For Habermas (1991, p. 142, 144) this was the beginning of the end of any distinct publicness in a bourgeois society:

> This dialectic of a progressive 'societization' of the state simultaneously with an increasing 'stateification' of society gradually destroyed

> the basis of the bourgeois public sphere – the separation of state and society. Between the two and out of the two…the distinction between 'public' and 'private' could not be usefully applied….[and] society was forced to relinquish even the flimsiest pretence of being a sphere in which the influence of power was suspended.

As the processes of economic concentration and crisis "pulled the veil of an exchange of equivalents off the antagonistic structure of [marketized] society…the more society became transparent as a mere nexus of coercive constraints [and] the more urgent became the need for a strong state." The reality of imperfect competition and the concentration of social power became more difficult to hide and defend. As a result, "the public sphere lost its place. It lost its clear boundary over and against the private sphere on the one hand and the 'world public' on the other; it lost its transparency and no longer admitted of a comprehensive view" (Habermas, 1991, p. 203).

In place of this idealized liberal notion of equal private people gathered together as a public, there emerged a series of private interest groups whose objectives were to turn the demands of particular associations into a credible "general interest". What Habermas (1991, p. 200) refers to as the "secret politics of interest groups" resulted in a situation where "the public sphere has to be 'made', it is not 'there' anymore", returning us to a "refeudalized" public realm.

Powerful corporate lobbies are the most obvious protagonists in this regard, with their large and sophisticated public relations programmes, but so is an increasingly influential and commoditized media. The latter, freed of its early role of catalyzing public debate and creating an emergent public space, could now focus on profits and more self-interested politics, reflecting the commodified nature of news and the opinion-shaping role it plays, particularly to promote market-friendly ideas and consumerist cultures. By the end of the 19th century, media in Europe had become "the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere" (Habermas, 1991, p. 185). The commodifying and oligopolizing effects of the market on communication had smothered the conditions necessary for a meaningful public realm. In this "manipulated public sphere an acclamation-prone mood comes to predominate. An opinion climate instead of a public opinion" (Habermas, 1991, p. 217). As Frederickson (1991, p. 397) notes, concepts of pluralism in public policy are nice in theory, but in practice "the well-established and economically favoured have an exaggerated ability to appear to represent the interests of the public" as a whole.

In short, the notion that a general public can transparently and collectively make public policy that represents general interests in a market economy had been undermined by the collapse of public-private spheres and the capture of opinion-making and legal systems by powerful corporate

interests. The nature and character of this trajectory has varied across different liberal democratic traditions and the emergence of new forms of media, but the general trend since the late 19th century has been towards a concentration of power in the hands of increasingly fewer groups who ostensibly make private decisions in the interests of a universal public (Baker, 2006).

Similar dynamics have shaped much of the post-colonial experience with "public" since the mid-20th century, with newly-independent regimes linked to Western powers calling for an enhanced public sphere but quickly limiting the potential for universal input in favour of expert opinion and decision making. Keynesian-era spending on public infrastructure largely benefited an emerging local elite alongside their metropolitan partners, with the subsequent neoliberalization of public spending serving to further tighten the flow of who was able to access essential services and who made decisions about their delivery and pricing (Bond, 2008; Lipton, 1977; Robinson, 2012). Varying degrees of public debate have offered some semblance of public participation as to the meaning and extent of a liberal public sphere, but for the most part the post-colonial experience has been a condensed version of earlier market-making eras, with notions of a universal public lubricating the material and ideological machinery of private accumulation in all market economies.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that the bourgeois public sphere which emerged and expanded over the past three centuries is unique in world history. For the first time, on a grand scale, societies began to operate on conceptions of universality and the notion that all human beings have the same right to act, argue and deliberate in common ways that allow for the pursuit of collective interest.

In reality, this public sphere is universal in name but partial and limited in practice. It is a product of, and essential to, the development of market economies, facilitating the growth of private wealth through the creation of a public domain that legitimates private accumulation. At first expansive in its aims, this bourgeois public sphere has since been systematically circumscribed as demands for greater control and enfranchisement have threatened capital's control over its material and discursive domain.

As decision-making in this public realm has been reigned in so too have notions of public became increasingly conflated with private, blurring their distinction and serving to conceal the biased ways in which our public sphere is managed, and in whose benefit it operates. The result has been the collapse of an ontologically independent public domain, now largely captured by the interests of private capital.

The emergence and remaking of this public sphere has differed dramatically across place and time and continues to change as capitalism morphs

and responds to innovative technological norms and political demands for access to collective processes. It also remains crisis prone, as the façade of universality is increasingly unveiled, and the realities of growing inequalities exposed.

With this in mind, I now turn to the more concrete question of "public services", and ask how the emergence and transformation of a bourgeois public sphere has affected "the provision of services that hitherto had been left to private hands" (Habermas, 1991, p. 147).