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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

When a Club Turns into a Public Event: The Structural Transformation of the British Parliament and the Making of Collective Solidarity

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Abstract
Much of the scholarship on the modern public sphere has, following Habermas, focused on arenas of sociability detached from state authority. However, little attention has been given to the ways in which patterns of sociability intrinsic to political institutions facilitated the rise of civil society and a sense of nationhood. This article unpacks various structural dimensions of collective solidarity from the perspective of sociability and publicity by drawing on a key political institution: the state parliament. By exploring the interrelations between the British parliament and the media from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, the article discusses how parliament aristocratic culture corresponded to a club model structured along horizontal, interpersonal networks but increasingly incorporated qualities of a centralized public event. Shifts in media practices were accompanied by changes in the ways that political actors interacted among themselves and with their audiences. Drawing on the concept of "public intimacy," namely, the staging of exclusive ties in front of a third party, the article delineates a structural transition in parliament culture from mechanisms of "clubby" public intimacy, which relied on patrician orality and sacred rituals, to "mediated" public intimacy, which was shaped by the institutionalization of gossip journalism. It is suggested that a similar combination of club exclusivity and public event has come to characterize subsequent civic institutions as well as social media. This dual structure helped shape feelings of solidarity as a continuum between personal and collective ties, casting the mass public as a network of confidants and friends.

Keywords Sociability · Gossip · Eighteenth century · Aristocracy · Politics of friendship · British Parliament

This article examines the historical convergence of aristocratic club culture and the modern public sphere. It argues that the experience of mass solidarity emerging with the rise of civil society has evolved, in part, as a fusion between two structures of sociability and performance: a network structure characteristic of social clubs and a centralized performance linking mass audiences to a public event. Focusing on the political culture of the British parliament and its relationship with the press during the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, I describe how this key government institution extended patterns of club sociability to civil society. Much of the scholarly discussion of the modern public sphere has, following Habermas (1991/1962), focused on new civic institutions detached from state authority (Reid, 2000). Less attention has been paid to the role of sociability within state institutions in shaping processes of democratization and national integration.

My analysis draws on existing historical and sociological research on parliament culture (particularly, Gabay, 2007; Greig and Vickery, 2021; Milne-Smith, 2009; Port, 2002; Reid, 2004; Thévoz, 2018) and connects it with recent theories on social club sociability (Kaplan, 2014, 2018) and social performance theory (Alexander, 2004). By focusing on changes in sociability and publicity in the British parliament, I examine how the interplay between club culture and performance in public events enacted feelings of collective solidarity. I suggest that through this combination of club exclusivity and media inclusivity the mass public could be cast as a network of confidants and friends.

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The Public Sphere and the British Parliament

In his celebrated work on the transformation of the public sphere in eighteenth-century Western Europe, Habermas (1991) analyzed the gradual emergence of civil society as a realm of solidarity and social action independent of state power. He distinguished the modern public sphere from earlier forms of publicness. Under feudal and monarchical rule, state affairs were conducted largely in the closed setting of the court and public rituals were employed mainly as a means of marking privileged social status and corporate membership. By contrast, the modern public sphere allowed the formation of solidarities through informal networks, providing a space for face-to-face interactions where individuals and groups could debate the actions taken by the political authority and present their identities in public (Melucci & Avritzer, 2000). The public sphere manifested itself in bourgeois practices of sociability in coffeehouses, salons, literary circles, and social clubs. According to Habermas (1991), these venues contributed to the rise of civil society by providing opportunities for critical debate and encouraging citizens to deliberate about their common affairs. The Habermasian public sphere was governed by two main principles: a new source of authority based on the consensus emerging from critical and open-ended public debate (Benson, 2009) and an "abstract universality" (Habermas, 1991, p. 54) based on reasoned deliberation and procedural rationality. Public deliberation emphasized the merits of the arguments and not the identities of the arguers and was hypothetically accessible to all regardless of social position (see Mah, 2000).

Habermas (1991, p. 57) considered Britain in the eighteenth century to be the first and exemplary case for the emergence of a modern public sphere that "functioned in the political realm," and the British parliament played an important role in his account (Davis, 2009). He made a direct connection between the transformations in the public sphere and democratic changes in the British parliament: "Forces endeavoring to influence the decisions of state authority appealed to the critical public in order to legitimate demands before this new forum. In connection with this practice, the assembly of estates became transformed into a modern Parliament" (Habermas, 1991, p. 57). This is attributed, among other things, to the elimination of censorship and the opening of parliament proceedings to reporters at the turn of the nineteenth century. Habermas credited the media with an indispensable role in the struggle against the privilege of parliament secrecy (Ku, 1998). Where formerly it had been considered a prerogative of the parliament to conduct its affairs "in private" without external pressures (Gabay, 2007, p. 77), following these democratic reforms the people themselves became an independent political authority such that "step by step the absolutism of Parliament had to retreat before their sovereignty" (Habermas, 1991, p. 66). From this point onward, however, it is the relationship between the media and civic institutions that attracted Habermas' attention as the main vehicle of the public sphere.

The changes in media coverage gave a new meaning to the notion of parliament as a public institution and an arena of public performance. Members of parliament (MPs) were to serve as legislators in the public interest of their constituents and also as actors performing in front of this public, now recast as audience. This invites an understanding of modern parliament proceedings as a form of public event and, specifically, a form of "social performance." Alexander (2004) called attention to an analytic distinction between ritualized performance and theatrical performance. In rituals, which are characteristic of simple societies, the whole community joins together to perform certain actions with no distinction between participants and audience. In theatrical performances, however, most people serve as the audience and watch actors performing on a stage (Ringmar, 2020). Alexander (2004) extended this idea from concrete theatrical performances to "social performance," namely, a form of public space in democratic societies where people gather in order to reflect on and negotiate the meanings of their shared lives and interests. The basic association of political performance with theater long precedes the rise of civil society (Ringmar, 2020). Nonetheless, according to Alexander (2004, p. 544), collective action in the modern public sphere can be regarded as a centralized "public stage" on which political actors are free to present social dramas to other members of society. Often mediated by the mass media, actors in the social performance attempt to mobilize the support and trust of their audience by convincing them that they present an authentic and morally legitimate account of their common values.

Social Club Sociability and British Club Politics

Habermas drew a stark distinction between the rational aspects of public interactions and their affective, embodied aspects, privileging the former as the basis of democratic deliberation and the proper articulation and representation of social interests in a well-functioning civil society (Hoggett & Thompson, 2002; Mah, 2000). However, the relationship between politics and civil society is also premised on expressive practices of sociability and notions of intimacy. In this article I suggest that the changing relationships between the parliament and the public can be studied through practices of "social club sociability" (Kaplan, 2018). Most modern-day social institutions—from formally defined state

organizations and voluntary associations to coffeehouses to social media platforms—operate as a social club of sorts: they occasion interpersonal encounters between members that typically revolve around a common activity or purpose and prescribe certain rules of conduct. Their diverse organizational structure and purposes notwithstanding, clubs, broadly defined, constitute a central arena of sociability in modern societies through which members distinguish between insiders and outsiders and transform unaffiliated strangers into acquaintances and friends (Kaplan, 2018).

The epitome of the modern social club was the English gentlemen's club, an elite social institution that took shape in eighteenth-century London and became an enduring hallmark of English and later British sociability and part of its national identity (Capdeville, 2016; Clark, 2000). The club's rule-governed social relations reinforced participants' sense of belonging to a selective community whose members were elected by democratic procedures often shrouded in elaborate rituals. Cultivating a masculinity that emphasized politeness and refined conversations, club membership became a visible sign of success and a key to social prestige and political power. Relationships between club members consisted of growing familiarity and loyalty alongside a shared sense of exclusivity and privilege: "A club's very existence relies on the imperative of protecting the group from nonmembers. That sense of connectedness—with some but not with all—provides legitimacy, purpose, and comfort to those who are connected" (Black, 2012, p. 28).

Participation in these social clubs carried political significance. Traditional English political culture could be characterized as an "organic" model of polity (Elazar, 1998, p. 2) that took on class-based characteristics, organized as a network of clubs cutting across the various formal institutions of English society. This oligarchic regime developed around two concentric circles--the central political leadership and the regional landed elites--and maintained a delicate balance of power between them. Positions of power were limited to those who belonged to the right clubs, developed the appropriate interpersonal connections, and participated in informal decision-making (Elazar, 1997). This culture exemplified a social order in which friendship ties were central to politics rather than considered a private matter detached from political and public life, as is often assumed in modern political theory (Silver, 1990).

The Present Case Study

Going beyond the Habermesian dichotomy between abstract and embodied interactions, this article focuses on various kinds of social interactions taking place among MPs and between the MPs and the British public during the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century. In an attempt to delineate the underlying social mechanisms that linked interpersonal ties with higher-level solidarity, I employ an analytical distinction between mechanisms of public intimacy and feelings of collective intimacy—a distinction I made in previous studies of social clubs as well as media events (Kaplan, 2014, 2018; Kaplan & Kupper, 2017). Public intimacy refers to the ways in which interpersonal interactions are performed and presented to an audience, which, in effect, serves as a third party to the interaction. In many instances, club members engage in personal exchange in public, often employing banter, private jargon, and coded gestures that bolster the exclusivity of their relationship in front of the audience; however, this teasing may also invite some of the audiences to engage and get involved in the interaction themselves. Collective intimacy, on the other hand, refers to a form of sociability shared collectively by the public as a whole: a multiplicity of social ties and mutual patterns of sociability learned through past experiences with public intimacy, which are revealed and reaffirmed during a public event. The combination of public and collective intimacy can be used to understand how mass solidarity depends on interpersonal ties.

In the present case, changes in media coverage altered parliamentary practices of sociability and publicity. For the purpose of the current demonstration, I divide this process into two chronological phases, although this should not be taken as a strictly historical account. In the first phase, prior to media exposure, the parliament was characterized by a culture of speech associated with "patrician orality" (Gabay, 2007, p. 15; Reid, 2000, p. 126) and parliament proceedings were staged as an intimate theater and a spectacle of sincerity. I define this performance in which the third party to the interactions were club members themselves as "clubby public intimacy." Ultimately, these individual performances enacted a sacred ritual attended by all members, thus fusing interpersonal ties with a sense of collective intimacy. The emergent feelings of solidarity were presumably limited to the political elite. In the second phase, the opening of parliament to media coverage engendered a more institutionalized form of public intimacy that was no longer confined to MPs, and the third party became the entire public. Best described as "mediated public intimacy" (Kaplan & Kupper, 2017), this performance employed gossip to harness the mass media readership. After presenting these two phases, I conclude by discussing how this dual structure of social club and public event spread to multiple forms of civic organizations modeled on British parliament culture and served to link interpersonal interactions with collective sentiments—a key characteristic in the development of national solidarity in modern societies.

Phase 1: Parliament as Social Club

The political roles and authority of the House of Commons changed during the mid-modern period. In the seventeenth century, the House was seen as providing advice and counsel to the king, with parliamentary deliberations considered mainly a tactical process of producing such counsel (Seaward & Ihalainen, 2016). The House assumed growing political importance after the 1689 Bill of Rights sought to secure the privileges of parliament and free speech against royal interference and, by the turn of the eighteenth century, MPs gradually assumed greater responsibility in overseeing government performance and controlling the public revenue. However, their public interests remained limited to their own social class: parliamentary bills and committees rarely dealt with social and economic problems of general concern and public petitions were seldom presented to the parliament. As noted by Jupp (1990, p. 57), "like any good club, the Commons was comparatively immune to external pressures, particularly those not sponsored by landed elite." The British parliamentary system thus epitomized what Elazar (1997, p. 242) defined as an organic, center-periphery model of polity: "In its pure form, the parliament occupies the center of this system. All else is in the periphery and the parliament itself operates like a club."

In terms of social makeup, the eighteenth-century House of Commons composed of roughly five distinct groups: (1) English, Scottish, and Irish titled noblemen (peers); (2) untitled country gentlemen; (3) businessmen with manufacturing and trade interests; (4) professional men with legal or military experience; and (5) self-made men who pursued politics as a profession (Namier & Brooke, 1985; Reid, 2004). MPs were expected to have substantial stake in the land, which guaranteed political independence and signified their attachment to specific localities rather than the national government (Reid, 2004). They pursued politics as part of what they considered their aristocratic responsibilities. Similar to artistic appreciation, political competence was naturalized as part of a gentleman's breeding and was not deemed to require any specialized knowledge or training; indeed, intuition and quick wit served as indicators of MPs' social status rather than professional skills which were considered a bourgeois concern (Gabay, 2007).

MPs enjoyed the facilities and privileges of "the best club in London" (Dickens, 1998/1865, p. 234). During the eighteenth-century, the growth in MP activities accelerated the overflow of political business beyond parliament chambers into the clubs and coffeehouses of St. James's area and across the City of Westminster (Greig and Vickery, 2021, p.108). In Thévoz's (2018) study of London club culture and social networks in the nineteenth century, he corroborated Elazar's (1997) model of British politics as founded on club culture. Thévoz (2018, p. 211) noted that between the 1830s and the 1860s clubs became a shared space for most MPs, with over 90% belonging to at least one club, thus demonstrating how the political arena overlapped heavily with the operation of political clubs. Private clubs and coffeehouses that transformed into political clubs served as hubs of communication, committee rooms, and newspaper reading rooms (Greig and Vickery, 2021, p. 120). Participation in clubs gave MPs the chance to "survey the world at safe distance" and enjoy many facilities and comforts under one roof: accommodation, stationery, and, most significantly, regulated access to informal gossip (Thévoz, 2018, p. 214), as I elaborate further on.

Parliament as Intimate Theater

I turn now to the spatial and performative aspects of parliamentary proceedings. Until the fire of 1834, the House of Commons met at St. Stephen's Chapel in the Palace of Westminster. It was a relatively small chamber and seating arrangements were constrained by the layout of the medieval chapel, which demanded that the MPs sat on benches divided by a central aisle. At times of ceremony or controversy, the chamber was so overcrowded that MPs literally rubbed shoulders, creating an atmosphere which was simultaneously adversarial and familiar to the point of intimacy (Reid, 2004). The timetable for parliamentary meetings was limited, with public sessions running only during winter and spring and mostly in the afternoons to allow the MPs to pursue their other daily activities. Their use of time extended to extra-parliamentary, informal, "social politics" taking place throughout the day in in the surrounding coffeehouse, clubs and the MPs private houses (Greig and Vickery, 2021, p. 126–127). The chamber's intimate architecture and the limited, designated time frames for official sessions created a space reminiscent of eighteenth-century theater and an atmosphere of an exclusive gentlemen's club (Gabay, 2007).

The theatrical performance in the House of Commons was based on the art of speech. The speeches were performed in front of a responsive and vocal audience comprising mainly the MPs themselves. Performers were expected to display verbal virtuosity, cogency in argument, and a capacity for refined, witty, and entertaining comments (Reid, 2000). In this, the House of Commons cultivated a culture of patrician orality and antiscribalism that emphasized the naturalness of speech over the artificiality of print culture. It favored the "living voice" with its expressivity, spontaneity, embodied presence, and immediacy over the reading of the "dead letter" (Gabay, 2007, p. 82). The performance of speech followed aristocratic conventions of eloquence and,

similar to a dance performance, the control of bodily movements demonstrated control of inner emotions. Eloquence in speech functioned as a marker of aristocratic grace and superiority. Reflecting a system of "government by speaking" (Gabay, 2007, p. 91), patrician orality both reaffirmed the gentle character of the House and represented the harmony and stability of a well-ordered state.

Clubby Public Intimacy

Similar to any club of a comparable size (558 members throughout most of the eighteen century), members of the House of Commons were acquainted with each other to varying degrees. Having repeatedly performed and presented themselves according to the norms of patrician orality, session after session, year upon year, they inevitably developed a level of familiarity, intimacy, and friendship with fellow members despite the potentially adversarial relations between political parties (Reid, 2004). By the same token, MPs continually engaged in boundary work to differentiate themselves from outsiders. Visitors and guests were called "strangers," and a standing order of the House provided "for the clearing of so-called strangers from its galleries whenever any member should so demand" (Gabay, 2007, p. 84).

Since the practice of political oratory demanded a stylized display of spontaneous and expressive speech, it also occasioned a public display of the social ties among parliament members, in other words, a performance of public intimacy (Kaplan, 2014). A typical example of public intimacy was to turn to a particular member during a public speech and address him in person, thus displaying their familiarity in front of the other members who served as a third party to the interaction. This would often be accompanied by "phatic" communication. Phatic communication, as discussed by Jakobson (1999), refers to speech and communicative gestures, often humoristic, that do not convey any meaningful information about the world but aim, primarily, to signal the speaker's presence, express sociability, and maintain social connections. I address this as "clubby" public intimacy due to the fact that the third party was restricted to club members themselves (and the occasional limited numbers of visitors and journalists).

In comparison to written text, speech tends to carry more phatic messages about the relationship between the speaker and the listeners, even when its function is ostensibly informational. Phatic communication is more common in spoken language where it is easier to see the co-present audience as an intimate community and the speech grows out of the speaker's sense of membership in it (Elbow, 1985). Gaining familiarity and sympathy from the audience was, accordingly, central to eighteen-century parliamentary speech. The speakers appealed to the shared values that defined the House of Commons as an assembly of gentlemen and gained trust through demonstration of character rather than facts (Reid, 2004). Burke (1990/1757, p. 177, quoted in Gabay 2017, p. 93) suggested that political oratory intended "to affect rather by sympathy than imitation; to display rather the effect of things on the mind of the speaker...than to present a clear idea of the things themselves."

In this context, the virtuosity of argumentation was less significant than the moral "spectacle of sincerity," namely, the ability to persuade the audience of the credibility of the speaker (Fliegelman, 1993, p. 43). Fliegelman (1993) associated sincerity with the theatrical display of honesty, emphasizing truthfulness with others rather than a display of an authentic self. It is the expression of emotion in an interpersonal situation that functions as a revelation of character: the obligation of the speaker "was to make the auditor feel as he feels, to be moved as he is moved" such that "both speaker and auditor ideally become doubles of one another" (Fliegelman, 1993, p. 43). In order for the speaker to win the audience's confidence, the moral character, or ethos, of the speaker must accommodate the perceived ethos of the audience, assuming that both are steeped in the norms of gentle culture (Reid, 2000). Thus, clubby public intimacy, namely, the display and affirmation of exclusive social ties among club members, could thrive in a parliament culture that linked sincerity with interpersonal performance and with the shared norms of the gentlemen's club.

A related aspect of club sociability is gossip. While public intimacy refers to interaction or communication between two parties in the presence of a third party or an audience, gossip refers, in effect, to a communication about the first party in their absence. It is an exchange of information that often entails normative evaluations and employs rumor or slander (Eder & Enke, 1991). The impact of gossip has remained underestimated in historical studies of politics due to its transitory nature (Thévoz, 2018). Clubland, the well-connected clubs in the St. James's area, offered their members regulated access to the flow of gossip emanating from the inner corridors of power. The promise of inside information on political affairs and personal scandals added luster to the prestige of club membership (Thévoz, 2018).

Conversations in the clubs were particularly useful for parliamentarians, giving them a testing ground for public opinion on strategic decisions, such as going to war. Throughout parliamentary sessions MPs would regularly frequent their favorite clubs, meeting up in the coffee rooms or smoking rooms for small-scale gatherings or set-piece consultations or simply bumping into one another by chance. The physical layout of clubs limited the circulation of members into a few narrow spaces, such as the central lobby and the steps leading to it, which facilitated personal interactions and the intimate exchange of news: "The lobby also served as an interception point, offering members the chance to 'buttonhole' passing members....The presence of seats in the

lobbies point to a demand for members to spend time in that one place" (Thévoz, 2018, p. 132). Information spread by word of mouth in other social venues at the St. James's area that blended leisure with politics, such as the Opera House or town house parties given by political hostesses (Greig and Vickery, 2021).

Both the performance of public intimacy and the use of gossip employ phatic communication, cynicism, and humor and enact a subtle interplay of exclusion and inclusion. They not only help signal the performers' common ground in the face of their audience but also signal the common norms held by members of the audience when sharing gossip about the performers in their absence. I elaborate on the public implications of gossip in the ensuing sections on media coverage and mediated public intimacy.

Fusion of Interpersonal and Collective Intimacy

While parliament is primarily a forum for political debate stirring fervent and often divisive speeches, it is also a social space where manners, civility, and ritual are called upon to cushion disagreement and controversy and create a non-factional, harmonious space. Accordingly, various measures were taken during sessions in the House of Commons to arouse participants' feelings of respect and harmony. One of these was the general rhetoric of "appeal," a ceremonial address often used by speakers. Originating in priestly discourse, such as the sermon, the congenial appeal was a rhetorical strategy that humbled the speaker and implicitly elevated the listener to a position of authority. It presented thoughts and feelings committed to a dispassionate, gentler idiom of polite society and forming an ethical appeal for action or justice (Gabay, 2007; Reid, 2004). Unlike an argument, the appeal called forth the listeners' moral sympathy and "better judgment" rather than their analytical faculties (Schroeder, 2003, p. 109) and was used by MPs as a stylistic tactic to avoid unnecessary confrontation and generate solidarity and harmony.

Another ritualized aspect of parliament culture was evident in the way that legal and bureaucratic routines were invested with sacred meaning. Rules, standing orders, and procedures achieved sanctification by being treated with reverence. In her ethnographic study of the contemporary House of Lords, Crewe (2010, p. 315) observed how veneration of parliamentary rules was augmented by arcane language and form which required a distinct class of trained clerks to interpret or administer them, thus acting as "specialist custodians" symbolically set apart from others by their dress. An additional example of pomp and ceremony is the requirement, going back to the late Middle Ages, that, before taking their seats in parliament, all members of both Houses swear the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown while holding a copy of the New Testament (later extended to a non-religious solemn affirmation).

Overall, parliamentary rituals not only reaffirmed aristocratic allegiance and loyalties between the ruling elites (Gabay, 2007) but also helped build solidarity by creating an atmosphere of sacredness. This is, of course, not unique to the eighteenth-century House of Commons. In premodern assemblies of estates, the ceremonial assemblies embodied the body politic as a whole by enacting theatrical and sensually tangible rituals that symbolized the ideals of reciprocity and consensus between the ruler and the estates (Stollberg-Rilinger, 2014).

The theatrical staging of formal parliamentary procedures along with the temporal ordering of the sessions and the stylized rhetoric of members' speeches stood in stark contrast to the informal social club sociability taking place in mundane parliamentary life. While everyday gossip and interactions of public intimacy among members point to the significance of exclusive interpersonal communication, it was during ceremonial occasions that the parliament assembly functioned as an emblem of collective intimacy, in other words, a form of sociability shared by all members of the House. Indeed, parliament life provided rapid shifts between periods of ritual and periods of mundane sociability. As suggested by Durkheimian theory, systematic separation between the sacred and the profane provides periodic confirmation of collective values shared by members of the community (Durkheim, 2008/1915). Yet, due to the limited number of parliament members interacting in a small physical space, the sacred and mundane were, in their experience, closely linked. The familiarity and intimacy that MPs developed with some of their individual colleagues were projected on their feelings of collective intimacy. The combination of familiarity and reverence served to reduce the perceived distance between personal ties and collective identification and infused both with an aura of sanctity.

It is through this interplay between clubby public intimacy and collective intimacy that we can understand the public role of the eighteenth-century British parliament. On the one hand, the MPs did not see themselves primarily as delegates responsible for representing the opinions and interests of their constituents but rather as members of a self-standing group that was sealed off from the general public. On the other hand, they considered it their role to give counsel to the king and to serve alongside him as a personification of the collective body politic. This was accomplished by juxtaposing mundane clubby familiarity and exclusivity with ritualized experiences of inclusive collective intimacy such that interaction between members came to embody the solidarity of society at large or the nation as a whole.

Phase 2: Parliament as a Mediated Public Event

Parliament Opening up to the Press

Because of the tradition of keeping parliamentary debates private, until the late seventeenth century the journals of the House of Commons were kept only for the purposes of the members. In 1681, for the first time, the House granted permission to print and publish its *Votes and Proceedings*, an official record that included minimal information on passed motions and received petitions (Haapala, 2016). The aim of parliamentary discussions was to persuade only the immediate audience of members whose votes would decide the issue. Using the floor to address audiences outside the parliament was seen as a threat to its sovereignty, and up to the mid-eighteenth century the House of Commons periodically renewed the standing orders which prohibited the reporting of its proceedings and excluded strangers from its galleries (Aspinall, 1956; Reid, 2000). Indeed, the MPs frowned on the idea that they had external reputations to win and considered external audiences, such as reporters, as interlopers promoting unwelcome middle-class interests (Reid, 2000).

At the same time, the eighteenth century also saw the spread of printing presses which helped to create a market for information and opinion (Reid, 2000). Newspapers were often read in social settings, and their circulation was closely tied to the rise of new venues associated with the public sphere. Coffeehouses, salons, and clubs often supplied their clients with local newspapers for discussions of current events, and these became a central means of attracting patrons (Barker, 2014; Schaich, 2008). In light of these developments, reporters became increasingly more confrontational in their attempts to gain access to parliament proceedings. Some reporting of parliamentary debates and political controversies could already be found in daily periodicals in the 1710s (Haapala, 2016). This reflected the growing competition between newspapers, each eager to offer readers its own account of the business of parliament. In response to these pressures, the House of Commons gradually ceased to enforce prohibitions on reporting, and from 1777 the gallery of the House was opened more frequently to reporters (though major controversial debates were still held in private) (Gabay, 2007). By 1783, reporters were permitted to take notes during the proceedings and thus no longer obliged to depend on just their memory (Aspinall, 1956, p. 237). Parliamentary debates began to appear prominently in most newspapers, and the interactions between political players in the House became visible to the public eye.

Another change came in 1803 following denied media coverage of the dramatic parliamentary debate over Britain's declaration of war against France, which marked the renewal of the Napoleonic wars. Due to intense public protest, the speaker of the House ordered parliament to give reporters privileged access to the back row of the gallery, thus marking press procurement of a permanent foothold in the House. Subsequently, when the New Palace of Westminster opened in 1852 after restoration from the fire of 1834, its new design included a press gallery with 19 front-row seats and a special writing room for reporters (Gabay, 2007).

The growing public interest in parliamentary news during the nineteen century was accompanied by a dramatic rise in the consumption of newspapers. In London alone, the number of newspapers rose from 19 in 1783 to 420 in 1856 (Aspinall, 1956, p. 6). The press became an important player in setting the agenda for parliamentary debates and monitoring its activities on a daily basis. The routine publishing of parliamentary proceedings was seen as improving the House's commitment to the ideal of political representation and accountability to the people.

Newspaper coverage also reflected a major shift from spoken language to printed text. Some social commentators, such as Jeremy Bentham (1999/1791), saw this as an opportunity to establish a more rational approach to the political legislation processes. He maintained that in lieu of a debating club with noisy galleries and seductive oratory, the press reconstructed parliamentary political discourse as an object that could be witnessed and reasoned about through detached deliberation. However, the new forms of reportage also provided readers with a more phatic, humoristic form of media consumption, such as caricatures. Political artists made satirical sketches of the leading speakers and "stamped them in the public mind" by exaggerating their visual features and behavioral gestures and incorporating catchwords from their speeches in the form of text bubbles (Reid, 2000, p. 127). Rather than facilitating abstract deliberation, this form of reportage contributed to the growing sense of familiarity and intimacy between the public and the politicians.

In response to these changes in both media technology and public sentiment, the MPs began to see their performance as destined for a wider (reading) audience. Formerly, their main audience resided inside the House and was intimate and familiar; speakers could appeal to the binding norms of all the attendants as an assembly of gentlemen. Now, their challenge was to engage with a new mass of literate readers "whose ideological outlook, familiarity with parliamentary codes and attitudes towards the political elite may have differed widely from those of the internal audience" (Reid, 2000, p. 129). The MPs had "to re-fashion themselves rhetorically in recognition of changing public conceptions of political sincerity, accountability and trust" (Reid, 2000, p. 128), which they slowly came to see as an opportunity: "if print took possession of their words, it could

also allow their words to take possession of the public" (Gabay, 2007, p. 112). Moreover, by developing new oratory styles that could mediate between the MPs' continued exchange with political peers and their direct access to mass readers, the parliament increasingly became a "platform for addressing the nation" (Gabay, 2007, p. 112).

Club Sociability and Mediated Public Intimacy

Parallel to the changing relationship between parliament and media, the nineteenth century also heralded a gradual change in the social composition of parliament. By the 1830s, a growing number of MPs were self-made men with merchants, bankers, industrialists, and lawyers comprising over 20% of the House (Jupp, 1990). A new style of politician emerged who took on the appearance and attire of the professional classes: a universal black top hat, topcoat, trousers, and shoes replaced the aristocratic preference for colored topcoats and decorations, silk breeches, and brightly buttoned shoes—a dress code exhibiting hierarchical social status. This change made MPs indistinguishable from upper middle-class urban men: "those who had worn the appearance in public of belonging to an exclusive gentlemen's club no longer did so" (Jupp, 1990, p. 67).

However, the fact that the House of Commons became a central actor in an ongoing public event and that its social composition was relatively more inclusive did not preclude its continuing role as a social club that maintained exclusive relationships among its members. Indeed, parliament continued to serve and be treated as a social club. In terms of physical arrangements, the intimate chamber used for parliamentary debates did not change much after its renovation in 1852. Charles Barry, the architect of the new design who specialized in planning clubs and country houses, managed to maintain a similar social club setting for the parliament. Port (1976, p. 70) compared Barry's parliamentary design to "an enormous club, replete with service quarters, meeting rooms, restaurants, libraries...corridors and offices." The perception of parliament as club remained throughout the nineteenth century. In 1869, conservative MP Beresford Hope complained cynically that the House of Commons "ought to be the best club in the world," but that it also became "the worst news room" (Port, 2002, p. 166, 181).

With growing media coverage MPs' performance was no longer limited to a "clubby public intimacy" in which the third party to the interaction were club members themselves; instead, their performance turned into a "mediated public intimacy" (following Kaplan & Kupper, 2017), in which the mass community of readers became a third party that was virtually present in parliamentary discussions. As predicted by MP William Windham in 1798, "by these daily publications the people were taught to look upon themselves as present at the discussion of all the proceedings of parliament, and sitting in judgment on them" (Cobbett, 1819, p. 159). Moreover, with media exposure, the House became a focus for social activities, with some of the public taking a more direct interest in political life and asking to meet the MPs in person. The constituents required space to see members and enjoyed being entertained at the House: it was "highly convenient for members to entertain constituents and their wives to tea, which became a very popular practice" (Port, 2002, pp. 198–199).

Publicity did not, therefore, appear to replace the role of sociability in parliament life. On the contrary, the increase in publicity simply placed growing demands on the politicians to display and manifest their sociability and to provide information about their personal life, in other words, it reinforced the importance of gossip. The flourishing of "society" journals in the nineteenth century institutionalized the use of gossip in print media, in particular, the gossip of elite clubs and political circles (Milne-Smith, 2009). With the rise in media coverage both within clubland and in society at large, a community of gossip thrived in which "verbal gossip and printed news functioned as a complementary system of knowledge" (Milne-Smith, 2009, p. 101).

Political gossip was eagerly consumed by the press as both a source of information and a form of phatic communication. For one thing, it offered a sense of urgency and inside information that took precedence over official news reportage. For instance, news of Lord Howe's naval victory against the French in June 1794 was broken by Lady Chatham to the audience at the Opera House before it was made public (Greig and Vickery 2021, p. 125). Thévoz (2018, p. 132) recounted another incident in 1855 when "Lord Stanley maintained that the government's fall was kept secret to the last moment, but that he first heard of it at the Carlton, one hour before the news was made public." Journalists often reported such parliamentary gossip and rumors that they picked up in the surrounding clubland under what would subsequently be called the "Chatham House Rule," which maintained the anonymity of the speakers while detailing what was said and where (Thévoz, 2018, p. 134; The rule itself was coined in 1927 with no connection to Lady Chatham). For another thing, institutionalizing gossip legitimized the phatic function of reporting. In this it not only facilitated familiarity with politicians but may also have contributed to a sense of solidarity among the readers. Sharing gossip about a celebrity has been shown to provide a bonding experience; it demonstrated the readers' knowledge of accepted social norms without the social risks of gossiping about people from their own personal circle (Turcotte, 2012).

Gossip news satisfied a desire for entertainment alongside the appeal of a mysterious, inaccessible world of celebrity and high politics (Milne-Smith, 2009). Club gossip amplified anecdotes and jokes about the personal lives of politicians and thus influenced their popularity (Thévoz, 2018).

Club culture became a key intersection of publicity, sociability, and secrecy, as bemoaned by a contemporary journalist:

> Now that the newspaper market is crowded with journals that hope to live on mere personal gossip, not the smallest incident of club life or club scandal is permitted to pass out of memory without a recorder to hand it down to posterity. (Cited in Milne-Smith, 2009, p. 98)

As discussed by Milne-Smith (2009), elite clubmen and politicians wanted the world to know they had secrets to keep. Their private affairs were reported in the society journals in coded form, using "veiled references" and "hints and fragments of personal gossip," often with names omitted, "allowing only those who knew the particulars and personalities to understand the references" and to "get the joke, and those outside the privileged circle [to] remain in the dark" (Milne-Smith, 2009, p. 96). Even when the stories reported were mundane, the ability of insiders to unravel the coded meaning made them appealing. Milne-Smith (2009, p. 98) concluded that club gossip served to distinguish an elite male society "joined by secret stories and privileged information." To the extent that clubmen were able to craft their stories and control their circulation, gossip served to reify and manifest their social status and power.

These media practices functioned as "coded communication" (Kaplan, 2014), namely, the exchange of insiders' private expressions and gestures that are unintelligible to outsiders and whose actual content is less important than their exclusionary effect. However, it is also important to consider the inclusionary effect of gossip on the audience of readers. Coded communication is directed both inward and outward: internally, it reinforces a sense of privileged bond, as described above, while externally, the coded stories capture the readers' curiosity and aim to tease them and let them know that they are missing out. Their function is not to prevent the audience from information but to keep them engaged through the veiling mechanisms of gossip and public intimacy. Coded communication is, in other words, a way of bragging about a privileged relationship that others cannot join, and which is worth joining precisely for that reason.

Compared to instances of clubby public intimacy in which gossip remained within club walls, the significance of mediated public intimacy lay in its ability to harness gossip, personalized rhetoric, and other mechanisms of phatic communication in order to summon and mobilize the mass audience. Sharing seemingly confidential stories and scandals about politicians' relationships manifested a set of common norms held by the readers and reinforced their sense of community. The daily act of reading these stories in the newspapers might be compared to a public event. Indeed, Anderson (1991/1983, pp. 35–36) famously described the mass consumption of newspapers as a collective reading ritual that gave shared meanings to a selection of unrelated but concurrent events and enabled readers to imagine themselves living their lives in parallel to fellow citizens.

Missing from Anderson's (1991) account, however, is the significance of familiarity and sociability for forging this solidarity. As political stories were increasingly depicted through the vocabulary of personal life, readers became intimately familiar with the actions and motivations of the protagonists, sympathizing with the way that these prominent strangers interacted and performed socially (see also Rai, 2002). Moreover, the reporters addressed the readers as a third party to the personal interactions described in the story and created the impression that they all attended clubs, even if not those of the elite, and shared similar understanding and judgment about the norms of sociability. In this respect, mass public events—including mediated events such as the newspaper reading ritual—not only reaffirm participants' common knowledge and values but also concretize and extend their social networks and norms of sociability to a mass community. Unlike the gradual transformation of strangers into friends in the life of each participant, public events occasion feelings of collective intimacy that engender an instant transformation of strangers into confidants. However, in order for this leap of confidence to take place, participants must believe in the ability of others to form close-knit ties—a belief that could only develop through successful past experiences of friend-making in a variety of social institutions, in other words, through mundane performances of public intimacy. In this way, the collective newspaper reading ritual becomes a proxy for past experiences of social club sociability.

Conclusion

The rich scholarship on the modern public sphere has, following Habermas (1991), focused on new arenas of sociability detached from state authority. Little attention has been given to the ways in which state institutions such as the parliament facilitated the rise of civil society and fashioned processes of national integration along the lines of exclusive, aristocratic codes of male sociability. The increase in media coverage of the British parliament at the turn of the nineteenth century strengthened not only democratic processes but also people's sense of familiarity with their politicians. The shift from an institution providing advice and counsel to the king to an elected house of representatives accountable to the people was accompanied by transformations of sociability. To examine these changes and consider their implications, this article drew on an analytical distinction between two structures of performance and solidarity: social clubs and public events. The former structure is situated in interpersonal networks that are horizontal, dialogical, and decentralized and make no a priori distinction between performers

and viewers. The latter structure reflects a hierarchical, one-to-many communication linking audiences to a centralized public stage on which actors present social dramas (in line with Alexander's 2004 social performance approach). The opening of parliament to public scrutiny at the turn of the nineteenth century offers a good opportunity to explore what happens when the two structures of solidarity merge: when the exclusive "club of clubs" (Elazar, 1997, p. 248) turns into an ongoing public event and yet continues to operate as a club, albeit one that seemingly invites the mass audience to join.

To recap, in the first phase, prior to media exposure, members of parliament practiced patterns of sociability that I described as clubby public intimacy in which the audience consisted mainly of members themselves and gossip was contained within club walls. This performance was based on the communicative measures of privileged patrician orality and a rhetoric of sincerity. The MPs enacted sacred rituals which fused interpersonal ties with a sense of collective intimacy and in which they formed an embodied representation of the nation; yet, national identification beyond the elites was presumably limited. In the second phase, the spread of mass print culture led to parliament proceedings becoming an ongoing public event. This engendered a mediated form of public intimacy in which interactions among MPs were on public display. Gossip about the political elite became institutionalized as a legitimate form of reportage. Through the newspaper reading ritual, mass readers turned from strangers into confidants and reaffirmed shared norms of club sociability. In this way, civic and national solidarity became concretized in the form of personal ties: the combination of exclusivity and transparency increased not only the readers' familiarity with their political leaders but also their sense of involvement and emotional complicity—a central mechanism of national solidarity (Kaplan, 2018).

Going back to Alexander's (2004) theoretical distinction between premodern rituals and the complexity of modern theatrical performance, early parliament proceedings might be considered an example of a traditional ritual, with all participants of the political process taking part in the ceremonial performance and affirming their common and self-evident values. In turn, the new relationship developing between the nineteenth-century parliament and the media reflected a modern "social performance" (Alexander, 2004) where citizens gathered to watch specific political actors perform on the public stage, attempting to convince rather than take for granted their shared interests and values.

However, the modern parliament was not only an arena of social performance; it still remained a club. The club model was a central organizing principle of English and later British politics (Elazar, 1997) way before Habermas (1991) depicted the clubs and salons of the eighteenth-century public sphere as a new and independent political space. Indeed, an alternative perspective might suggest that, through its growing publicity, the parliament, the most politically influential club, became a model for other institutions and associations of civil society. Thus, during the nineteenth century, social clubs expanded significantly beyond aristocratic circles to the middle classes. Black (2012) described how, with the advent of the British Empire and the accompanying rise in living standards, membership in clubs enabled the new bourgeoisie to acquire higher social status by adopting the appropriate lifestyle, habits, and respectability associated with the aristocratic gentlemen's club. Moreover, the approach of some of the new clubs to publicity followed the parliament's lead. For example, the first academic associations, such as the Political Economy Club founded in 1821, were modeled on the political clubs and closely aligned to parliamentary circles; alongside internal club debates over scientific theories, members reached out to the public through the publication of periodicals (Gabay, 2007).

While the historic relationship between the spread of clubs and nation building requires further study, I tentatively propose that feelings of collective solidarity are rooted in the historical dissemination and expansion of social club sociability across wider echelons of society. Many modern social institutions, ranging from public schools and military units to civic associations and social media platforms, operate as a form of club that brings together strangers and turns them into confidants (Kaplan, 2018). Having participated in a range of clubs in the course of their lives, citizens thus share overlapping social networks and learn common norms of sociability. Along these lines, I have elsewhere outlined how mechanisms of public intimacy operating in contemporary social media interactions on Facebook and Tweeter function as a collective performance which constantly reproduces mass solidarity as an imagined community of friends (Kaplan, 2021).

Rather than assuming that the rise of civil society consisted of a break from aristocratic political institutions, I suggest that the parliament, which fused personal interactions with collective meanings and combined a structure of club membership with a mass social performance, became a central model of sociality and solidarity for other social institutions and, eventually, for the nation-state as a whole. The same mechanisms of public intimacy operated in additional clubs and public events beyond parliament and state politics and contributed to the reproduction of solidarity. By employing a complex interplay between exclusion and inclusion, secrecy and disclosure, the combination of clubby and mediated public intimacy served to create a sense of collective intimacy. It anchored feelings of mass solidarity in the concretization of social relations, thus rescaling society to the size of a club and conferring sacred national meaning on mundane club procedures. In this way, modern national

solidarity has remained an exclusive, aristocratic-like sentiment but takes the form of an inclusive network of friends.

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