CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Will the Public Sphere Survive?

MINORITY MEDIA AND COMMUNITARIANISM

The changes that took place in Israeli society were not confined to the collapse of the old party system, as in many European countries. During this period a new sectorial social structure was also formed, whereby various cultural groups competed over the definition of the collective identity and the nature of the new political order. The upper echelons — the possessors of political, economic, and symbolic resources, who profited from globalization — continued to stay in the loci of power of the media-centered democracy and to preserve their status. The co-cultures — the minority groups and the lower classes — did not have access to the new forms of power and needed to find other political mechanisms for expressing their interests, voicing their needs for recognition and identity, influencing the policy sphere, and shaping the social and symbolic order.

Neopopulism was one of the practices that appealed to many people in these groups. They joined the antihegemonic bloc and followed the telepopulist leader Netanyahu, challenging the social order and seeking a radical change in the system. But telepopulism had some outstanding disadvantages, one of which was the nature of parasocial relations with the leader. Neopopulism did not meet the need for strong community ties and clear identification with a solid social framework. This was what the new sectorial structure could offer: membership of a cultural group with a deep sense of affiliation based on grounds perceived as primordial, such as ethnic origin, language, extended family ties, and above all close cooperation in systems that supply vital social services.

The sociocultural movements of the 1990s in sectorial Israel embraced this communitarian solution. These movements also assumed a political aspect, resembling the "camp parties" that had existed during the pre-state period (Lissak 1998). Shas was the most prominent example of these sociocultural movements. Within a short period of time, Shas successfully established an extensive framework of social services, similar to non-Jewish fundamentalist movements, which included educational and health services, employment, housing, and welfare. Other sectors varied in their levels of development, with the small media playing a major role in consolidating a new social movement, building up the status of the leadership and functioning as a tool of mobilization and social control. These media helped to define the collective boundaries by fighting with the "other" — particularly the groups that occupied the old national center.

In this case, the familiar role of the Israeli media in the dynamic process of collective identity construction occurred not at the nation-state level but at the subnational level of cultural groups, minorities, or diasporic communities (Riggins 1992: 2). In the same way that the particularist media helped the creation of an Iranian diaspora in California (Naficy 1993), the gay press reinforced the collective identity of the gay community in the United States (Gross 1993), and the black media aided the emergence of a black public sphere in Chicago (Herbst 1994; see also Dayan 1996b: 109), the minority media in Israel instituted the sectorial discourse and strengthened the particularist collective identity of the various cultural and co-cultural groups.

This analysis of the minority media evidently supports the constructivist view in media research. In contrast to the instrumentalist approach, which regards the media as a vehicle used by the group to disseminate its message, the constructivist approach argues that the media influence the construction processes of the group itself. Proponents of this approach argue that the action of the media is not measured by the extent to which the group succeeds in using them to spread its messages, but by the way in which the media's coverage of the group shapes its self-constitution (Zoonen 1996).

If the elections of 1996 were marked by the advent of a new telepopulist leader and influenced by his leadership style, the 1999 elections revealed the drawing power of the communitarian solution. Combined, the two major parties that represented the old center lost twenty-one seats, having already lost eighteen in 1996, and now together commanded not more than forty-five seats, the lowest number ever. The real victory in the elections was that of the various co-cultures, which bore the flag of the communitarian alternative. Invited by Barak to join his government, they did not reject his offer on the spot, despite their vastly different political opinions. The possibility of gaining a share in the national budget in order to supply services directly to their members seemed much more important to the leaders of these parties than the overall national issues with which Barak was concerned, such as the peace talks.[1]

The establishment of particularist media systems in each of the co-cul-

tures puts great pressure on the public sphere, threatening it with disintegration and fragmentation. The picture that emerged at the end of the 1990s was one of a fierce struggle over control of the general public sphere while at the same time questioning its centrality and simultaneously strengthening the small public spheres, the "public micro-spheres" (Dahlgren 1994), or "sphericules" (Gitlin 1999). These developments raise a major question as to the effects of the segmentation of the public sphere: Does such fragmentation of the public sphere testify to the weakness of the mechanisms of solidarity and social integration, to the point of collapsing the common ethos and disintegrating Israeli society?

The fear of the minority media's disintegrative effect in Israel reflects a state of mind that prevailed among media scholars in the 1990s, especially in the United States. Many media scholars feared that the development of the new media and the rapid spread of broadcasting would lead to diminution of the national commitment and fragmentation of the collective culture. The empirical data particularly from the United States (Turow 1997) and the concept of disintegration or even loss of the public sphere (Habermas 1989) deepened this fear.[2] In Israel, the concern about the proliferation of channels was expressed by Elihu Katz (1996), whose argument merits special attention:

> With the rapid multiplication of channels, television has all but ceased to function as a shared public space. . . . Unlike the replacement of radio by television, as radio underwent a similar process of segmentation, there is no new medium in the wings to replace television that is likely to promote national political integration. . . . Thus is mass democracy deprived of its last common meeting grounds, and . . . cohesion of the nation-state itself is in jeopardy. (Katz 1996: 22)

Katz sees this as particularly relevant with regard to Israel:

> Television served Israel as a powerful unifying force. It deepened the sense of attachment to the center both in its focus on collective concerns and in its communal way of doing so. . . . The years of monopolistic public television in Israel have almost certainly had an effect on the forging of the national identity, enhancing the sense of belonging, promoting civil religion and the continuity of traditional sentiments. . . . The new era of segmentation will support the growing liberal spirit of individualism, self-fulfillment, hedonism, and privatization. By definition it will not do much good to altruism, patriotism, collectivity orientation, ideological politics, or the civic need for a shared public space. (Katz 1996: 22–32)

Katz, more than others, expressed concern about the fragmentation and segmentation of the Israeli public sphere and the extinguishing of the "tribal bonfire." As a world-renowned media scholar who was also as a practitioner (he headed the team that set up Israeli television at the end of the 1960s), Katz was associated with the "social development" school, a prevalent sociological paradigm of that period. This was a time when the development of new societies in the "third world" was at its height, being at the end of the decolonization period. Like other scholars, Katz saw television as a major tool for national integration and nation building.

To Katz, the loss of the "tribal bonfire," around which most Israelis sat every evening and shared in interpreting the common text with its repeated stress on the characteristics and contents of the collective identity, was the loss of the public sphere, which he saw as a condition for the shared existence. The media revolution scattered the Israelis into many small groups, each in its own territory, each within its closed boundaries. Katz saw the Israeli phenomenon as a particular case of the postmodern process that many contemporary societies were undergoing, notably the United States. But was he right? Is there really no difference between the Israeli and American cases? Regardless of the comparison, three questions are pertinent here. First, does the proliferation of channels mean division and destruction of the public sphere? Second, is Israeli society really more divided today than in the past? Third, does the minority media's restructuring of the collective identity of the various co-cultures inevitably lead to the dismantling of the overall social bonds?

The salient difference between the American and the Israeli case is that in the United States the audience was divided by narrowcasting (Turow 1997). The aim of this technique is to create "consumer groups," classified by age, gender, interests, values, or taste, based on differential consumption patterns, in order to focus on the advertisement of products preferred by specific, and thus relatively limited, groups of consumers. Even the division into ethnic or cultural groups stemmed largely from commercial considerations. Mass audiences have been divided into distinct groups for the purposes of gearing certain products and services toward these targeted groups.

This is not, however, the case in Israel, and the critical difference between the two results mainly from the size of the market, that is the difference between a market of 6 million and another of 280 million. More importantly, niche marketing prevails in the United States, and consequently consumer groups are created by the advertisers. In the case of Israel, however, these are cultural groups whose members maintain interactions within the group and share interests and a consciousness of a common identity. The groups in the United States are "conceptual categories" (Meyrowitz 1993: 44), which are fluid and are constantly shifting, while in Israel they are identity groups, some of them traditional, combining ethnic origin, a cultural system, and a community base.[3]

In terms of consumption of political media, there lies another difference between Israel and the United States. In the United States, "mass audiences have been broken down or segmented in the present era into strategic

groups for which highly personalized messages and delivery systems are constructed by the growing ranks of pollsters, strategists, and spin doctors who work behind the scenes of modern democracies" (Bennett and Entman 2000: 17). The difference is that 70 percent of the American public receive most of their political information solely from television (Entman 1989: 23), and if they watch one channel that is geared only to them they will not know exactly what was broadcast on another channel, while in Israel most TV viewers also read a daily paper. Thus, it is hard to speak of a process of atomization of this society due to differential media consumption.

Has the proliferation of channels really led to the disappearance of the one public sphere? The reasoning is that so long as there was one national television channel in Israel, most of the population viewed the same news broadcast every evening. In 1990, 63 percent of households viewed the news broadcast. The establishment of the multichannel structure split this population, with more of them now watching the news on Channel 2. Altogether some 40 percent watch the nightly newscasts (Katz and Haas 1995; Tokatly 2000: 239).

These figures are problematic, particularly with regard to the earlier period, because of the changes in measurement methods over the years. In the 1970s the measurement procedure was "time budgeting," that is to say, respondents were asked to complete diaries detailing all their activities during a twenty-four-hour period. In the 1980s telephone interviews were used and the questions were based on "recall" ("Did you watch the news last night?"). In the late 1990s, another method (the "people meter") was introduced and used (Adir Cohen 1999).

Furthermore, one may ask, does viewing the news on two separate channels mean viewing two different newscasts, thus providing no basis for a joint discourse of the two viewing groups? This argument would be valid if there were a significant difference between the broadcasts, and someone seeing one of them did not know what was in the other. But that is not the case. The convergence process has eliminated the difference; the items in the lineup of both broadcasts are similar, about 80 percent of the items appear nightly in both, and the same people are interviewed on both channels. In fact, they participate in the same discourse.

More important is the argument that it is not the television newscast alone that forms the Israeli tribal bonfire, but rather the sum total of the political broadcasts, including programs on current events and talk shows. From this point of view, the Israeli public sphere has not shrunk due to the proliferation of channels; it has grown, just as it grew in other places due to the blurring of genres (Bennett and Entman 2001: 21). The conclusion is that the fear of disintegration of the public sphere as a result of commercial multichannel television appears to be unfounded.

IN WHAT DIRECTION WILL THE PLURALISTIC STRUCTURE DEVELOP?

Is Israeli society in the twenty-first century more polarized than it was in the past? Arguably it was no less divided in previous years, but the division was less visible. The press, the main communication medium during the pre-state period and the first ten years of the state, was no less divided during the era of parallelism. For example, at that time it would not have occurred to an ultraorthodox Jew from Jerusalem to read *Al Hamishmar*, or to a Mapai kibbutz member to read *Hamodia*. Even when the consociational arrangements were weakened and Israeli society appeared to be growing more homogeneous, the dividing lines between the various co-cultures still remained below the surface. The illusion of unity was created because of the hegemony of the dominant camp and its control of the national culture.

But the fact that Kol Israel newsreaders, for example, spoke only in a "correct" Hebrew accent does not mean that there were not broad groups that spoke in different accents, in a Yiddish dialect or a French-Moroccan accent. By the same token, does the fact that Kol Israel avoided broadcasting Mizrahi music indicate the absence of a large consumer market for this cultural product? In fact, it was precisely because of Kol Israel's virtual ban of this music that the alternative industry of taped Mizrahi music flourished.

The hegemony hid the division but did not eliminate it. As co-culture theory argues, "The mainstream media have tended to ignore ethnic minorities or to present them essentially in terms of social problems they create for the majority" (Riggins 2001: 2). The dominant groups in society view the minority groups negatively and ignore them. They create communication systems that reflect their hegemonic status and force the weaker groups to adjust to an inferior and marginal state (Orbe 1998: 11), in which their experiences are often made invisible by the pervasiveness of the dominant culture. The fact that the dominant culture did not succeed in bringing the other cultural groups to accept it and become assimilated in it led to the "revolt of the peripheries" in the 1990s.

Thus, what happened was not the deepening of social divisions but the undermining of the foundations of social solidarity and enfeeblement of some of the mechanisms of conflict resolution and management. The end of the dominant party regime, the creation of a competitive bipolar system, the political impasse, and the ongoing crisis generated by the colonial situation are some of the causes. At the same time, there was growing recognition of the existence of the divisions, awareness of conflicts,

and concern about their consequences. These were certainly influenced by the media, for the simple reason that the media exposed them and gave voice to them.

In the old sectorial society, in which contact between secular and ultra-orthodox Jews was minimal, there was less awareness of the divisions. When representatives of both camps sat around the table haranguing each other on a televised political talk show, many more became aware of the actual depth of the division and started fearing its potential dangers. Although exposing conflicts and divisions through the media does not cause social segmentation, it does bring about the mobilization of counterforces by raising awareness of existing divisions and conflicts.

A different but much more significant question is whether the cultivation of separate cultural identities in separate media systems strengthens disintegrative processes. The concern expressed in "and deliver us from segmentation" is that the fostering of the separate identities will destroy national unity. This was the underlying concern of the advocates of the melting-pot approach that prevailed in Israel until the 1990s, and this was the justification for the assimilationist approach, the attempt to eliminate cultural differences, causing them to lose any distinctive characteristic in order to fit the dominant cultural group. For this reason, the assimilationists opposed every separate ethnic cultural organization. But surely national integration can be achieved by other means than the melting pot. A strategy of accommodation — the development of appreciation, independence, and communication skills to effectively work with persons from other cultures — seems to be a possible alternative. Functioning from this perspective requires that the dominant structures reinvent, or at least change the rules, so that they incorporate the life experiences of each co-cultural group (Orbe 1998: 15). There are some who believe that this is definitely possible:

> There is no doubt that the maintenance of diversity may involve a rejection of universalism. . . . It may foster the decline of that universalist model of the nation-state. . . . Yet particularistic motives are not doomed from the beginning. They can involve a rejection of universalism but not necessarily so. In fact, the discourse of particularism is far from monolithic. The media that insure the continued survival of certain groups tend to offer these groups competing versions of their identity. Some are lethal, some are not. There are many types of particularist rhetoric, and many ways of mediating the knowledge required for community construction. Constructing identities, and maintaining identities, involves various processes. (Dayan 1996: 105)

This argument is also supported by empirical research. Naficy, for example, who studied groups of Iranian émigrés in California, showed how their microspheres served as a stage in the process of their entrance into the national sphere. "Far from exclusivity protecting traditional lifestyles, the construction of exile cultures served as a rite of passage into, and an instrument of acculturation to, the host society" (Dayan 1998: 110).

A similar debate arose in the 1990s, following the massive immigration from the former Soviet Union. In the ongoing public discourse — but also in the academic, particularly sociological, discourse — two voices could be heard. One argued that the fact that the Russian-speaking immigrants trying so hard to preserve their cultural identity, unlike previous immigrants, testified to their wish to remain separate from Israeli society, to "ghettoization," and was liable to erode the national bonds (Lissak and Leshem 1995). The second voice argued that this was a new pattern of integration, replacing the previous acculturation pattern, which had involved the old identity components.

This new pattern creates a new breed of "Israelis with a Russian flavor." There are Russian-Israelis, to borrow Gitlin's play on words, and "the affirmation of the left side of the hyphen becomes a way of affirming the right side" (Gitlin 1998: 173). In the same way, there are Palestinian Israelis or ultraorthodox Israelis. According to this view, when Israelis recognized the fact that there is more than one way of being Israeli they also reached the awareness that it is possible to maintain a new pattern of national integration, accepting the existence of various breeds side by side, without attempting to destroy the uniqueness of any of them.[4]

Now that the melting-pot approach has gone, what will replace it? In what direction will Israeli society develop and what will be the nature of its pluralism? Smolicz's schematic structure presents the range of possibilities. He discerns six strategies for relating to different cultural groups: assimilation, cultural diversity, residual multiculturalism, transitional pluralism, segregation, and interactive multiculturalism (Smolicz 1981, 1997). In the period of mass immigration in the early years of the state, the assimilation strategy was unquestioningly adopted, both by the authorities and by the immigrants themselves. However, concepts such as "melting pot" and "generation of the wilderness," which characterized the 1950s, disappeared in the 1970s, and by the 1990s had become negative points of reference, "the mistakes of the 1950s" (Leshem and Lissak 1998).

With time, cultural diversity gained legitimacy, albeit to a limited extent, and mainly from an ethnographic, folklorist standpoint. The Arabs were still prohibited from fostering their political identity, and the southerners from fostering their ethnic identity. This has been described as culinary multiculturalism. Later, a growing number accepted the residual multiculturalism model, which is one step up in the acceptance of people's right to be different and preserve their distinct character. However,

those who hold these views are at heart advocates of transitional pluralism: they believe that diversity is a temporary phenomenon that will pass when the generation of the wilderness disappears and a new generation grows up speaking Hebrew (Horowitz and Leshem 1998: 303).

By contrast, in the 1990s, a demand arose for the first time in Israel, that the principles of interactive multiculturalism — which sees coexistence, cross-fertilization, and mutual enrichment as the best solutions to pluralism — be adopted. From this point of view the Russian immigrants' impact on Israeli culture was quite revolutionary. The stated wish of these immigrants to preserve their culture and their language, and to pass them on to their children, was a significant factor in the development of interactive pluralism. They were supported in this by the popularity of multicultural ideas brought to Israel by the intellectual and cultural elite. In a society based on multicultural principles, the minority media can fill its dual role without its two components being perceived as an irreconcilable contradiction. On the one hand, the minority media contribute to ethnic cohesion and cultural maintenance; on the other hand, they may also encourage the assimilation of their audience to mainstream values (Riggins 1992: 4).

The question of language is also critical. In the 1950s the "imparting the language" campaign was more than just an endeavor to teach the new immigrants Hebrew; it was also pressure to stop the use of foreign languages, as part of the process of severing the immigrants from their Diaspora past and of building the new nation. The official policy also influenced the social norms, and Israelis were sometimes coerced into changing their family names and adopting new Hebrew names. For the same reason, foreign-language newspapers were held in contempt, even though some of Israel's best journalists wrote for them.

The Russian speakers were the first group of immigrants who used political tools to fight for official recognition of their language, so much so that in the 14th Knesset a private bill was submitted to make Russian one of Israel's official languages. For the first time in the history of immigration in Israel, these immigrants established a parallel education system of supplementary studies operating in the afternoon, with the lessons conducted in Russian. The proliferation of Russian-language newspapers can be seen not only as a means of supplying information to those who do not speak Hebrew but also as an educational effort to preserve the language. Therefore, they are likely to survive for the foreseeable future.

The question of language applies also to some of the other co-cultures. The nonuse of Hebrew among the Palestinian cultural group is not so much due to lack of knowledge as to the intention to preserve this distinguishing cultural component. Similarly, the prohibition on using the mainstream media among the ultraorthodox is designed to seal off the

boundaries between their community and society at large, which inevitably intensifies the use of the alternative, minority media. Thus in the 1990s, the period of growth and flourishing of co-cultures and of the sectorial structure, the proportion of foreign-language dailies and periodicals in Israel rose considerably.[5]

THE MEDIA IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

The key to the question of solidarity and integration in Israeli society is to be found less in the growth of the number of commercial channels in the national media, and much more in the direction of development of the minority media. The concern expressed by Katz recalls a similar situation in the mid-1970s, when local newspapers began to spring up and it was feared that they would "cause a decline in the centralizing power of the national establishments," or "consolidation of a local identity" (Caspi and Limor 1992: 69). In a small country like Israel, with its centralized government structure and national rather than localized problems, these fears soon proved to be groundless.[6]

Nevertheless, in the near future, the minority media and their relations with the national media might have a greater impact on how pluralism develops in Israel. The extent to which the minority media foster animosity and alienation toward the national media, or avoid doing so, will affect the development of Israeli pluralism in the direction of multiculturalism, segregation, or even disintegration. An examination of the Russian-language press conducted in 1995 found indications of three approaches toward the host society: adaptation, segregation, and integration (Lissak and Leshem 1995). Thus, various possible directions of development exist.

The attitudes of minority media tend to be influenced by the attitudes of the national media toward the co-cultures, and many studies conducted worldwide show that the tendency is usually to ignore these cultures (Riggins 1992). Hitherto, this has been the case with Israel.[7] The more the national media give expression to the representatives of the various co-cultures, reveal what happens within these groups, and reflect their symbolic order, the more the barriers dividing the sphericules will be relaxed.

If the national media ignore the co-cultures and the minority media — refraining from broadcasting their music, giving a stage to journalists and broadcasters from these co-cultures, or covering what happens in their communities — these groups will increasingly turn to their internal media and become alienated from the national media. In addition, the spiral of ignorance of the majority concerning the cultural enclaves will grow, deepening the misunderstanding and antagonism toward them.

There was a dramatic precedent for this in the 1990s. In retrospect, one of the major shortcomings of the national media in Israel was their failure to describe social and cultural developments affecting the immigrants from the former Soviet Union who arrived in such large numbers. Consequently, Israeli society at large remained unaware of developments affecting close to one-fifth of the population, and policymakers were completely blind to these issues. Therefore, the important developments in this cultural enclave, including their political organization and their success in the elections to the 14th Knesset, were unanticipated.

If the co-cultures have access to the mainstream media, even if the minority media continue to coexist alongside the mainstream media, the minority media is more likely to complement the national media instead of being antagonistic toward them. In this context, the national media's ability to use, or even create, common identity symbols, even of a "virtual" nature, will be very important. The fact that these symbols will be polysemic, capable of interpretation in various ways, is not necessarily negative. On the contrary, it has the advantage of permitting social solutions in the spirit of "constructive ambiguity."[8]

The difference in the professional cultures of the mainstream media and the minority media is one of the factors that affect their relations. A basic principle among journalists of the national media is "the public's right to know." This does not apply to the ultraorthodox media, however. "We repudiate this principle and we are proud of the public's right not to know. . . . We will give information only up to the point where it might violate our principles," wrote Moshe Akiva Druk, editor of the ultraorthodox *Hamodia*, in March 1986 to Education Minister Yitzhak Levy (Levy 1989: 247). The general press is characterized by negative writing. "With us it is forbidden to write bad news about crime, sex, and the like." And Rivka Flok, a journalist who writes for ultraorthodox newspapers, offers an explanation for this policy: "Exposure arouses devils and increases crime."[9]

That is why journalists in the religious press willingly accept the decisions of the "supreme council," which represents the community leadership, sitting every evening in the editorial room and serving as the final arbiter of what will be published and what rejected. This is a practice that is completely in contradiction with the principle of professional autonomy of the national press. While the national media embrace the principle of even-handedness, giving the injured party the right to react, the minority media object to this. "That approach, whereby every attitude also has a legitimate opposing attitude, is exactly what leads you to relativism. We have one clear truth."[10]

This is exactly the phenomenon described by White in his work on differing conceptions of professionalism in the mainstream and minority media. Because minority media are more concerned with journalists' responsibility to a community or movement, there may be active rejection of autonomous professionals, whose standards are set internally, in favor of a participatory approach to communication that welcomes citizen input. The result may not necessarily be the most objective reporting of events (White 1989).

Basic principles upheld by a large part of the minority media are unacceptable to journalists in the national media, who relate to such a professional code in the same way as hegemonic groups in liberal democracies relate to traditional, nonliberal practices in their co-cultures, such as kosher slaughter of animals, clitoridectomy, or the arranged marriage of young girls. "I accept multiculturalism, provided that they behave according to liberal game rules," said Avirama Golan, a columnist in *Haaretz*.[11] Is it possible to bridge such a deep normative gap?

In the past decade this question has increasingly occupied the multicultural discourse, which distinguishes between shallow and deep multiculturalism. The solution is easy in the case of shallow multiculturalism, where cultural differences are tempered by the acceptance of liberal principles. But to what extent can a liberal society accept the existence of nonliberal codes in the name of multiculturalism? Can there also be deep multiculturalism, in which liberal cultures live side by side with nonliberal ones?

Yael Tamir believes that this is possible (Tamir 1998), and in her opinion such coexistence does not match some moral principle but constitutes a compromise solution that suits the interests of both sides. This is a modus vivendi that is achieved by the liberal community out of respect for the other, and by the nonliberal community out of recognition of its inferior status. The liberals will lower their demands and expectations regarding the kind of agreements they can achieve with nonliberal groups, while the latter will understand that compromise is the best solution because all the alternatives are worse.

This solution is feasible in a sectorial society, but only on one condition: although not all the groups sharing a public sphere have to be committed to the basic principles of liberal democracy, they do have to share in the consensus regarding the constitutional order. Not every stable democracy has a consensus on liberal principles; however they do possess social mechanisms that enable them to prevent the nonliberal movements from destroying liberal democracy, as happened in Germany or Italy between the two world wars. For example, there is the Scandinavian experience, when some of the symbols of the protofascist movements were "domesticated" and integrated into the parliamentary tradition. The same thing happens in the United States, where even fascist or religious