PART I

Patterns of Civility

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The Limits of Civil Society and the Path to Civility

The Origins of Modern Civil Society

In order to pursue the exploration sketched in the Introduction, the sociology of Islam should perform a preliminary step. It should contribute to replace a politically overloaded idea of civil society reflecting Western aspirations and postulates with a more malleable, yet historically sound and transculturally plausible, concept of civility. We should distill an adequate notion of civility out of the waves that have recurrently pushed up the banner of civil society, until the end of the 20th century.

The idea of civility binds together and, as it were, balances knowledge and power, innovative potential and institutional crystallization, against each other. However, we cannot ignore that civility, however reformulated here with a view to its usefulness for the sociology of Islam, comes to us heavily filtered through the more specific, integrated, and therefore strongly one-sided articulation and theorization of the historic Western concept of civil society. Due to the genealogy itself of Western social sciences, civility appears as first integrated into a full-fledged, and to a large extent modern, concept of society. This concept has been in turn modeled on specific, hegemonic Western trajectories, most notably those originating from North-Western Europe.

Surely in order to reconstruct a rather transversal notion of civility and emancipate it from its dependence on a unilateral Western heritage one needs to take into account non-Western experiences and trajectories. The inevitable tension between the need to start from an integrated Western

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model (or, as we will see, 'dream') of civil society and the goal of achieving a transculturally more suitable concept of civility is reflected in the fact that, as stated by Şerif Mardin, civil society "does not translate into Islamic terms. Civility, which is a latent content of civil society, does, but these two are not interchangeable terms" (Mardin 1995: 279). Translated into operational terms, this means that we need to explore the extent to which a transversal idea of civility can be extracted or redeemed, as it were, from the hegemonic model of civil society and put to the service of a more global vision, and specifically to a non-Eurocentric approach to Islam. The fact that since the end of the 18th century the Western notion of civil society has been gradually ingrained into the hegemonic processes that allowed for a climax in the Western exercise of power and knowledge over the non-Western world makes this move even more necessary, though also difficult.

Let us start by recalling that although first theorized by different branches of the European Enlightenment, civil society experienced a strong and sudden revival during the 1990s (most representative of it, Cohen and Arato 1992). It rapidly became a privileged tool, both conceptually and practically, for covering the emerging aspirations to democratic transformations within the Muslim world. In introducing his seminal two-volume *Civil Society in the Middle East*, Augustus Norton defined civil society as the icon of democracy:

> If democracy has a home, it is in civil society, where a mélange of associations, clubs, guilds, syndicates, federations, unions, parties and groups come together to provide a buffer between state and citizen … The functioning of civil society is literally and plainly at the heart of participant political systems.
> (Norton 1995: 7)

This strategic opening to the concept of civil society in the study of both Muslim-majority societies and of transnational forms of Islam occurred in the wake of the collapse of the authoritarian regimes of Eastern and East-Central Europe belonging to the so-called Soviet bloc. The idea of civil society was quite swiftly adopted by movements within Muslim-majority societies, from the Arab world to Southeast Asia, in the popular struggles against overtly autocratic or pseudo-democratic regimes, variably associated with the ongoing neoliberal globalization (Hefner 2000). In cases like that of Egypt, where the regime claimed a democratic legitimacy by holding parliamentary elections curtailed by state violence, intimidation, and fraud, the act of raising the banner of civil society pointed out that democratization

can never be a top-down concession of autocratic cliques. Democratization rather needs—so the message goes—a bottom-up process that starts at the level where associations, unions, parties, but also informal groups (the ensemble of which, it was remarked, constitutes civil society), are formed in order to represent citizens' grievances and claims to distant and exploitative state authorities.

This surging enthusiasm for civil society as a panacea against corruption and authoritarianism in the Muslim world and particularly in the Middle East was clearly misplaced. This was partly due to the fact that many of the same Western governments and donors that were ostensibly supportive of the ideal were in fact undermining it through the continued support of authoritarian regimes. Yet there was an even deeper contradiction to this facile operationalization of civil society that was revealed by the ways through which much too often aid policies weakened rather than strengthened the associational bonds of basically spontaneous cooperation (Salvatore 2011). In this context, civil society, which had been reconceived as the privileged arena for preparing democratic transformations, shrank into a mere logo impressed on the business cards of a new generation of professionally staffed non-governmental organizations committed to public advocacy around often narrow questions of good practices and policy optimization (Challand 2011). The encompassing idea initially written on the banner proved hardly suitable to enable activists and citizens to grapple with the larger questions surrounding the essentially undemocratic and inequitable nature of regimes and their political economies. Yet while the promise of civil society, increasingly identified with Western-certified NGOs, became less obviously regenerative, other potentially formative (and transformative) patterns of civility were still latent in the process. As Mardin warned, the one-sided and not seldom fraudulent nature of an imitative politicization of Western civil society—a notion that, as we will see, is already in itself (due to its origin and history) a hardly coherent platform of change—did not exclude that more complex and less streamlined articulations of civility through Islamic idioms could be gradually and honestly unveiled.

In the post-9/11 trajectory of the Muslim-majority world up to the Arab Spring, also due to the petering out of the latter's initial impetus, popular responses to oppressive state systems have become more nuanced. In this context, the extent to which ideas and practices of civility can facilitate democratic transformations beyond the one-sidedness of European models of civil society's functional interactions with modern, Westphalian states

has been subject to reappraisal (Gervasio 2014). In parallel, there have been attempts to critically reframe ideas of the civic glue of the social bond in a historically more diversified perspective that has shown the inherent limits of a sheer application of the civil society model to potentially every locale on a global scale (Challand 2011; Volpi 2011). Particularly, the 2000s have been important for inflicting a dystopian twist to the more specifically Western 'dream' of civil society, due to its slipping toward thin conceptions of market democracy often forcefully married to the rhetoric on the War on Terror. Let us, in this chapter, take stock and analyze the historical precedents and ideological bias that make the construct of civil society a far cry from being a limpid, universally extendable site of societal self-empowerment.

In order to understand the lopsided effects of the mere extension of a revived notion of civil society on the Muslim-majority world since the 1990s, it is important to fully grasp how the weakness of the theory is coextensive to its potential strength in depicting an exceptional development in parts of Western Christendom across the epoch conventionally dubbed the Enlightenment. The idea of civil society envisions a society whose constituting ties are shaped by the prevalence of politeness and affection rather than violence and fear. This notion is not the innocent pleonasm that it appears at first sight. The concept imbues the construction itself of society, which can be hardly taken for granted, with the no less problematic attribute of civility. This, in turn, is intended as both the outcome and the engine of a continual social process that tames violence by facilitating the inculcation of proper codes of behavior and cooperation in the members of society. While society and civility appear in themselves as contested concepts, predicating society through civility construes the former as a stable, functional, and cohesive entity almost by default. This is true to the extent that society appears organized in a civil way, namely according to modalities that restrict and ultimately prevent recourse to arbitrary violence. On the positive side, a society thus made civil provides, according to the theory, agency, rights, and ultimately the benefits and entitlements of citizenship to its members. Ernest Gellner, one of the major theorists of civil society throughout its late 20th-century revival, maintained that the red thread unfolding through a variety of Western definitions of civil society is a "highly specific," and in this sense not easily replicable view of the social bond among individuals as "unsanctified, instrumental, revocable." According to Gellner, civil society is a highly modern construct to the extent that it relies on ad hoc associations and cooperations which overcome any traditional, indissoluble bonds and dependences among individuals (Gellner 1995: 42).

The process underlying what appears as a well-rounded conception of civil society reflects quite immediately the experience of modern transformations in North-Western Europe, most notably of Scotland, particularly in the 18th century. According to this conception, society can be sufficiently civilized only under quite exceptional conditions like the prevalence of secure frameworks for the implementation of the law and the guarantee of contracts. Ultimately, in the words of Gellner, this condition is reflected in the acceptance of the "tyranny of kings" over the "tyranny of cousins." Through this suggestive formula he emphasized the Westphalian regimes' capacity to effectively overcome bonds of kin and build an (even if initially despotic) enlightened, centralized rule. It clearly emerges from this formula that, paradoxically perhaps, civil society is premised on the prevalence of a political regime over the autonomy of the social bond. It is also important to stress that the interests and aspirations of an emerging commercial and industrial bourgeoisie were decisive in supporting the process. To prevail in the process is exactly the type of modern power (first absolutist, then liberal, finally democratic) that enables the individual to pursue her interests. This can only occur within a legal framework gravitating around a law of contract ultimately secured by the Westphalian state's monopolization of force, operating alongside the administration of society through a well-functioning bureaucracy. This monopolization purportedly extinguishes tribal or clan-based forms of social power and control (the "tyranny of cousins"). These indeed provide the allegedly premodern socio-political background against which Scottish views of civil society took form.

Mardin (1995) echoes Gellner (1995) in evidencing the specificity, even the peculiarity, of the Western dream of civil society. The Turkish scholar stressed that what needs to be carefully analyzed are not only the factors that make society civil. One also needs to focus on what habilitates society itself to provide the cohesive yet innerly differentiated macro-dimension of the social bond. Mardin agrees with Gellner in seeing civil society as the foil of the prevalence of forms of cohesiveness transcending bonds of kin and locality. Underneath the formulaic emphasis on individuals and rights, the genie in the lamp of civil society is in the empowerment of agents to autonomous action and the pursuit of their interests via benefiting from a legal frame that does not fully absorb, and so risk to hijack, individual creativity and freedom.

Nonetheless, this view is a dream, according to Mardin, in that it presupposes that the state can steadily project a protective shadow on individual interactants without degenerating into becoming an intrusive despot. This

condition is not necessarily matched by the way modern bureaucracies work. Yet it is even more of a dream since the factors of cohesion which allow individuals to be bound to each other socially while pursuing their particular interests are assumed to reside in factors other than the law or the individual rights that they exercise. Civil law can be an instrument of civil society, but the latter cannot be collapsed into the former, since it presupposes a type of agency that is non-legal or prelegal. There seems to be a mysterious factor that matches right with liberty: a factor so evanescent that Mardin can locate it only at the level of aspirations, if not wishful thinking (Mardin 1995).

As shown by Adam Seligman (1992; 2002), the crux of the idea of civil society lies in the fact that it presupposes ties of trust that it cannot actually produce or explain. This evanescence is reflected by the vague and even naïvely sounding postulation by the thinkers belonging to the so-called 18th-century Scottish Enlightenment of a natural sympathy or a 'moral sense' spontaneously binding even heterogeneous individuals, across class identities and status ascriptions. Individual interests are matched by reciprocal affections and ultimately mutual trust among individuals. According to Seligman it is particularly evident that the notion of trust underlying this view overstates the individual moral agency of social actors or at least its unitary character (see Silver 1997).

This reconstruction of the nature of the social bond goes back in particular to 18th-century Scottish thinkers like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Ferguson. The individual social agent is depicted as knowing her own interest and possessing a capacity to act autonomously, while also sharing a sense of affection and sympathy toward other individuals/agents. This nexus of sympathy between *ego* and *alter* provides the kernel to the type of bond that, if replicated on a macro-scale, constitutes civil society. If the agency presupposed by the model is overstated, the notion (and the glue) of civil society crumbles. As remarked by Alasdair MacIntyre, the trouble with this conception owes much to the fact that the theorized "moral sense," and its accompanying trust, are quite unexplainable in sociological terms. The activation of the mysterious sense requires a largely unilateral act of trust on the part of the social agent. Thus interaction presupposes individual agency, which however in turn requires trust. Since trust cannot be explained through interaction, it depends on a unilateral act, which looks like pure faith in disguise (MacIntyre 1984 [1981]: 229).

The key to civil society is therefore this unconditional, precontractual, quasi-pristine trust among private individuals. Its condition is the

above-mentioned agential capacity to recognize *ego*'s own interests and modulate them through the filter of a sense of affection for *alter*. Trust so defined is the only possible vehicle of cooperation among people outside of clearly defined, traditionally given, ascriptive roles. All too evidently its basis cannot be easily ascertained sociologically (cf. Seligman 1992: 44–5, 62). It remains little more than a moral imperative. We can start to understand how, if not a dream, as maintained by Mardin, civil society might be the outcome of a deceitful projection of the type of glue of the social bond that the Scottish moralists saw endangered by the rash transformations that led to the rise of commercial and industrial society—a process whose major epicenter was initially located in Scottish cities (primarily Glasgow) rather than in English ones.

Seligman has convincingly shown how this fragile view of civil society and its fundaments was the outcome of a gradual intervention on the ancient, medieval, and early modern natural law tradition. This tradition renewed itself over the centuries and within shifting socio-political conditions by placing an increasing stress on the rational basis of individual commitments to the contractually regulated social bonds. The rational, regulative framework becomes an even more highly integrative one when individuals—as in the modern societies increasingly characterized by commercial ties and a social division of labor—are ever more self-regulated automatons or scattered atoms. The transformation was premised on the alteration of the natural law tradition. To be natural now consists no longer in abiding by the law of human sociability, which postulates the spontaneous development of intersubjective cooperation and understanding between *ego* and *alter*. Rather, natural law is now a law of human attachment, sympathy, and affection activated by a principled, absolute, and autonomous agency of the subject as a fully autonomous *ego*-actor. This idea became a key condition for the modern concept of civil society to develop and enliven subsequent waves of social theory throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

The doubt, however, is about the extent to which this *ego*-centered agency is entirely a natural endowment, as maintained by the Scottish moralists, or rather the outcome of a process of education, if not disciplining, of the citizen to actively seek a cooperation with the fellow citizen (Foucault 1979). Within modern European conditions, the state was certainly active in inculcating such a cooperative attitude, which at the stage of the Scottish Enlightenment was still considered—in a yet (but lopsided) Aristotelian way—as a moral capacity. On the other hand, cooperation so defined was still short of circumscribing a full-fledged, organic form of

solidarity based on a rational social division of labor, as sociological theory will claim, particularly with Durkheim.

This theorization of a trust-based social bond as the kernel of civil society replaced a more traditional notion of the social space as a partnership of faith in God among individuals. This traditional view was the result of a reformulation of the Aristotelian approach filtered through the prism of the Roman Catholic natural law tradition, whose champion was Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). The alternate, emerging vision of the Enlightenment (Scottish or otherwise) preferred to stress rather new factors of cohesion in society, whose sociological moorings remained however suspended. What clearly emerged was a theological revision, or minimization, resulting from the new vision: the bond of trust now linked individuals without any divine mediation, mostly under the purview of a benevolent yet distant God. Yet as just highlighted, and not too surprisingly—given the Protestant and more particularly Calvinist background of such transformations, in Scotland as elsewhere—such an investment in trust de facto signified a highly irrational magnification of pure faith, which Aquinas had earlier yoked to Christian reason and virtues (faith being one of them).

This abridged and essentialized type of trust among individuals within civil society became the key to redefining a social bond increasingly exposed to the impersonality of factory work and of contract-based labor relationships within capitalist economies, and regulated by the faceless yet rational (at least in a Weberian sense) bureaucracies that during the 19th century replaced the arbitrary rule of absolutist autocrats. Civil society was considered in principle distinct from the modern state for resting on a pristine agency and trust, yet it fed into the latter's functioning almost via a symbiotic relationship. Optimally, civil society expresses legitimate interests and produces ties of solidarity, while the state guarantees the rules that protect those interests and provides a legal framework for warranting social order. Civil society is indeed the site of formation of largely autonomous citizens' associations, also including juries and militias (a type of association culminating in the modern 'police'), but these are then directly or indirectly reabsorbed under the domain of the state, via regulation if not incorporation.

Civil Society as a Site of Production of Modern Power

It would be far-fetched and anachronistic to impute this modern civilizing process entirely to a capillary intervention of the state (we will look more

deeply at the specific dimension of state agency and the law in the next volume). Not by chance some 20th-century social thinkers, including Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), have spoken of the invention of the social and society as a newly determined space within Western modernity, producing interdependent, disciplined subjects. These are linked to each other through a socially functional division of labor, which favors cohesion in the context of the potentially unrestrained pursuit of interests that is typical of commercial and industrial societies (Arendt 1958). Foucault himself observed that in the 18th century's theorization of civil society, the first key innovation resided in the purported autonomy of society itself. This autonomy is located in the working of a third, intermediate socio-political space that mediates between the needs of governance, a prerogative of the state, and the aspirations and interests of the private citizens (Foucault 1979).

We see here more clearly how civil society was born in the 18th century as a crucial space for the production of modern power, situated at the confluence of public and private law, and which the state decisively shaped, without controlling it entirely. The notion of civil society certainly presupposed a work of deconstruction of Aristotle's social theory performed by such authors as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704), who had earlier worked to discard the traditional natural law tradition. Yet the shaping of the new notion represented a leap forward from the work of these two key thinkers. They had still argued in terms of the state's prerogatives and individual liberties without the need to refer to an intermediate space. The trajectory itself of the Scottish moralists both culminated with and was overcome by Adam Smith (1723–1790), author of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1853 [1759]). It is particularly revealing to see how a fundamental author of Western social and economic theory like Smith both assimilated and undermined the idea of civil society shaped by his predecessors. He did so by closely building on the last champion of the Scottish moralists, namely Adam Ferguson (1723–1816), while prefiguring key elements of 19th- and even 20th-century social thought. Smith's intervention is symptomatic of the instability of an idea of a civil society relying on a moral sense of social actors. Just a few decades after its elaboration, the concept started to be eroded from within by an emerging logic of social interaction that the idea of civil society had initially attempted to integrate and neutralize in order to conceal and attenuate, as much as possible, the mutating notion of power underlying the interactive logic itself.

Competition of interests and wills and the social game aimed at buttressing individual reputation had been increasingly acknowledged, in the

second half of the 18th century, as formative of social interactions. This game was ultimately recognized as essentially constructive of the social bond by pointing out a factor, like the 'moral sense,' which manifested attraction and sympathy, and ultimately produced trust, between *ego* and *alter*, in spite of their potentially clashing interests. Apart from manifesting the benevolent orientation to other, and in this sense the altruistic component of social agency, the emerging trust was seen as essential and almost providential in facilitating contractual exchange among private individuals and so providing the necessary stability to social relationships spurned by the commercial and industrial revolutions. Thus even before Smith a sort of providential factor was seen to be at work in the process of production of society and in what makes it civil, cohesive, and disciplined.

The outcome, in social terms, of Adam Smith's interventions is a sociologically subtle redefinition of the primacy of the private sphere over both civil society and ultimately the public sphere as well (Salvatore 2007: 219–34). The prelegal engine of the process lies in the fact that a civilized, largely self-regulated formulation of individual interests is preventively channeled by socially interactive factors that can work both to moderate and to exalt those interests. This mechanism lies firstly in the plain anthropological fact that *ego* has to cope with *alter*, and secondly in the sociological constraint that the subject's interests would not subsist without the continuing existence (and, to some extent, wellbeing) of the other. Far from being just an occasional contract partner, the other provides a permanent screen to the self's projection of individual interests and identity. As stressed by Seligman, crucial in the process is not just the emergence of the autonomy of correctly modulated self-interest but also and even more the integrity of the self as such. The subject is now autonomous even from the virtuous dispositions and the orientation to a higher good that had characterized the traditional, Aristotelian conception of the social agent (Seligman 1992: 25–44). While such a traditional conception was still strong in Hutcheson, with Shaftesbury, and even more with Ferguson, the social mechanisms that single out the self in her entanglement with the other beyond sheer self-interest come to the fore with increasing vigor. These mechanisms culminate with Adam Smith in a coherent vision of the inner civilizing engine represented by the "moral sentiments," which now acquire a stronger socio-anthropological plasticity and plausibility than the prior vague "moral sense."

The engine of Smith's moral psychology, now turned into a challenging proto-sociology, is the cumulative power of the other's gaze. The hidden, yet

necessary, membrane of the moral sense appears now as nothing less than a highly sophisticated version of the Panopticon (as infamously theorized by Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century). Here each member of society, by becoming an impartial spectator, is both under surveillance and occupies the watchtower (Santoro 2003 [1999]: 164–5). Supported by an increasingly discrete though still all-powerful sovereign (Hobbes' Leviathan), this kind of society helps make every comrade an attentive, meticulous—and increasingly democratic—observer/supervisor. The result is that "in social interaction the individual replaces God as the regulator of her and others' behavior" (Santoro 2003 [1999]: 165; cf. also the interpretation of civil society in Foucault 1979; 1991; Burchell 1991). The civility of society is therefore part and parcel of a package deal where agency and freedom are matched by self-regulation via a network of mutual supervisions and organic surveillance.

We see here how the turning of the moral sense into a much tighter social mechanism acquired a sinisterly Foucaultian spin, which in turn revealed how surveillance lurks behind trust. The initial push in this direction was a recognition that agency is inherently complex for being based on a combination of the principled freedom of the *ego*s and their dependence on the appreciation of others via the sentiment of vanity. Being too vague a construct, the moral sense (as the root of more discrete sentiments) needed to be turned, with Adam Smith, into the principle of the impartial observer, activated precisely by a vanity-dependent type of agency. The outcome was the postulation of a powerful, providential, yet potentially concentrated, source of social power: rather the obverse of trust, namely surveillance. This was the outcome of a sustained, modern Western breakthrough marked by the overcoming of the Aristotelian legacy of the citizen's virtue and the emerging primacy of a notion of disciplined, and in this sense 'civilized,' type of agency increasingly functional to capitalist development and new labor relations. The civil character of this type or dimension of society is ensured by the public exposure of the moral self. This exposure secures a degree of mutual involvement (but also scrutiny) among individuals that transcends commercial interests and contractual relations. It contributes to cement the moral roots of a new type of self, based on self-esteem and even self-love (which was yet a diabolic manifestation in traditional views of the virtues).

Adam Seligman has shown how the genuine thrust to transcend mere interests and sheer contractual obligations captures the necessity to postulate a dimension of solidarity irreducible to self-interest and self-respect. Yet at the same time, this *ego*-transcending impulse mystifies the capacity

of the social system to preserve and nurture the postulated moral sense without recourse to an overarching technology of control. With Adam Smith, unlike his predecessors of the Scottish Enlightenment, moral sentiments appear as the facilitators of the providential glue of civil society, yet not as their ultimate foundation. This lies in a rather amoral, yet densely social, network of surveillance that draws from, yet also constitutes the strengths and weaknesses of, a new modern subjectivity. This tempting, rather extreme rationalization of the glue of civility as the outcome of the Western Enlightenment induced Ernest Gellner to provocatively describe the Western ideal of civil society as a kind of "failed *umma*":

> the would-be secular *Umma* of the immanentist, formally materialist socio-historical religion … signally failed as an *Umma* but has not yet demonstrated its capacity to produce a civil society either. All that the latter has achieved is to generate, at least amongst a significant portion of its citizens, an evidently sincere and ardent *desire* for civil society.
>
> (Gellner 1995: 39)

With this verdict, which largely matches Mardin's idea of civil society as a Western aspiration or a dream, Gellner also intended to stress that excessive expectations about a morally supported mutual trust as the real, effective glue of civil society (supposedly replacing without significant residues a communal bond of faith) risk neglecting its necessarily "modular" articulation. More than a moral sense, it is a modular sensibleness that allows agents to perpetually weave together contingent bits and pieces of a civil bond. However, modularity can never be fully pragmatic, since in spite of being upheld by the ever resurfacing desire for civil society like the one that resulted from the epochal failure, in parts of Europe, of "the would-be secular Umma of the immanentist, formally materialist socio-historical religion," it tends to fall back onto some non-liberal and premodern idea of social cohesion, which Gellner liked to exemplify in terms of the Islamic *umma*. Ultimately, according to Gellner, civil society, if we want to extrapolate its modern sociological significance and difference from any traditional idea of community, can only rest on the inherent fragility of such a modular sensibleness.

Modularity is unlike the principle of full inclusion (or exclusion) from a rather closed community or citizenry. It manifests rather the possibility (or indeed necessity) of simultaneous and multiple memberships in intermediate yet instrumental social groups. The modularity of the self that can

selectively and intermittently join multiple groups unfolds without blood rituals of sort sanctifying any of those groups. "The importance of being modular," according to Gellner, reflects a basic freedom of the agent from ascriptive ties of real, ritual, or contractual consanguinity (Gellner 1995: 40–43). The problematic, tautological character of this modular civility is due to the fact that a basic freedom is both the outcome of the process and is presupposed by it. There are no in-built mechanisms that guarantee that agential freedom is matched by an open access to the differentiated social fields. This is due to the plain social fact that these fields are in reality social networks that modulate access based on the interests of their dominant actors, and are therefore potentially (and often actually) exclusive. The liberal, modular notion of civil society theorized by Gellner remains sociologically no less evanescent than the moral sense of the Scottish Enlightenment.

What is interesting, in Gellner's reformulation of civil society hinging on the cliff of a failed *umma*, is rather a lingering nostalgia of bygone faith, which we saw reflected by the Aristotelian residues that are latent within the arguments of the theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment, but also within the vision of the Marxist proponents of a radical secular society targeted by Gellner. This symptomatic ambivalence of civil society is even more evident when paired with the fact that the primacy of modern modularity vis-à-vis traditional, authoritative mediation seems to discount an excess of investment in the will and capacity of the agents to formulate (and circumscribe) their commitments in modular terms. It is indeed only this theoretical overinvestment that can ground the resulting autonomy of civil society as a largely self-regulated, intermediate social space, distinct from both the state and its bureaucracy and regulations, on the one hand, and from the capitalist economy and its emergent market rules, on the other.

This problem of an excessive investment into the modern novelty of civil society was keenly recognized by such a leading Western thinker as G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831). He argued that the condition for the formation of a civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) was a cluster of traditionally rooted intermediary institutions that incarnate an ethical idiom irreducible to trust and trust-based contractualism. This institutional cluster cannot simply result from projecting an evanescent moral sense. Such an intermediary space indeed needs an ethical foundation. This ethic is provided by the extent to which civil society facilitates and, as it were, encompasses the agency of individuals in the context of their institutionalized relations. For Hegel such relations and their ethical fundament are still imperfect, yet they do play a constitutive and stabilizing role in the social bond. Agency within

civil society is therefore neither fully autonomous nor organically linked to a nakedly modular, civic bond of convenience.

This inherent vulnerability of historic Western notions of civil society and their ambivalent dependence on traditional notions of the social bond prompts us to walk a path that recalibrates civility by avoiding the Eurocentrism of civil society. This path shuns civil society's indigestible combination of tautology of attributes (by collapsing being moral into being civil and social) and overinvestment in agency (by presupposing a quite implausible type of diffuse, modular agency). Civility should be initially conceived, more modestly and realistically, as a slippery dimension of social action and of the social bond more than as the integrative code of an autonomous social space. Realizing this facilitates a shift from the specific ideal of civil society toward a wider, yet also potentially sharper, view of civility that is transversal to traditional and modern practices. This move can provide a more suitable terrain for building a transcultural view of civility emancipated from an excessive orientation to Western prototypes and stereotypes and to their burdensome (and largely unrealistic) expectations, which are often nourished by unaudited nostalgias for a holistic type of sociality. Civility should also help us to overcome the socio-centric bias of agency and cooperation conceived mainly as internal to a given society. Last, civility, by transcending the limitations of a civil society bound to the design of a nation-state, has the advantage of more realistically reflecting the modalities of relations innervating Western hegemony over an increasingly global society (and the earlier, premodern one similarly characterizing the Islamic ecumene). Such relations are not restricted to questions of citizenship or membership within a given, national society intent on maximizing its commercial and industrial comparative advantages.

In what follows, I will attempt to show a welcome collateral effect, for the sociology of Islam, of this shift away from civil society and toward a reconstructed, transversal concept of civility. This effect consists in deflating most if not all trivialities and negativities that resulted from applying an uncritically accepted, package-like notion of civil society to Islam and the Muslim-majority world. This shift is also necessary in order to minimize the collateral damages generated by the defective universalism of civil society and the toll taken on Western social sciences in general and sociology in particular as a result of this deficit. As put by Bryan Turner, one of the pioneers of the sociology of Islam, the lopsided ambition of the concept of civil society has resulted in the untenable, highly un-sociological, and deeply orientalist view according to which

> Muslim society lacked independent cities, an autonomous bourgeois class, rational bureaucracy, personal property and that cluster of rights which embody bourgeois legal culture. Without these institutional and cultural elements, there was nothing in Islamic civilisation to challenge the dead-end of pre-capitalist tradition.
>
> (Turner 1984: 23)

The road to a more sober, transversal view of civility requires a preliminary step. This consists in an effort to make visible the idea of civility that we can recuperate from scraping away the delusional incrustations overburdening the modern Western idea of civil society. While one obvious problem of civil society is its Eurocentric character, the other, and less obvious, major shortcoming is that it does not reveal the full extent of the global impact of Eurocentrism and the way it rested on (and altered) earlier hegemonic forms of global connectedness. Once we accomplish the preliminary step, we can start to see civility as the outcome not only of the specific modern history of the West (or of some parts thereof) but also of its relations with the (colonial and postcolonial, but also to a large extent precolonial) 'rest,' first and foremost the Muslim-majority world, or the Islamic ecumene.

In other words, the transversality of civility vs. the ill-concealed exclusiveness of civil society resides in acknowledging the historical, process-like character of the former as the outcome of an ongoing, inherently global civilizing process that has been subjected to frequent, sudden turns, transformations and even reversals in the course of human history. This insight also entails that with the rise of Western modernity and with its subsequent mutation into diversified—both global and more localized—forms of modernity, civility could no longer be just the outcome of a civilizing process but became dependent on the West's colonial construction of itself (its hegemony) through a leap out of its purported 'metropolitan' cultural identity into the depths of its colonial Other. Far from us, then, to wish to construct civility as the unproblematically authentic (and thus genuinely universal) core of civil society. To paraphrase Gellner, the West's encounter with the long-term civilizing process of the Islamic ecumene created the delusion of a new, potentially global, cohesive Western *umma*.

Folding Civil Society into a Transversal Notion of Civility

In order to be able to look beyond the delusional dimension of civil society and into the sociological underpinnings of civility, we need to factor in both

the dislocating trajectory and the contestation of the West's increasingly global hegemony that was construed, particularly in the heydays of colonialism, as a 'civilizing mission.' Yet while process trumps origin, one should be aware that the modern Western genealogy of civility is in the first instance the outcome of specific developments within North-Western Europe. It coincides with the basically simultaneous, early modern, rise of the European Westphalian state and of capitalist enterprise. While the Westphalian system of modern sovereign states has a certain primacy in kicking off the historical process, we have seen how—particularly with the formation of commercial and industrial societies, specifically in Scotland and England—reflections on the idea of what it meant to be civil sharply transcended the earlier, classic emphasis on natural law and ideas of good government and focused on the challenges of a new world of capitalist enterprise. It is important to keep in mind that such reflections occurred from within locations belonging to the fastest developing parts of Europe that were increasingly committed to ever widening colonial ventures. It might have been the unprecedented pace of transformations, and the attention paid to the role of entrepreneurial characters, that created a reductionist view of the civil dimension of the social bond as centered on individual agency. The rather unrealistic idea of the autonomy of trust and the attached moral sense was particularly reductionist, as if only responding to the push of interests and the pull of affections determining the prism of an enterprising self.

The Scottish idea of civil society, while keeping a tenuous symbolic continuity with the classic *societas civilis* of Aristotle, Cicero, and the Stoics, embraced a society that is civil and peaceful first of all because the institutionalization and internalization of the law of contract ensures a high degree of predictability of social relations. This reductive focus neglected the more unpredictable and unregulated mechanisms of construction of the social bond entailing protest and crowd behavior (the 'mob' as the antithesis of legal, contract-based action). This higher complexity of collective action was highlighted by the early 19th-century French thinker Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859). His attention not by chance went beyond the societies of North-Western Europe and was attracted by emerging, burgeoning non-European societies like those of the USA and Russia. This shift of attention reflected the need to look beyond those mechanisms of social integration that are framed within settled territorial polities (like those of old Europe) and which revealed an increasingly well-delineated, functional division of tasks between bureaucracies, enterprises, and associations. Additionally, Tocqueville paid attention to France's colonial occupation of

Algeria, which represented a watershed in the externally expansive and innerly integrative capacity of European colonial modernity, supported by the framing of a European civilizing mission (de Tocqueville 2001). Civility starts then to appear as integral to a web of colonial, imperial, and global relations that cannot be reduced to enterprise. Its genealogy cuts across all conventional inner and outer borders of Europe or the West but also complicates conventional wisdom (including the one reflected by the Scottish moralists) on the relation between tradition and modernity. Not least, the genealogy encompasses, in conflicted and hardly linear ways, the plural yet also fractured heritage of the Islamic ecumene, via the colonial process that put an end to the previous, long-term centrality of Islam in the Afro-Eurasian civilizational realm.

Tocqueville's integrative shift was not a particularly subversive move but had the merit of highlighting the complexity of the nexus between pre-colonial and colonial practices and notions of civility. It is hardly contested that the conceptual origins of the ideas of a civic realm of interaction and subjectivity-formation can be traced back to classical Greece, specifically to the experience of Athens. They reflect a collective dynamics of cohesion, contention, and governance that cannot be entirely captured by the modern liberal notion of civil society. The classic idea, and the related practices, were integral to the reflections and systematizations of philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Yet these traditions influenced a particularly thriving knowledge field within Islamic civilization (not restricted to philosophy) which in turn affected processes of state formation within the Islamic ecumene in the early modern era (see Chapter 5). By retrieving this longer trajectory, one can embrace a more diversified fabric of reflections on civility which cuts across what became the colonial divide between the West and the Muslim-majority world, precedes the packaging of the modern Western idea of civil society, and has haunted the latter like a shadow in the course of the West's run-up to colonial hegemony and the subsequent process of decolonization.

As a result of such complex processes, civility is located not at the peak of a linear and mono-dimensional development transcending traditional social arrangements and roles but rather delimits a gray zone where the social gravity of familiarity and consanguinity ("the tyranny of cousins" according to Gellner) is pulled into new forms of cooperation. Accordingly, *ego*'s mirroring in the perception and consideration of *alter*—often (though not necessarily) through the mediation of a big Other represented by a transcendent God—has the capacity to dilute (or at least bracket out) the

weight of both modern class cleavages and traditional status inequalities. Civility is then neither anchored within traditional modes nor quintessentially modern; it is the outcome of complex and often contradictory civilizing processes, involving both tension and conflict and the intermittent downplaying of inequalities and differences for the sake of the coordination of social action. Since the following chapters will distill civility and its trajectory within the Islamic ecumene out of a complex and entangled heritage, it would be far-fetched to postulate that civility possesses an intrinsically religious or moral kernel, or, alternately, an outright secular engine in the form of fully secularized civic morals, e.g. as in a Durkheimian view of organic solidarity. The formulas of civility should be more soberly identified in a mode of managing *ego*'s relations to *alter* with a modicum of recourse to symbolic and material violence and by implementing in its stead a connective modus between interactants. This modus cannot be reduced to a mild sentiment of sympathy. It reflects a type of connectedness that can only hold if based on some degree of shared social knowledge of the needs and trustworthiness of the members of a group. No doubt, within a wide variety of forms of civility supported by solidarity, some might be potentially conducive to major upheavals, whereby the religious heritage and articulation of modes of connectedness can certainly play a role. Yet as adumbrated by civilizational analysis (see Introduction), it is not religion or tradition per se (or, as it were, fundamentalism) at work in such cases. The inherent fragility of civic patterns can be rather subject to challenges when the unsettling of the ideals of fairness on a large scale tips the balance toward a radical reinterpretation of religiously grounded obligations and related ideas of justice.

What we need is to reset the stage and so relativize the prestige of the peculiarly Western dream of civil society. While acknowledging that in spite of a certain erosion of appeal, especially since 9/11, civil society still represents a major banner of Western conceptual and civilizational hegemony, civility could be well on its way to be able to supplant it in defining the grammar of a social idiom suitable for recognizing not just the needs, capabilities, and trustworthiness of actors but also and especially the alchemy of their conflicts and cooperations. This grammar can also provide the coordinates for a cooperative enterprise on behalf of the 'common good.' This is a rather traditional concept that is perhaps not by chance being revived on the contemporary stage, in parallel with the loss of prestige of civil society and alongside the increasingly global struggles for the safeguarding of the 'commons' of humankind. These are the ensemble of all resources and wealth (not just natural but also cultural, particularly

with regard to knowledge acquisition and distribution) that should not be held privately. It is interesting that these struggles are also leading to a redefinition of the traditional notion of the 'commoners' (*al-'amma* in Islamic parlance: see Chapter 3): no longer to designate a member of the non-elite (i.e. neither noble nor notable), but whoever has a right on the commons. It is also important to clarify that the commons can include, but should not be limited to, the 'public goods,' which are studied and defined by a variety of disciplines concerned with public policies.

Yet again, it would be risky to draw too sharp a line between traditional and modern views of the commons and commoners, and of their relations to changing patterns of civility. This can be shown by the historic Islamic case covered by the flexible institutional matrix represented by the pious/charitable foundation, the *waqf* (see Chapters 2 and 3). While it would be tempting to say that modern notions of the commons and of civility specifically revolve around the concept of rights, it could be argued that the case of the *waqf* shows that this concept was always at work. It would show that the modern turn was rather characterized by singling out from traditional injunctions of doing good to others an idea of functional, governmental charity. This has been finalized to address the (also modern) category of the (especially urban) poor, an idea that could then be extended to whichever 'target group' is in question. This approach to charity is much more disciplinary—in the above-mentioned Benthamian and Foucaultian sense—than it is oriented to rights, which actually tend to be suspended within modern disciplinary regimes (see Chapter 6). It would be interesting to verify whether the worldwide adoption of a technical vocabulary (rather than a grammar) of rights by certified international NGOs has fed into the genuinely modern, disciplinary approach to charity.

If we revisit the debates and investigations conducted since the 1990s on the empowerment and activism of civic groups and associations—including a vast range of case studies concerning Muslim-majority societies and Muslim communities with minority status—we see that there is often—explicitly or implicitly—something more at work than the liberal idea of civil society inherited from the commercial and industrial revolutions and the Enlightenment. Crucial are the processes through which ties of interest, affection, and solidarity reflect and renew the civic patterns of reciprocity and the quest for dignity inherent in traditional arrangements and institutions. This is the case irrespective of whether such traditional arrangements subsist intact (a rare case) or (most often) have been subject to disruption or reconstruction through the global push of the Western 'civilizing mission'

and hegemony, which have also manifested a global impact through the basically universal adoption of civil codes.

In the Islamic case the Sufi brotherhood (*tariqa*) is an important traditional matrix of the associational bond that facilitates cooperation and a channel for its implementation via the acquisition of knowledge, spiritual elevation, and cohesive social networking. We will start examining the *tariqa* as a meta-institutional matrix in historical and comparative perspectives from the next chapter onward. In the Introduction we suggested how the meta-institutional foundation of the Islamic process of institution-building, as well as of the articulation of flexible ways to formalize the underlying social bond, primarily relies on the textual corpus of *hadith* (the transmitted and authenticated sayings and deeds of the prophet Muhammad: see Brown 2009). This was intended as an exemplary and normative narration inspiring both jurisprudence (and its main institutional infrastructure, namely the *waqf*) and the Sufi way, more than any compactly legal edifice mistakenly identified as a *shariʿa*-centered body of law. A specific tradition of normative narrations and the complexly selective scholarly networks authenticating such narrations (Sentürk 2005) are what ultimately enacts and legitimizes, over several generations, a specific and highly malleable model of Islamic civility originating from the *hadith* corpus. While the process of formation of the matrix of brotherhood is mainly associated with Sufism and its organizational unit, the *tariqa*, it should not be reduced to it. We will also explore how the historic European counterpart to the Sufi *tariqa* shows elements of both similarity and difference (see Chapter 4). From the analysis it will be possible to derive not a scholastic comparison but a better understanding of the way Western and Islamic articulations of the knowledge–power equation relate to each other historically and not just in an abstract, rigged game of establishing norms and exceptions.

What comes to the fore here is precisely the crucial, further layer going one full step beyond the notion of civil society as the locus of sheer cooperation among self-interested individuals. This layer also transcends civil society's purported fundaments, identified with the type and level of trust that facilitates entering and implementing contracts between individuals or companies. It is the dimension of cooperative action whose bottom line is mutual help, but that is ultimately supported by culturally shared expectations of all consequences (including those potentially going beyond the individual life span) of one's behavior. This engine of civility does not need the mediation of the stimulus of self-recognition and aggrandizement, as theorized by Ferguson and Smith. The shared expectations underlying

such ties of civility rather presuppose common narrations with a widely consensual normative impact, including salvational narratives. The consensus is provided by integrated networks where knowledge is produced. This means that networks count not just as the facilitators and beneficiaries of the mere sharing of interests but as the knowledge machines themselves that create and authorize the mechanism of sharing. It would be difficult to conceive of forms of civility that are produced outside such sociologically refined dynamics, which we can consider the hub of civilizing processes. Such longer-term matrices continue to represent a hard kernel of civility even when the later focus on the individual happens to be legitimized by modern transformations in state-led, law-inspired, and outwardly powerful disciplinary mechanisms of the type instantiated by Norbert Elias (Elias 2000 [1939; 1968]; 1983 [1969]).

Often wrapped in a web of formal rules of tact and manners, civility thus conceived reflects the realization that there is a more profound communicative substratum that facilitates cooperative social action and sociability, which is often as ethical as it responds to canons of beauty (see Ikegami 2005). Civility is accordingly network based, being often activated and maintained by a variety of individuals across ties of kin and neighborhood through an iterative, shared, or at least overlapping invocation of some higher goods (often but not necessarily warranted or exacted by a transcendent reference). What counts here is the working of a shared habitus that induces people to bracket out localized interest and pursue overlapping goals either by reference to a 'common good' or at least to discrete goods, which might be social and cooperative or more broadly cultural, or artistic. The resulting patterns of interaction do not merely serve the need of self-interested cooperation or secure an immediate, tangible gain to the interactants. This difference marks a crucial divergence from the civil society model. Of course this higher autonomy of the goods of civility does not prevent it from frequently serving the needs of commercial networks and markets, which depend on the solidity of interconnections and their careful maintenance by reference to those higher goods that are shared or overlapping.

This type of civility, grounded on classic models and traditional practices but also continually transcending and complexifying them, goes beyond not just ties of good neighborhood and codes of courtesy. It also transcends ideas of interest narrowly conceived on the basis of the modern idea of contract between individuals assumed to be in full control of their willed agency, and in this sense, technically free in contractual terms. On the

other hand, as we will see in the specific case of the Islamic ecumene, civility does cover an idea of contract and underlying patterns of a rather systemic contractualism imbued with a common idiom of connectedness. The system and the idiom facilitate the search for joint interest and the summoning of a common good not in merely abstract terms, but based on recognized methods for pondering, valuing, and ordering the plurality of goods and intentions entering a given interaction. This type of civility, in the preliberal West as much as in precolonial Islam, is directly or indirectly tied to Aristotelian categories, while it does not eschew per se a contractual logic and an orientation to the market.

It is therefore important not to reduce civility so defined to the moral work of building virtuous dispositions. While ideas of discernment and recognition of the goods and attendant practices are an important engine of civility, civility is relevant sociologically also, if not especially, for its habitualized, outer dimension reflected in self-composure, modulated exposure, porousness to communication and understanding, and, as a cumulative result, its capacity to build connectedness. If this were not the case, we would get stuck in a dichotomy between a basically normal and normative, Aristotelian view of civility, on the one hand, and altered versions thereof—including modern liberal ones—merely reproducing a technical vocabulary of contract and rights, on the other. We should overcome the temptation of adopting such an alternate, Aristotelian Western-centrism and rather conceive of patterns of civility as intrinsically plural and prone to circulation, transgression, and metamorphosis.

There is no possibility of postulating a common, normal, and/or universal ethical basis to civility. Such an axiom would make civility sociologically implausible. Yet by recognizing such an impossibility, one should also acknowledge that within the longer and diverse trajectory of Islamic history it was not just more difficult, but less necessary, to build up a modern state exactly like the one that emerged in Westphalian Europe. This is the type of state that became the ultimate guarantor of the specifically liberal type of civility underlying the civil society model. This civility could only be implemented through holding a monopoly on violence as the ultimate way to guarantee a centralized enforcement of contracts. Undoubtedly in various societies and regions of North-Western Europe this modern liberal type of civility also relied on varying degrees of intervention of intermediate bodies, as stressed by Hegel's recalibration of the Scottish notion of civil society. Through this move, civil society retrieved a foundation within traditional patterns of civility.

Yet once the model of civil society was concretely forged (not least, in continental Europe, in the shape of codes of civil law throughout the 19th century) and further refined via the elaboration of a variety of theorists, a key difference between the modern, mainly liberal, West and the colonized rest, including the Islamic ecumene, happened to be inscribed in social theory. This is the modernity gap, as it were, according to which the wider West owned the source code of modernity and the rest could at best be on its receiving side, often by hacking into it as if from the margins of the new global civilization called modernity. This idea of an essential gap disguises the much more intricate, though certainly unequal, relations unfolding within the workings of an increasingly global civilizing process. Particularly in a postcolonial context, it became easier to elaborate non-Western responses to the implicit but powerful assertion of a civilizational gap. The responses to Western colonialism and imperialism by a vast array of non-Western reformers, intellectuals, and agitators revealed the diversity and complexity of civilization as an ongoing and largely unpredictable process and of civility as a set of mobile and often vulnerable patterns. It is probably true that the hypothesis of multiple modernities, briefly illustrated at the end of the Introduction and intended to include and almost coopt alternative, non-Western modernities, does not redeem the weight of the Western primogeniture over the modern world. The remedy to this shortcoming can be an emphasis on a dislocated global civility that is nurtured by partly converging, often conflicting, civilizing processes. This idea accounts for both the contestability of modern Western hegemony and the relative originality of non-Western responses and reconstructions.

This is the level of analysis where we can reintroduce the doublet of knowledge and power as the key variables leading up to civility, as preliminarily discussed in the Introduction. The triadic field of knowledge, power, and civility, which provides the main focus of this volume, replaces the slightly mystifying, almost idyllic vision of a civil society based on a moral sense merging affectionate sympathy with sober interest. Knowledge and power appear as the twin basic factors of the equation that produces a social and cultural force, namely civility, which covers simultaneously both the intersubjective nexus among agents and a mode of subjectivity and agency. The modern European Westphalian state effectively redefined politics as an autonomous sphere by occupying the center of the political realm. This has occurred both through the monopolistic exercise of real power and through the cultural orchestration of symbolic power. In this Westphalian context

civil society needs to fit into the politics, or, to be more precise, the political publicness, of the modern state.

Civility is instead conceived in broader terms than within the historic cage of the modern Western Westphalian state. It delimits a relatively autonomous yet mostly inertial dimension of construction and maintenance of the social bond. This process can impinge in a variety of ways upon politics as the most specific field of power, embracing the contestation and adjudication of values and resources tied to the institutional and regulative machinery of the modern state. However, civility does not fit into the modern state as a hand in a glove. It is not caged in the Westphalian state as civil society is, but it is not isolated from it either. The extension of the Westphalian form of the state worldwide via Western colonialism did integrate the global civilizing process in the international, i.e. the interstate order originating from the peace of Westphalia, but not to the point of making the civilizing process fully subordinate to the Westphalian logic. Responses to this logic varied according to time, locale, and the civilizational resources available in each case. Surely we would need a deeper treatment of the question of the modern state as a unique integrator of the knowledge–power dynamics in order to profitably extend this historical and theoretical argument, but we need to postpone this deepening of the argument to a future volume on the sociology of Islam.

We should here remain focused on the overlapping, rather transcultural, conceptualization of civility as often promoted by alternate views to the mainstream hegemonic theorization of civil society that took form within the core of the West itself, in a tight symbiosis with its commercial and industrial revolutions and global colonial expansion. Such alternate views might resonate particularly well with non-Western, and, as we will see, specifically Islamic, conceptions and practices. The contestation of the hegemony of one-sided, overly streamlined notions of civil society, which are quite neatly aligned with Western-centered modern state formation and capitalist development, basically overlapped with the latest phase of Western colonial domination. In this sense, Islamic critiques of civil society and Islamic reconstructions of civility are not instances of an anti-Western Islamic exceptionalism. They rather reflect the combination of civilizational originality with the postcolonial predicament of contemporary Muslim-majority societies, which often encourages a critique of Western Eurocentrism. Yet it is also important to consider that this critique has been directly or, more often, indirectly, influenced by earlier Western voices not aligned with the hegemonic trajectory of first Anglo-Scottish and later Anglo-American articulations of civility.

We see in the process a conceptual bifurcation between a notion of civility rather functional to bourgeois society (in the guise of 'civil society') and a more connective notion, which can better reflect other types of social arrangements or hegemonies. This latter conceptualization is never the outcome of a deterministic reaction to Western hegemonic experiences but has been largely stimulated by self-critical reflections, within the West itself, on one-sided (and often ideologically self-congratulatory) views of Western modernity. We should therefore recognize that there is no single uncontested idea of civility, not even in the hegemonic trajectory of the modern West. Civility is not just continually subject to variations, contestations, and new entanglements but also circumscribes, by reflex, a global arena of, as it were, cultural wars. It is nonetheless possible and even necessary to distinguish between a more genuinely sociological dimension of civility constituted by patterns of habitualization of social behavior and the cultural discourse that originates from reflecting on the importance of such processes. This latter dimension of reflection is subject to frequent oscillations between holding onto a claim of absolute originality of specific (and mostly Western) experiences and the recognition of inevitable patterns of mutual dependence among various experiences, both between the West and the non-West and within the West itself. Clearly the sociological reconstruction of the concept of civility benefits from the discourse which, by emphasizing the non-normativity of powerful Western models and the diversity of historic patterns of civility, also stimulates investigations into how such diverse patterns have been shaped in history and are being shaped in the present.

One early, major instance of alternate Western views of civility can be identified in the social thought of the early 18th-century Neapolitan thinker Giambattista Vico (1688–1744). Vico's work roughly coincided with the beginnings of the Scottish Enlightenment, but was directly or indirectly influential on many thinkers who wrestled with civil society well into the 20th century, the most famous of them probably being Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). Particularly in his *magnum opus*, entitled *The New Science* (Vico 1999 [1744]), Vico produced a lucid analysis of how civility copes with modern power constellations without mystifying its traditional underpinnings often associated with the weight of religious institutions. Even if he could not directly engage with the slightly later Scottish notion of civil society and even if he articulated civility as an attribute more than as a noun (and therefore as an autonomous social force), his acerb theorizing on civility provides unique insights into the process-like character of the force at stake, particularly in its self-transformative potential. Rather than simply

reproducing a dichotomy between a traditional model based on virtue and a modern one based on a moral sense (MacIntyre 1984 [1981]); 1988), Vico delineates a continuous process of transformation that approximates a civilizing process determined by complex sociological much more than by sheer ethical factors.

The merit of Vico's argument on civility ultimately consists in how it spelt out much more transparently than those of his Scottish counterparts how the reshaping of the civic realm is a process through which the ethos of the premodern, 'heroic' ages is diluted into the more relaxed, civic mores of the members of an increasingly complex society. According to Vico, the civilizing process, far from marking a linear evolution, is subject to depletion and exhaustion through cyclical, spiral motions (Stark 1976). Centuries before other authors, like Michael Walzer, articulated a similar view (see Volpi 2011), Vico clearly showed the intrinsically 'post-heroic' character of modern civility. In this sense, the lopsided view of the moral sense as articulated by the Scottish Enlightenment can be more sharply seen not as an essential, atemporal cement of the social bond but as the outcome of an increasing relaxation of heroic virtues: a depotentiation of the social bond once supported by a shared, virtuous orientation to the common good. Going one step further, and adopting a somewhat Nietzschean reading of Vico's view of civil virtues as a codified emasculation of heroic virtues, one could even hypothesize that Aristotelian ethical references to a hierarchy of goods and to the highest, common good were themselves early symptoms of civilizational impoverishment and relaxation of mores. The axial Aristotle neutralizes the preaxial Homer, who is the main reference of Vico on the matter. The pursuit of heroic, preaxial codes of honor cannot afford ordering and ranking goods and their matching virtues once for all in a pragmatic and almost calculative way. Nonetheless, the acceleration and unpredictability of civilizing processes and cycles are to a large extent favored by the ethical and cognitive prestige acquired by this Aristotelian scheme both within the West and in the Islamic ecumene. This process is also signaled by the fact that, from the Scottish Enlightenment onward, as we have argued, liberal conceptions of civility fall back on Aristotelian ethical grammars whenever they meet obstacles or reach stalemates.

Vico's view was also reliant on a deeper anthropological awareness of the coordinates of the social bond and its developmental potential, including the symbolic underpinnings of diffuse authority, which not even the densely commercial, Scottish type of civil society could completely dispense with. In this sense, he also showed that patriarchal authority, what Gellner called

"the tyranny of cousins," is diluted but not necessarily erased by modern liberal civility (Salvatore 2007: 186–209). Particularly, Vico tackled head-on an issue that is often kept latent in discussions of the conceptual cluster coagulating into civility: the question of how, at the conclusion of the transition from heroic to civil modes of taming violence, the associational bond based on collective violence-control and individual self-restraint is institutionalized. Only by addressing this issue was he able to suggest how institutionalization on a large scale, like the one corresponding to the rise of modern states, i.e. nation-states (and which in Weberian parlance amounts to a routinization of charisma: see Chapter 2), is also premised on a depletion of the ethical substance of Aristotelian civility.

This Vichian view raises questions that are unsolvable through the Anglo-Scottish paradigm of civility: Is 'contract' per se enough of a condition to operate such a 'prosaic' transition from heroic to civil modes of social interaction? Are there cultural variables and communicative factors that under normal conditions determine the key threshold of the transition? Could such factors, in times of crisis, even surrogate the institutional ties themselves? Due to his contribution in helping us formulate such crucial questions, Vico acquires a unique importance as representing the alternate modern (yet Western) theorist of a type of civility not intimately married to the disciplinary power of the modern Westphalian state-society complex and to its normatively liberal articulations. This is why I am electing Vico as the best possible guide to help us transition from Western-bound to Islamic articulations of civility, to which the rest of this book is dedicated.

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