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Civil Society and Public Spheres in a Comparative Perspective*

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to present a comparative analysis of the constitution of public spheres and civil societies in several pre-modern civilizations—the Islamic, the Indian, and the European Christian ones—and their possible bearing on the crystallization in modern societies thereof.

Keywords: civil society, public spheres, Islamic societies, Indian civilization, Christian civilization.

Public Spheres and Civil Society in Selected Pre-Modern Societies:
Some Comparative Observations
I

This analysis is undertaken in the framework of the comparative study of civilizations and of multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000, 2002). In many, especially more recent, studies of modernization and globalization, one can find a very strong assumption that the development of a vibrant civil society is a basic component of modernity, above all of democratic modernity, and the development of such civil society has often been seen as an important yardstick according to which different societies were measured.

This recent discourse has been squarely put in the framework of modern Western, especially European, experience. In this discourse public spheres and civil society were often conflated, and civil society was often conceived as a distinct ontological entity facing another such entity—the state, but when the term and discourse of civil society were transplanted also into non-European or non-Western societies, there arose the problem of to what extent civil society (as for instance Ernest Gellner has formulated in a most extreme and forceful way) is essentially connected with the classical Western individualist liberal conceptions; or whether, as anthropologists like Hahn (1996) or the Comaroffs (1999) have indicated, the central core characteristics of civil society, of its relation with the state, can be also developed on the basis of other premises.

The growing literature on these problems, the available historical and contemporary evidence show that the assumption which conflates civil society and public sphere

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and the concomitant assumption which has informed many of these discussions that civil society constitutes a very problematic and distinct ontological entity—confronting another such entity—the state (or also the market), and that the relations between civil society, public sphere, the state, and the political arena are much more variable than is implied in this literature.

The concept of a public sphere assumes that there are at least two other spheres—the "official" sphere of rulership and the private sphere—from which the public sphere is more or less institutionally and culturally differentiated. It is, therefore, a sphere located between the official and the private spheres. It is a sphere where discussions about the common good are at stake. This holds also for the official sphere; but in the public sphere such business is carried out by groups that do not belong to the rulers' domain. Rather, the public sphere draws its membership from the private sphere. It expands and shrinks according to shifting involvements of such membership, as Albert O. Hirschman has demonstrated with regard to modern development (Eisenstadt, Schluchter and Wittrock 2001). The term "public sphere" therefore denotes the existence of arenas that are not only autonomous from the political order but are also public in the sense that they are accessible to different sectors of society. The discourse in public spheres admits to the possibility of different interpretations of the common good and of the demands made on the rulers in the name of such good, but not in terms of private, distinct interests.

Civil society entails direct participation in the political process of corporate bodies or a more or less restricted body of citizens in which private interests play a very important role. Such society entails a public sphere, but not every public sphere entails a civil society, as defined in the contemporary discourse. In every civilization, especially literary ones with some complexity and literacy, a public sphere—but not necessarily a civil society type—will emerge (Eisenstadt, Schluchter and Wittrock 2001).

But whatever the differences with respect to the relations between public sphere, civil society, and the political arena, in all societies these relations have entailed continual contestation about power and authority, their legitimation and accountability. The concrete ways in which such negotiations or contestations develop and are played out in different ways in different societies or civilizations accordingly have also different impacts on the dynamics and transformative potentialities of different political regimes.

First of all they differ greatly between premodern and modern societies, even if many of the roots of the concrete patterns of civil society as they develop in different modern societies have many of their roots in the "premodern" periods thereof. It is indeed of central importance in the context of this discussion that public spheres develop and are constituted also in "premodern" societies—and while they do indeed have far-reaching impact on the political dynamics of their respective societies, such developments are not necessarily tantamount to civil society in the modern sense.

Second, such negotiations and the relations between public spheres and the transformative tendencies of different political regimes differ also greatly in different modern societies.

II

The European model of civil society is used here as a heuristic device. It is used in comparative perspective as a point of departure and as a heuristic yardstick—to identify deviance, not deficiency—leading to an analysis from within that then accounts for the internal dynamics peculiar to different civilizations analyzed here (Eisenstadt, Schluchter and Wittrock 2001).

Public Spheres and Islamic Societies
III

We shall start with Islamic societies—a major characteristic of which has been, as has been fully illustrated in a workshop in Jerusalem devoted to this problem, the crystallization of a very vibrant and autonomous public sphere that was of crucial importance in shaping the dynamics of these societies.

This public sphere or spheres crystallized in Islamic societies out of the interaction of the shari'a (the sacred religious law), the "ulama" (the interpreters of that law), various sectors of the broader community, and the rulers. It was the shari'a, the religious law, which was the main overall framework of Islamic societies, the regulator of the moral and religious vision, the cohesive and boundary-setting force of Muslim communities. To quote Hoexter and Levtzion (2002) in their introduction to the volume of the Jerusalem symposium:

> The picture that emerges from the papers in this volume is that of a vibrant public sphere, accommodating a large variety of autonomous groups and characterized by its relatively stable but very dynamic nature. The community of believers was the center of gravity around which activity in the public sphere revolved. Its participation in the formation of the public sphere was a matter of course; its well-being, its customs and consensus were both the motives and the main justifications for the introduction of changes in social and religious practices, in the law and policies governing the public sphere. The independence of the shari'a and the distribution of duties towards the community between the ruler and the 'ulama,' established very clearly in Islamic history, were crucial factors in securing the autonomy of the public sphere and in putting limits on the absolute power of the ruler.

Umma and shari'a are central conceptions that run through the discussion in virtually all the papers included in the present volume. The umma—the community of believers—was accorded central importance in Islamic political thought. Not only were the protection and furthering of its interests the central concern of the ruler, the individual Muslim, and the 'ulama.' The umma's consensus (ijma') on the legitimacy of the ruler as well as on details concerning the development of social and cultural norms was considered infallible. The community of believers was thus placed as the most significant group in the public sphere, and above the ruler.

> The shari'a—the sacred law, or the rules and regulations governing the lives of Muslims, derived in principal from the Qur'an and hadith—was developed by fuqaha' (jurists) and was basically an autonomous legal system, independent from the ruler's influence. Above and beyond a legal system, the shari'a embodied the values and norms of the social order proper to the community of believers (the umma) and became its principal cultural symbol. The sacred nature of the shari'a has been entrenched in a deep-rooted public

sentiment of Muslim societies. The sanction of the sacred law contributed to the formation of a Muslim public opinion, and endowed institutions and social groupings based on the shari'a—such as the qadi, the mufti, the schools of law (madhabib)—with a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the rulers. It also accorded moral authority to the 'ulama'—the shari'a specialists—who asserted the position of the authorized interpreters of the shari'a law and the custodians of the moral values underlying the ideals of social order of the umma (Gibb 1962, Hodgson 1974, Lapidus 1991).

Of the many organizations that developed in Muslim societies, it was mainly the schools of law, the waqf, the far-ranging endowments, and the different Sufi orders that reconstituted the continuality of the public sphere. Many aspects of the institutional arenas constituting the public sphere varied in different societies and periods, and the relative importance and scope of these institutions did change in different historical settings and periods. But some combination of them seems to have existed in all cases; though regulated by the ruler, these arenas were yet autonomous and could exert far-reaching influence on the ruler—an influence that went far beyond simple subservience to official rule or attempts to evade it.

The relative strength of these actors varied, of course, in different periods and in different Muslim societies; and these differences greatly influenced the specific contours of the major institutions of the public sphere. In some cases, as Said Arjomand (1988) has shown in his analysis of the emergence of the academies in medieval Islamic societies, they could indeed be greatly dependent on the ruler; he could exercise strong control—based on patronage—over the appointment of personnel to the institutions and hence limit their independence. In cases where the rulers were weak, as for instance in Malaka, as Robert Heffner (1998) has shown, strong merchant groups could become not only autonomous in their own milieu but also major players in the political arena vis-à-vis the ruler. But in all cases the rulers retained the basic parameters of public spheres as constituted in Islamic societies.

Concomitantly there developed also in many Islamic societies, especially but not only in urban centers, more informal public spaces, such as coffee houses or bazaar meeting points, which served as meeting places for many sectors of the society, sometimes in close relation with the people engaged in the more formal frameworks.

These public spheres that developed in Islamic societies were characterized by several features which seem very close to the modern (Western) model of civil society—namely first, a quite remarkable even if certainly not legally grounded relative autonomy from the rulers; a crucial role in the continual self-organization of society and in promulgating and upholding the moral order and social cohesion thereof; and their constituting the guardians and bearers of the moral consensus of the society. Such public sphere or spheres entailed also a certain component of civility, of relative tolerance between different sectors of society, based on a combination of equality of all believers—those entitled to full membership of the society (as distinct from various non-Muslims, especially Jews or Christians); but often with some hierarchical notions as they developed in the social arena. Similarly these public spheres, while closely related to the existing family or occupational groups, probably more than in Western society, yet were not totally embedded in them—entailing some opening between them, encompassing them and indeed giving rise to more open autonomous arenas or channels across such groups.

At the same time this public sphere differed in some important ways from the Western conception of civil society. The most important distinctive characteristics of the public sphere which distinguish it from that of the ideal type of "Western" civil society is seen in its relation to the political arena, in the fact that while many of the actors in this sphere could—and did—influence the concrete policies of many rulers, this did not imply direct autonomous access to the political arena, to the domain of rulership, as was the case in European parliaments and corporate urban institutions. Needless to say some—often very strong—attempts to exert such influence did develop in many Muslim societies. But in matters of concrete politics, especially in matters of foreign or military policy, as well as in such internal affairs as taxation and the keeping of public order and supervision of their own officials, the rulers were quite independent from the various actors in the public sphere.

Thus in Muslim, especially Sunni, societies there developed a far-reaching decoupling between the make-up of the public sphere and access to the political arena proper and to the decision-making of the rulers. This decoupling was manifested in the combination, on the one hand, of the fact that the upholding of the moral order of the community was vested in the ulama and in the members of the community, with the rulers playing a secondary role, and on the other hand of the participants in the public sphere of large sectors of the society, having only rather limited autonomous access to concrete policymaking—i.e., of the relative independence of the rulers (Lapidus 1996).

But the relative, but very strong, independence of the ruler was attained at a price—a price rooted in the separation between khalifa and sultan which constituted a basic aspect of the historical experience of Islamic societies, especially in the mainstream of Islamic (Sunni) religious thought, and which tended to legitimize any ruler who ensured the existence of the Muslim community and the upholding of the shari'a. This mode legitimated—indeed assumed—the possible coercive nature of such rulers and their distance from the pristine Muslim ideal regarding the moral order of the community. But while rulers, even oppressive ones, were legitimized in the seemingly minimalistic terms as necessary for the maintenance of public order and of the community, they were not seen as the promulgators, guardians, or regulators of the basic norms of the Islamic community. Whatever the extent of the acceptance of their legitimation, it usually entailed the rulers' duty to uphold the social order and to implement shari'a justice—and hence also the possibility of close scrutiny of their behavior by the ulama—even if such scrutiny did not usually have clear and direct institutional effects. Paradoxically enough, the fact that political problems constituted a central focus of Muslim theology was to no small extent rooted in this disjunction between the ideal of the Islamic ruler as the upholder of the pristine transcendental vision of Islam and the reality of his rulership (Rosenthal 1958).

Thus the perception of the Muslim rulers as Oriental despots, rooted indeed in the decoupling between the make-up of the public sphere and access to the decision-making of the rulers, is basically wrong. It is wrong because in fact the scope of the autonomous decision-making of these rulers was relatively limited. Even if the

rulers could behave in despotic ways in their relations with the officials most close
to them, or even towards any single subject, in internal affairs beyond taxation and
the keeping of public order they were limited, and not only because of the limits of
technology. Their power was limited because, unlike a European experience, rulership
("politics") in these above all Sunni Islamic societies did not constitute—contrary to
the early pristine image of the Muslim ruler as the embodiment of the transcendental
vision of Islam—a central ideological component in the upholding of the moral order
of the Islamic community even if, pragmatically, it constituted a necessary condition
for the implementation of shari'a. Moreover, the "political" weakness of many of the
major organizations in the public sphere, as Arjomand has shown, is to be attributed
not to the despotic tendencies of the ruler but to the absence of legal concepts and of
corporations (Arjomand 1988, 1999).

<div align="center">IV</div>

These distinct characteristics of the public sphere in Islamic societies were, as was
also the case, as we shall see later on, in other societies, greatly influenced by the
combination of the basic premises of social and political order prevalent in these
societies and their specific historical experiences in the case of Islam, especially the
mode of its expansion (Hodgson 1974).

  Most important among the premises of social and political order bearing on the
constitution of public spheres in Islam societies were the ideal of the ummah—
the community of all believers—as the major arena for the implementation of the
transcendental and moral vision of Islam; the strong universalistic component in the
definition of this Islamic community; the closely connected emphasis on the principled
political equality of all believers—and the continual confrontation of this ideal with
the political realities of the expansion of Islam.

  This pristine vision of the ummah—implicit only in the very formative period
of Islam, but often portrayed in Muslim discourse—entailed a complete fusion of
political and religious collectivities, the complete convergence or conflation of the
sociopolitical and religious communities (Hodgson 1974). Indeed, the very conceptual
distinction between these two dimensions, rooted as it is in the Western historical
experience, is basically not applicable to the concept of the ummah.

  In this vision two strong tensions developed from the very beginning of Is-
lam's history—from the end of the Ummayad period. One such tension was that
between these particularistic primordial Arab elements or components, seemingly
naturally embodied in the initial carriers of the Islamic vision and the universalis-
tic orientation—tensions that became more important with the continual expansion
of Islamic conquest and incorporation of new territorial entities and ethnic groups
(Shaban 1990, Sharon 1983).

  The second tension was that between the communal or egalitarian universalistic
vision of the pristine Islamic community and the institutional reality of the patrimonial

and Imperial structure of the societies conquered by Islam in the first, formative period of its expansion.

These tensions became most fully visible with the institutionalization of the Abbasid revolution—indeed, in close relation to the institutionalization of this universalistic vision—when concomitantly there developed, especially within Sunni Islam, the final crystallization of this universalistic ideology with a *de facto* separation between the religious community and the rulers—a separation between the khalifa, the actual ruler and the sultan, the embodiment of the pristine Islamic vision heralding de facto separation between the rulers and the religious establishment (ulama). This separation, partially legitimized by the religious leadership, was continually reinforced, above all by the ongoing military and missionary expansion of Islam—expansion far beyond the ability of any single regime to sustain it (Lapidus 1991)—a process which culminated in the eleventh century and became further reinforced under the impact of the Mongol invasions.

In the various Muslim, especially Sunni, regimes that developed under the impact of the continual expansion of Islam, the khalifa often became *de facto* powerless yet continued to serve as an ideal figure—the presumed embodiment of the pristine Islamic vision of the umma and the major source of legitimation of the sultan—even if *de facto* he and the ulama legitimized any person or group that was able to seize power. Such separation between the khalifa and the sultan was reinforced by the crystallization (in close relation to the mode of expansion of Islam, especially Sunni Islam) of a unique type of ruling group—namely, the military-religious rulers, who emerged from tribal and sectarian elements. It also produced the system of military slavery, which created special channels of mobility—such as the ghulam system in general and the Mameluk system and Ottoman devshisme in particular—through which the ruling groups could be recruited from alien elements (Ayalon 1951, 1996, Crone 1980, Pipes 1981). Even when some imperial components developed—as was the case in Iran, which became a stronghold of Shi'ite Islam in which relatively continuous strong patrimonial regimes developed—a complete fusion between the political ruler and the religious elites and establishment did not ensue (Arjomand 1988).

It was in the framework of the continual tension between the ideal of the ummah and the sociopolitical realities that there developed the continuous yet variable vitality, the specific characteristics of the public spheres in Islamic societies and of the major actors therein, characterized by the autonomy of the ulama, the hegemony of the shari'a, and their relationship to the rulers.

V

The specific combination of a vibrant public sphere with highly limited autonomous access of the major social actors within this sphere to the rulers' decision-making gave rise in Muslim societies to a very paradoxical situation with respect to the impact of these actors on changes in the political arena. The most important fact here—one that seemingly strengthens the view of these regimes as despotic—is that despite the

potential autonomous standing of members of the ulama which did not develop in these societies—fully institutionalized effective checks on the decision-making of the rulers, there was no machinery other than rebellion through which to enforce any far-reaching "radical" political demands.

And yet in contrast to other—for instance South East Asian or MesoAmerican—patrimonial regimes, the potential not just for rebellion but also for principled revolt and possible regime changes was endemic in Muslim societies. True, as Bernard Lewis (1973) has shown, a concept of revolution never developed within Islam. But at the same time, as Ernest Gellner (1981) indicated in his interpretation of Ibn Khaldoun's (1958) work, a less direct yet very forceful pattern of indirect ruler accountability and the possibility of regime changes did arise. This pattern was closely connected with a second type of ruler legitimation and accountability in Muslim societies—that embodied in the ruler being seen as the upholder of the pristine, transcendental Islamist vision—a conception promulgated above all by the different sectarian activities that constituted a continual component of the Islamic scene. These sectarian activities were connected with the combination of enduring utopian vision of the original Islamic era, and with the fact that this vision was neither fully implemented nor ever fully given up. Such sectarian-like tendencies have indeed existed in the recurring social movements in Muslim societies; and one of their distinctive characteristics has been the importance within them of the political dimension, frequently oriented toward the restoration of that pristine vision of Islam, which has never been given up.

Such sectarian activities, frequently oriented toward the restoration of that pristine vision of Islam, have never been given up. Such renovative orientations were embodied in the different versions of the tradition of reform—the Mujaddid tradition (Landau-Tasseron 1989); they could be focused on the person of a mahdi and/or be promulgated by a Sufi order in a tribal group such as the Wahabites or in a school of law. Such political and/or renovative orientations could be directed toward active participation in the political center, or its destruction or transformation, or toward a conscious withdrawal from it. But even such withdrawal, which developed in both Shi'ism and Sufism, often harbored tendencies to pristine renovation, leading potentially to political action.

Yet the possibility of implementing that pristine vision of Islam, of achieving that ideal fusion between the political and the religious community, of constructing the umma, was actually given up already relatively early in the formation and expansion of Islam. Indeed, the fact that political issues constituted a central focus of Muslim theology was to no small extent rooted in this disjunction between the ideal of the Islamic ruler as the upholder of the pristine transcendental vision of Islam and the reality of rulership in Islamic religion. Yet although never fully attained, it was continually promulgated, as Aziz Al Azmeh (1996) has shown, with very strong utopian orientations, by various scholars and religious leaders, in the later periods (Levtzion and Voll 1987, Voll 1991, Munson 1998). Given the ongoing perception of the age of the Prophet as an ideal, even utopian model, the idea of restoration constituted a perennial component of Islamic civilization, promoted above all by some of the extreme reformist movements. Muhammad's community in Medina became—in the

apt phrase of Henry Munson, Jr. (1998)—the Islamic "primordial utopia." Many of the later rulers (the Abbasids, Fatimids, and others) came to power on the crest of religious movements that upheld this ideal and legitimized themselves in just such religious-political terms.

VI

The fullest development of the political potential of such renovative tendencies took place in Islamic societies where such tendencies became connected with the resurgence of tribal revival against "corrupt" or weak regimes. In these cases the political impact of such movements became connected with processes attendant on the expansion of Islam and especially with the continuous impingement on the core Islamic polities of relatively newly converted tribal elements who presented themselves as the carriers of the original ideal Islamic vision and of the pristine Islamic polity. Many tribes (e.g., some of the Mongols), after being converted to Islam, transformed their own "typical" tribal structures to accord with Islamic religious-political visions and presented themselves as the symbol of pristine Islam, with strong renovative tendencies oriented to the restoration of pristine Islam.

This tendency became closely related to the famous cycle depicted by Ibn Khaldoun—namely, the cycle of tribal conquest, based on tribal solidarity and religious devotion, giving rise to the conquest of cities and settlement in them, followed by the degeneration of the ruling (often the former tribal) elite and then by its subsequent regeneration by new tribal elements from the vast—old or new—tribal reservoirs. Ibn Khaldoun emphasized above all the possibility of such renovation from within the original, especially Arab, tribal reservoir, and not from reservoirs acquired as it were through the expansion of Islam. Moreover, he focused more on the dilution of internal tribal cohesion as an important factor in the decline of Muslim dynasties and paid less attention to the "dogmatic" dimensions of Islam. But the overall strength of Ibn Khaldoun's approach is that it provides an important analytical tool for understanding the dynamics of Islamic societies beyond the geographical scope of his own vision. Such new "converts"—along with the seemingly dormant tribes of the Arabian peninsula, of which the Wahabites constituted probably the latest and most forceful illustration—became a central dynamic political force in Islamic civilization.

By virtue of the combination of this mode of Islamic expansion with such sectarian, renovative orientations, Islam was probably the only Axial civilization in which sectarian-like movements—together with tribal leadership and groups—often led not only to the overthrow or downfall of existing regimes but also to the establishment of new political regimes oriented, at least initially, to the implementation of the original pristine, primordial Islamic utopia. But significantly enough, once these regimes became institutionalized they gave rise to patrimonial or Imperial regimes within which the "old" Ibn Khaldoun cycle tended to develop anew.

Public Spheres in Indian Civilization
VII

At the other end of the spectrum—and seemingly indeed very paradoxically closer to the European, Western model—stands the "traditional," premodern India. The crux of this "Indian" paradox is that the public sphere that developed in "traditional" India, and which was indeed closest to the classical Western model of civil society, was rooted in and based on highly hierarchical non-egalitarian social order. Yet the Indian social order, especially—indeed paradoxically—of what has been designated as the caste system or orders, or to be more precise in the multiple social, including caste networks and organizations, as well as in the ideological premises of these orders, was relatively flexible. These social organizations and networks were not relatively simple closed units of the kind that can perhaps presumably be found in many tribal or nonliterate societies, defined in terms of relatively restricted kinship or territorial criteria. Rather these social organizations were continuously constituted—elaborate ideological constructions that imbued the primordial attributes of various local or occupational groups and the civil orders of various communities and polities with a relatively high level of symbolization and ideologization. Such orders, seemingly based on a country-wide non-flexible ideology, were in fact constructed in multiple local or regional settings, in which they were often interwoven with other settings or organizations such as temples, sects or guilds, which were related to the political arena, but also independent of it, and which were legitimized and interwoven in different settings in multiple, relatively flexible ways.

These numerous networks—especially but not only the caste networks—were characterized by several distinctive features. Organizationally, castes were local or regional units interlocked in many ritual, economic, and political combinations, and they were organized on several distinct levels. One was the local level—the jati—the exact composition of which naturally varied greatly between different places. But on the "global-Indian" level, despite many local variations, the schemata according to which castes and inter-caste relations were constructed and the various networks that bore them, constituted the focus of a broad, potentially continent-wide civilizational identity or identities.

Inter-caste relations, constructed in terms of either hierarchical principles, those of center-periphery relations, or of complementary reciprocal relations between the different jati, were usually effected through series of gifts and presentations, often presented in public displays and ceremonies in which the ritual power and economic relations between the different caste groups and their relations to the ruler were symbolized.

Of great importance in this context was the distinction between the castes of the right as against those of the left—the first being those economically based on land and the second the more mobile castes of merchants and artisans. Significantly, brahmins did belong to both castes of the right and of the left, and in this way they served as the many mediators or points of interlinkage, often in close relation to the kings as arbiters between different local jati organizations.

All these tendencies gave rise—to paraphrase M. L. Reiniche (1979, 1998,)—to

"a distinct social morphology and segmentary processes of differentiation, and at times identification, which at every level gave rise to a degree of social flexibility is working at the very root of the society and it is already at this level that we find 'pragmatism and accommodation.' In the working of such a society we find variable spaces and times for distinctions and discriminations as well as for some kind of equalitarian behaviour—the frontiers of ascribed status were never fully removed beyond symbolical and ritual moments of cooperation…".

"…At every level, we find a kind of restricted, localized "public" space as far as it involves a continual action (through publicized religious merits, marriage alliances, assertion of rights or qualifications, occupations, and so on) of individuals or limited regroupings towards differentiation of themselves from the others according to such or such point of view—in other words, we have, as would have claimed L. Dumont (1970), variable networks of relationships and not corporate groups."

VIII

Several characteristics of this relatively flexible and open social system are of great importance for the understanding of the constitution of public spheres, political participation and dynamics in "historical" India.

The first of these characteristics is the relative autonomy of the major social sectors and networks, the complex and networks of castes, villages, guilds, occupational groups such as those of merchants—an autonomy which was embedded in ascriptive, albeit wide and continuously reconstructed, frameworks (Reiniche 1979, 1998). The nature of this autonomy has been captured by R. Inden (1990), who defines the various local and caste groups as both subjects and citizens who, although taxed and controlled by the kings, were also allowed a high degree of self-regulation: they "had an inherent, but limited and partial capacity (we might call it rights) to combine within and among themselves and order their own affairs" (Bayly 1999).

But it was not only the relative autonomy of these networks or groups from the rulers that is important. Of great significance from the point of view of our discussion is the fact that this autonomy was connected with the possibility of at least some autonomous access to the rulers—an access rooted not in a conception of "rights," certainly not of individual rights, but rather in that of the initial duties of rulers and ruled, especially of the duties of rulers to listen to the problems raised by the subjects. Moreover, at least some attention to the demands of the subjects and their problems was effected not just through petitions and behind-the-scenes bargaining, but in open public occasions such as for instance in those described by Pamela Price (1986).

It was because of this combination of relative autonomy of such sectors from the ruler, the possibility of autonomous access to the ruler, and the public nature of some at least of the negotiations between them, that the networks which constituted the major components of the public spheres that developed in Indian society can be seen as kernels of an equivalent of civil society in the European scene—albeit a highly hierarchical one rooted in conceptions of duties and not of rights, and organized in a highly hierarchical and in principled collective ways. At the same time, given the strong hierarchical roots and assumptions on which this model was based, the civility and tolerance that developed within these public spheres were of "segregative" and

limited type. Yet, significantly enough, these relations were also imbued with a very strong emphasis on reciprocity which, formulated in terms of reciprocal duties, when combined with the relatively flexible mode of constitution of concrete caste groups (jatis) on the ground, could serve as ground for some common discourse.

For all these reasons and above all because of the relatively widespread access to the political arena, there seemingly developed in India in contrast to the case of the Islamic societies a situation very close to the ideal model of European civil society.

But in fact the public spheres that developed in India differed greatly from the European case from the point of view of their respective dynamics—especially with respect to the importance within the Islamic and European societies of very strong political utopian orientations with strong reformist or semi-revolutionary dimensions—a component which was very weak, probably even missing in the Indian case.

The weakness of such a political utopian component in the Indian case was closely related to, indeed rooted in, the relative devaluation—in comparison with the monotheistic religions and in a different mode with China—of the political realm in them or transcendental vision, the ontological premises of which were hegemonic in Indian civilization.

The political arena, the arena of rulership, did not constitute in "historical" India—as it did in monotheistic civilizations or in Confucianism—a major arena of the implementation of the transcendental visions predominant in this civilization. The contours of Indian civilizational identity as promulgated by the major bearers of this transcendental vision—above all Buddhism—was not defined, as in Europe, or as in the other monothelistic religions (Judaism and Islam), and even more so in China, in political terms. It is only in the contemporary scene lately that there have developed strong tendencies among some political groups to promulgate a specific Hindu political identity and to define the Indian civilization in political terms. In "historical" "pre-modern" India the major arenas of the implementation of such civilizational conceptions and visions were not the political but the religious-ritual—even when borne by military Kshatriya groups. Concomitantly while the political component certainly was not of negligible importance in the constitution of the multiple and multifaceted identities of the different collectivities—local, national, or religious and indeed also of caste identities—as they crystallized in India, it did not play a central, and certainly not an exclusive, role in such construction (Dirks 1987, Galey 1983, Inden 1982, Kulke 1993, Pouchepadass and Stern 1991).

These conceptions of the political arena and of legitimation of rulers were closely related to the theory and practice of sovereignty that developed in India. Thus as Wink (1986, 1991), the Rudolphs (1984, 1987), and others (Price 1986, Saberwal 1999) have shown, these conceptions emphasized the multiple rights—usually defined in terms of various duties—of different groups and sectors of society rather than a unitary, quasi-ontological conception—real or ideal—of "the state" or of "society"—giving instead rise to what can be defined as fractured sovereignty.

This does not necessarily mean that rulership was, in the Indian civilizational complex, only secondary or derivative, as was suggested or at least implied in the classical expositions of Luis Dumont (1970) and to a lesser extent of Jan Heesterman (1985,

1992). In these expositions, the king's symbolic authority was in principle derived from the overall Brahmanic cultural-religious vision and was symbolized through religious rituals closely connected to this vision—and accordingly his "sanctity" was only derivative. Recent revisionist approaches have emphasized that the king/the ruler played a central and rather complex role in the context of such transcendental visions and the possibility of their implementation. These approaches have suggested that a high level of sacral or semisacral status, distinction and honor accrued to the political ruler or rulers, and that some—sometimes very significant—degree of authority seems to have been attributed to him independently of the "official"—Brahminic religious—legitimation. The king was often portrayed as "king of the universe," his rule extending to the four corners of the earth, his coronation ceremony and annual commemoration and the often accompanying horse sacrifice renewing his powers annually. His claim to universal sovereignty, as "lord of all lords," and the manifestation of his greatness through temples and monuments attested to his symbolic, indeed semi-sacral power and distinctiveness—but always in principle, if not in practice, secondary to the Brahminic one, but not necessarily derived from it (Dirks 1987, Galey 1983, Price 1986).

IX

It is in the context of the combination between the relatively flexible characteristics of the major networks and organizations of Indian society and the modes of legitimation of rulers that there developed pragmatic, mutually accommodating, relations between the rulers and different sectors of society; the continual intensive political bargaining, and to some, certainly not egalitarian but widespread tendency to power-sharing, with a relatively wide scope for some pluralistic arrangements. Such accommodative tendencies were also reinforced by the fact that the boundaries of different political formations were rather flexible, giving rise to strong inclusivist tendencies with respect to different territorial groups and trans-territorial networks. Significantly enough these features were also characteristics, as Stanley J. Tambiah has shown, contrary to some "Orientalist" views of the Mughal Empire (Tambiah 1988). This does not mean, of course, that the political game in India was peaceful, "nice" or gentlemanly—it was often vicious and manipulative as the Artashastra fully attests to. But it was not "ideological" in the way it was in the monotheistic civilizations or, in a different mode, in China. Or in other words, the principled ideological orientation did not constitute a central component of the political process and struggle.

Thus the crux of these relations between the different social sectors and the arenas of rulership, rooted in the non-ontologization of the political arena, was first, the relatively strong autonomy of the various, continually reconstructed social networks and sectors, combined with, second, their relatively autonomous access to the arena of rulership; third, a strong tendency to inclusiveness—i.e., of incorporation of various subsectors into their frameworks; and fourth, non-individualistic grounding of these

processes—all of which have given rise to very distinct dynamics borne above all by numerous political and religious entrepreneurs.

Given the ontological conceptions prevalent in India, the relative devaluation in these conceptions of the political arena, and the weakness of the utopian political component in these visions, the distinct "civil society" that developed there did not entail, in contrast to Europe, basic ideological confrontations between "state" and "society"—it gave rise to the distinctive dynamics which distinguish them from the European and Islamic scene. The crux of these dynamics has been—seemingly and paradoxically, concomitantly with the new access of the participation in the public sphere, to the political, that there developed weaker tendencies to the reconstitution of the political regimes than in the sectarian sectors in the Muslim societies.

The basic definition of ontological reality and of the political arena prevalent in India there did not give rise—as was the case in Europe, and to a smaller extent in Islamic societies—to strong alternative conceptions of the political order, and the principled, ideological reconstruction of the political (or economic) arena according to basic transcendental orientations. Attempts at such reconstruction did not constitute, as they did in Europe, a major focus of the movements of protest or the numerous sects that developed in India—be it Bhakti, Jain, Buddhism, and other, movements within Hinduism—even if in many cases segments of such movements participated in the changes of political regimes and in the struggles between different kings and princes.

Many of the visions promulgated by these movements emphasized equality, but it was above all equality in the cultural or religious arena, with respect to access to worship, and only to some extent in the definition of membership in the political community. Such egalitarian orientations promulgated in some of the heterodox movements, which sometimes became connected with rebellions and political struggle, were not characterized by the strong articulation of new political goals, nor were they linked with many attempts to restructure the basic premises of political regimes. Only in some popular uprising against alien or "bad" rulers did such goals crystallize for a short while (Malik 1977, Eschmann 1997).

These movements, oriented toward the reconstitution of ascriptive civilizational symbols and collectivities, could become connected with the extension of the borders of political communities or with the establishment of new ones, with changes of dynasties, but rarely—and usually rather fleetingly—with the reconstruction of the premises of the political centers. Buddhism did give rise to such new premises, but they became fully institutionalized only outside India, in the new Theravada Buddhist polities of southeast Asia and in Mahayana Tibet.

There were of course very important but never absolute exceptions to the relatively weak principled political orientations of the various sectarian movements. Thus on the one hand there developed, as Shulman and Subrahmanjah have shown, in South India, especially in Tamilnadu, a rather distinct type of polity which was characterized by a much greater autonomy of the political arena rooted in the castes of the left hand with strong sectarian tendencies and seemingly without the Brahminic mode being predominant (Narayana, Shulman, Subrahmanyan 1992). Moreover, as Reiniche (1998) has indicated, among some of these sectarian movements there de-

veloped far-reaching challenges to the Brahminic hegemony, often indeed closely connected to such political endeavors. And yet significantly enough in all these cases, there developed a very strong process of Brahminization of such sectarianism which was originally connected with very significant transporting of the religious orientations beyond the Brahminic caste order, developed into yet another component of this order. Thus for instance, as David Shulman (1984) has shown, the Viraisva movement in the 12th century which started as a protest against this order with its triple pivot of temple, caste, and king, ultimately "The Revolution was in fact transformed."

Parallelly, and again in contrast to Europe, the reconstruction of the major collectivities and the development of new types of social organization in India was not, on the whole, connected with radical shifts in the modes of their legitimation, or with principled struggles concerning the bases of such legitimation. The bases of legitimation of the various mundane activities—political, economic, and the like—defined in terms of their respective dharmas and auspicious performances, were relatively continuous throughout Indian history, even if their concrete applications were often rather flexible.

Throughout its long history, "traditional" India, including Mughal India, witnessed far-reaching changes in its political and economic organization, in technology, and in levels of social differentiation—redefinition of the boundaries of political units, some restructuring of the economic sphere, and changes in social and economic policies— all effected by coalitions of entrepreneurs rooted in different caste and sectarian networks and of economic groups such as merchants. But except for the ultimately unsuccessful attempt of Asoka, most of these processes of movements of change did not succeed in—and possibly did not even aim at—restructuring the basic premises of the political arena, or the basic center–periphery relations (Thapar 1973, Tambiah 1988).

X

It is these characteristics of the institutional and symbolic characteristics of the political arena and of the major religious movements that explain one of the most interesting, perhaps again from a comparative point of view, paradoxical aspects of Indian medieval and early-modern history, namely the absence of wars of religion such as characterized Christianity and Islam—that is, wars in which political goals were closely interwoven with, and legitimized by, attempts to impose a religion on the community or on the political realm by political fiat in name of its universal claim. While there were many, often brutal struggles and contestations between different religious groups—no wars of religion, i.e. attempts, as in the monotheistic civilizations, to impose a religion on a society by political fiat or coercion, developed. Even if the recent emphasis on the relatively peaceful symbiosis of Muslim and Hinduism groups in the Mughal realm are probably exaggerated, and numerous points of conflict between them continually developed, yet they did not usually acquire a totalistic confrontational characteristic which has been an important component of the situation within and between monotheistic religions. The often very intensive religious

conflicts between Muslims and Hindus which developed in the Moghul Empire under Muslim rule did not develop in the direction of a forced conversion or of a total confrontation with the Hindu religion or religions.

Christian Civilizations—The European Complex
XI

The distinctive patterns of public spheres and their impact on political dynamics that developed in Western and Central Europe was characterized by a stronger tendency to bring together the constitution of public spheres in which the moral order of society was promulgated with the active participation of the various (usually higher) strata in the political arenas, and with the development within such public spheres of potentially transformative tendencies of their respective regimes. While these tendencies developed fully in modern regimes, kernels thereof could be identified already in early premodern Europe.

These tendencies were rooted, as was the case in other civilizations, in the combination of the basic civilizational premises of the respective cases of Christian civilization—especially in their multiple historic roots—Jewish, Hellenistic and tribal—with the specific historical experience of the different parts of this civilization (Heer 1968).

Within the Christian civilizations there developed from the very beginning conceptions of the transcendental order which contained within itself some combination of this-worldly and other-worldly orientations. Christianity's inherent this-worldly orientations, i.e. the vision of the reconstruction of the mundane world as one of the ways of salvation, i.e. the vision that the mundane world constitutes—indeed in marked contrast to Buddhism—at least one arena for activities which are relevant to salvation, for the implementation of its transcendental vision, has been rooted in its Jewish origins and reinforced by its encounter with the heritage of the Greek, Hellenistic and Roman antiquities.

This strong orientation to activities in the mundane world can already be found within the Christian ascetic and monastic communities which from the early centuries (4th on) were oriented also, unlike the Buddhist or the Indian renouncer, towards this world and not to total escape from it.

Historical circumstances—the initial low political status of Christianity, its being a persecuted sect or sects—made such this-worldly orientations in the earlier period of Christianity rather subdued, but did not obliterate them. More propitious historical circumstances—above all the conversion of Constantine—brought out these this-worldly ideological orientations in full force, built on potentialities which have existed in early Christianity from its very beginning. Since then tension between them and the pure other-worldly or outworldly ones became a continuous part of the history of Christianity.

These potentialities and the tension between this-worldly and other-worldly orientations developed in different ways in different parts of the Christian civilizations—

in the Catholic one, the Eastern, the Byzantine and later Russian Christianity—according to the specific combination of this- and other-worldly orientations that has developed in the respective centers and their carriers; and the geopolitical circumstances and the structure of political power and elites in each of them.

The most widespread, continuous and dynamic of these civilizations developed in Western, Northern and Central and Central-Eastern Europe. Here, in conjunction with rather specific geopolitical circumstances, there developed some distinctive characteristics that provided the background for the development of the specific type of relations between public spheres and political participation which constituted the ideal model of civil society in the modern political discourse (Eisenstadt 1977, 1999).

Of great importance in this context has been the combination between structural and cultural ideological pluralisms. The structural pluralism was characterized above all by a strong combination of low, but continuously increasing levels of structural differentiation with the continuously changing boundaries of different collectivities and frameworks. Parallelly there developed in Europe a multiplicity of prevalent cultural orientations which developed out of several traditions—the Jewish, the Christian, the Greek and the various tribal ones; and a closely related multiplicity and complexity of ways to resolve the tensions between the transcendental and mundane orders, through either worldly (political and economic) or other-worldly activities. This multiplicity of orientations was rooted in the fact that the European civilization developed out of the continuous interaction between, on the one hand, the secondary breakthrough of two major Axial civilizations—the Jewish and the Greek one—and on the other hand numerous "pagan" tribal traditions and society.

The combination of such multiple cultural traditions with the pluralistic structural and political-ecological conditions, explains the fact that in Western and Central Europe there developed—more than in other Christian civilizations—continuous tensions between conceptions of hierarchy and equality, as the basic dimensions of participation of different sectors of the society in the political and religious arenas; and between the strong commitment and autonomous access of different groups and strata to the religious and political orders, on the one hand, and the emphasis on the mediation of such access by the Church or by political powers, on the other (Bloch 1962, Hintze 1975).

The crystallization of these structural tendencies combined with the specific cultural orientations, rooted in Christianity and its encounter with the German heritage and in some tribal traditions prevalent in Europe, gave rise there to (a) multiplicity of centers; (b) a high degree of permeation of the peripheries by the centers and of impingement of the peripheries on the centers; (c) a relatively small degree of overlapping of the boundaries of class, ethnic, religious and political entities and their continuous restructuring; (d) a comparatively high degree of autonomy of groups and strata and of their access to the centers of society; (e) a high degree of overlapping among different status units combined with a high level of countrywide status ("class") consciousness and political activity; (f) multiplicity of cultural and "functional" (economic or professional) elites with a relatively high degree of autonomy,

a high degree of cross-cutting between them and close relationship between them and broader, more ascriptive strata; (g) relative autonomy of the legal system with regard to other integrative systems—above all the political and religious ones; and (h) the high degree of autonomy of cities and autonomous centers of social and structural creativity and identity-formation (Eisenstadt 1977).

The continuous restructuring of centers and collectivities that took place in Europe was closely connected with the continuous oscillation and tension between the sacred, primordial, and civil dimensions of the legitimation of these centers and as components of these collectivities. While, for instance, many collectivities were defined mainly in primordial terms and the Church was seemingly defined mainly in sacred ones, yet at the same time however, each collectivity, institution and center also attempted to arrogate all the other symbols of legitimation to itself (Hallam 1975, Hintze 1975).

These types of centers and subcenters and of center–periphery relations can be explained, at least in part, by the prevalence of many autonomous elites—political, religious and economic—often not confined to their specific activities. Thus the religious elites were oriented not only towards the religious arena but also towards the social and political-economic arenas, and the same was true of the other elites. These were characterized by: the predisposition of secondary elites, relatively close to the center, to be the major carriers of religious heterodoxies and political innovations; a relatively close relationship between these secondary elites and broader social strata, and hence also to movements of rebellion; and a concomitant predisposition on the part of those elites and groups to develop and often combine activities oriented towards center-formation with those of institution-building in the economic, cultural and educational spheres (Burton 1965, Kołakowski 1969, LeGoff 1968, Rutenberg 1973).

In close relation to these structural characteristics there developed a distinct mode of change in Western Europe, from at least the late Middle Ages on. This mode of change was characterized by a relatively high degree of symbolic and ideological articulation of the political struggle and of movements of protest which focused on the relative symbolic importance of the various collectivities and centers; second, with attempts to combine the structuring of the boundaries of these centers and collectivities with the reconstruction of the bases of their legitimation (Eisenstadt 1987, Tilly 1975).

XII

The very frequent attempts at the reconstruction of centers and collectivities were closely connected, first, with very strong ideological struggles, which focused on the relative symbolic importance of the various collectivities and centers; second, with attempts to combine the structuring of the boundaries of these centers and collectivities with the reconstruction of the bases of their legitimation; and third, with a very strong consciousness of discontinuity between different stages or periods of their development. Thus changes within any component of macro-societal order impinged on

one another and above all on the political sphere. These changes gave rise to continuous mutual restructuring of these spheres—without necessarily coalescing into one continuous political or cultural framework.

Concomitantly, as compared with the pure Imperial systems, Western Europe was characterized by a much lesser stability of regimes, by continuous changes of boundaries of regimes and collectivities and restructuring of centers; but at the same time it evinced also a much greater degree of capacity of institutional innovation cutting across different political and "national" boundaries and centers.

The patterns were activated by: (a) a high degree of predisposition of secondary elites, relatively close to the center, to be the major carriers of religious heterodoxies and political innovations; (b) a relatively close relationship between such autonomous secondary elites within broader social strata, and hence also to movements of rebellion; (c) a concomitant predisposition on the part of these elites and broader social strata to develop activities oriented to center-formation and to combine them with those of institution-building in the economic, cultural and educational spheres.

Concomitantly, there developed a continuous impingement of movements of protest, heterodoxies on the political struggle in the center and the incorporation of many themes of protest into the center. It was such combination of cosmological visions and political-ecological settings that provided the specific framework to the development of the Great Revolutions, of the modern political order (Eisenstadt 1999).

Out of these tendencies there developed a continuous confrontation between the constitution of centers, movements of protest and the process of institution-building. Institution-building in most spheres was seen as very relevant to the construction of centers and judged according to its contribution to the basic premises of these centers, while at the same time centers were also judged according to their capacity to promote such institutions. Second was the continuous competition between different groups or strata and elites about their access to the constitution of these centers. Third, there was a continuous impingement of movements of protest, heterodoxies on the political struggle in the center and the incorporation of many themes of protest into the center.

It was these characteristics of center–periphery relations that constituted important background for the development of multiple public spheres constituted by the major social actors, in which different conceptions of public good were promulgated—which at the same time could also serve as arenas for the participation of different groups in the political arenas that gave rise to the kernels of the very strong tendency to the conflation or at least coalescence between public sphere or spheres with the emphasis within them on the promulgation of the moral and social order of society; with demands of various sectors of society to autonomous participation and representation of their interests in the political process and their various interests.

The roots of the demands of various sectors of society to autonomous access to the political arena are, of course, to be found in the older constitutional arrangements of Europe, but with the crystallization of the modern political orders, most fully

epitomized in the Great Revolutions, there took place a far-reaching transformation in the nature of such demands.

Concluding Remarks
XIII

The analyses presented above have indicated that the dynamics of public spheres in the societies studied here were shaped by the combination of the ontological visions and premises of social order prevalent in these societies, as they developed in the respective historical experiences of these societies, in which the confrontation between the heterodoxies and the orthodoxies played an important role.

Thus the constitution of a very vibrant public sphere combined as it was with limitations of autonomous access of major social sectors of the major actors in this sphere, to the political arena that developed in Islamic (especially Sunni) societies, was shaped by the combination of the pristine vision of the ummah, the dissociation between the Khalifa and the Sultan as it developed attendant on the specific mode of expansion of Islam; and the relative devaluation of concrete political arena in contrast to the promulgation of the vision of the moral of community. At the same time this combination imbued sectarian activities with a very strong political dimension and gave rise to the strong but highly distinctive transformative potentialities within them.

In India the very vibrant public sphere which combined relatively strong access to the rulers, with but very limited transformative tendencies in the political arena, has been closely connected with the fact that the political order did not constitute a major arena for the implementation of the predominant transcendental and moral vision; that sovereignty was highly fragmented; and that rulership was to a large extent embedded in the very flexible social especially caste order from within which there arose the many sectarian groups and individuals—bearers of visions which were not focused on the reconstitution of the political arena.

In China—which we did not discuss here—where the political order in fact constituted the major arena for the implementation of the transcendental vision but where it was the rulers who, together with the Confucian literati there, constituted the sole custodian of this order, there developed but limited scope for an autonomous public sphere and even less so for autonomous political participation of the actors in this sphere in the central political system.

In Europe the relatively close relation between public sphere as the locus of the constitution and upholding of the moral order of society, and the participation of different social sectors in the political arena and the concomitant development of strong challenges to the existing social and political orders were shaped by the combination of the specific structural and cultural characteristics that developed in the realm of European civilization, especially by the prevalence in them of combined this- and other-worldly orientation, ontological visions in the central place of heterodoxies in political process and their strong connection with broader social movements. All

these have matured as it was in the Great Revolutions and have given rise to the modern political order.

Public Spheres and Civil Society in the Modern Political Order—Some Introductory Observations—The core of modern civil society; autonomy from the state; autonomous access to the state; and the crystallization of public spheres
XIV

The relations between civil society and public sphere have changed drastically with the constitution of the modern political order.

Whatever the differences between different "pre-modern" societies, including pre-modern (and early modern) Europe, common to all of them was the prevalence of a "traditional" legitimation of the political regimes and very often also their symbolization in the central public sphere in the person of the monarch or head of state. It is the demise of this mode of legitimation—together, of course, with the development of the distinct modern institutional formations—that gave rise to relations between public spheres and the political arena which are distinctive of the "modern" order, within the framework of which developed the distinctive characteristics and problematic of modern civil society.

The core of modern civil society is the development of the distinct mode of relations between the social and political arenas. Or, in other words, contrary to many common definitions, civil society (or "society") is not a distinct ontological reality or entity disembedded from ascriptive and oligarchic society and not regulated by the state which confronts another such entity—the state—but rather a distinct mode of relations between the social and the political arenas, the core of which is the development of autonomy of social sectors from the state; autonomous access to the state, to the political arena and the development of public spheres in which the relations between different social groups and the political arena, and indeed the concomitant tendency to the reconstitution of the realm of the political, are being continually openly discussed and contested.

Of crucial importance in facilitating the autonomous access of major social sectors to the political arena and to engage in a continual participation in it and their ability to call rulers to some accountability, has been, first, the continual process of the flow of open communication and information within and between these various associations, groups and sectors, and between them and the centers, above all through the combination and interweaving of associational and political activities. Second, of crucial importance in the development of such mode of relations between the "society" and the political arena was the development of critical interaction between the members of the political class or classes which developed in the modern societies, which were composed of different "traditional" and more "modern" elements, but which were on the whole already selected according to different modern criteria, and the continually developing members and leaders of the different associations and movements.

Thus the major problem or challenge of the constitution and reconstitution of modern civil society has been the development and continuity of institutional frameworks, social spaces and orientations which facilitate the crystallization of the continual development and reconstitution of such relations, of such modes of interaction in the modern order between social and political action, between "one" and society.

The potentiality of the development of such patterns of civil society, of the distinct characteristics of relations between "state" and society, is potentially given in all modern regimes—but it works out in different ways in the major types of modern political regimes—and these differences may be related to the different patterns of constitution of public spheres as they crystallized in the historical experience of these societies. The explorations of these relations should constitute a focus of future systematic research.

We may now take up the implications of the analysis presented above for the problematic of multiple modernities. As we have indicated above, such a perspective necessitates a somewhat new look at Europe. Such an approach looks at European civil society, as well as European modernity in general, as just one possible development of modernity, one—even if certainly historically the first one—of multiple modernities, all of which develop in distinct historical contexts.

Other modernities, other patterns of public spheres and civil societies developed under the impact of developments which differed from those that took place in Europe of Sufism in the 18th century. While many of the potentialities inherent in these developments have been stiffened by colonialism and Imperialism, yet they could also be of importance not only in the colonial setting but also post-colonial, giving rise to distinct multiple modernities such as for instance those which developed in Indonesia and Malaysia, and which are analyzed among others by Robert Hefner (2000).

Parallelly the distinct characteristics of the public spheres that developed in pre-modern India might have greatly influenced both the crystallization of the national modernity under the British, but also those of the contemporary Indian public sphere and democratic policy as distinct possibilities of modernity, of which the Western European, as well as the different American ones, are different from the European ones and are indeed important but not the only illustrations.

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