GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY?

John Keane

John Keane, a leading political thinker, tracks the recent development of a powerful big idea – global civil society. Keane explores the jumble of contradictory forces currently nurturing or threatening its growth, and he shows how talk of global civil society implies a political vision: of a less violent world founded on legally sanctioned power-sharing arrangements among many different and intermingling forms of socio-economic life. Keane's reflections are pitted against the widespread feeling that the world is both too complex and too violent and crazy for this idea to deserve serious reflection. His account borrows from various scholarly disciplines, including political science and international relations, to challenge the normative silence and confusion within much of the contemporary literature on globalisation and global governance. Against fears of terrorism, rising tides of xenophobia, and loose talk of 'anti-globalisation', the defence of global civil society mounted here implies the need for new democratic ways of living – and for brand-new democratic thinking about such planetary matters as global markets uncivil war, university life, and government with a global reach.

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John Keane is founder of the Centre for the St of Democracy and Professor of Politics at the University of Westminster. Born in Australia a educated at the universities of Adelaide, Toro and Cambridge, he is a frequent contributor t radio programmes and newspapers and magazines around the world. Among his book *The Media and Democracy* (1991), which has translated into more than twenty-five languag the prize-winning biography *Tom Paine : A Political Life* (1995); *Civil Society : Old Images New Visions* (1998); and a biography of powe *Václav Havel : A Political Tragedy in Six Acts* (1999). He was recently Karl Deutsch Profess Political Science at the Wissenschaftszentrur Berlin and a Fellow of the influential London-based think-tank, the Institute for Public Poli Research. He is currently writing a full-scale history of democracy – the first for over a cent

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Unfamiliar words

A new cosmology

All human orders, hunting and gathering societies included, have lived off shared images of the cosmos, world-views that served to plant the feet of their members firmly in space and time. Yet very few have fantasised the linking of the five oceans, six continents and peoples of our little blue planet wrapped in white vapour. Each of these world-views in the strict sense emerged only after the military defeats suffered by Islam, in early modern Europe. They included the forceful global acquisition of territory, resources and subjects in the name of empire; the efforts of Christendom to pick-a-back on imperial ventures for the purpose of bringing spiritual salvation to earth; and the will to unify the world through the totalitarian violence of fascism and Marxism–Leninism. Each of these globalising projects left indelible marks on the lives of the world's peoples, their institutions and ecosystems, but each also failed to accomplish its mission. In our times, against the backdrop of those failures, the image of ourselves as involved in another great human adventure, one carried out on a global scale, is again on the rise. A new world-view, radically different from any that has existed before, has been born and is currently enjoying a growth spurt: it is called global civil society.

These unfamiliar words 'global civil society' – a neologism of the 1990s – are fast becoming fashionable. They were born at the confluence of seven overlapping streams of concern among publicly-minded intellectuals at the end of the 1980s: the revival of the old language of civil society, especially in central–eastern Europe, after the military crushing of the Prague Spring; a heightening appreciation of the revolutionary effects of the new galaxy of satellite/computer-mediated communications (captured in Marshall McLuhan's famous neologism, 'the global village'); the new awareness, stimulated by the peace and ecological movements, of ourselves as members of a fragile and potentially self-destructive world system; the widespread perception that the implosion of Soviet-type communist systems implied a new global political order; the world-wide

growth spurt of neo-liberal economics and market capitalist economies; the disillusionment with the broken and unfulfilled promises of post-colonial states; and the rising concern about the dangerous and misery-producing vacuums opened up by the collapse of empires and states and the outbreak of uncivil wars.[1] Fed by these developments, talk of global civil society has become popular among citizens' campaigners, bankers, diplomats, NGOs and politicians. World Bank documents welcome 'the opportunity to work with civil society'; the Asian Development Bank (ADB) similarly speaks of the need to 'strengthen cooperation with civil society'; and even the World Trade Organisation (WTO) declares its support for dialogue with the world's civil society institutions.[2] The phrase 'global civil society' becomes protean and promiscuous. It even peppers speeches of prominent figures like UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, former US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, and Chancellor Schröder, sometimes to the point where the words themselves become as fickle as they are fashionable.

There is today much chatter about global civil society, but too little thinking about it. That is why the phrase 'global civil society' must be used with caution. Like all other vocabularies with a political edge, its meaning is neither self-evident nor automatically free of prejudice. So how can we best think about these words? Current usages are quite confused. There is general agreement that talk of global civil society is a response to rising concerns about the need for a new social and economic and political deal at the global level. And parallels are sometimes observed with the early modern European invention of the distinction between 'government' and 'civil society', which emerged during the period of questioning of the transcendental foundations of order, especially

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[1] Among the earliest expressions of these concerns is the theory of a 'world civic culture' in Elise Boulding, *Building a Global Civic Culture. Education for an Interdependent World* (New York, 1988); the idea of 'global civilization' in the working paper by Richard Falk, 'Economic Dimensions of Global Civilization' (Global Civilization Project, Center for International Studies, Princeton University, 1990); the theory of the 'internationalisation' of civil society and the terms 'cosmopolitan civil society' and 'global' or 'transnational' civil society in John Keane, 'The Future of Civil Society', in Tatjana Sikosha, *The Internationalisation of Civil Society* (The Hague, 1989) and *The Media and Democracy* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 135ff.; and Morten Ougaard, 'The Internationalisation of Civil Society' (Center for Udviklingsforskning, Copenhagen, June 1990). Among the first efforts to draw together this early work is Ronnie Lipschutz, 'Reconstructing World Politics: The Emergence of Global Civil Society', *Millennium*, 21:3 (1992), pp. 389–420.

[2] Each case is cited in Aziz Choudry, 'All this "civil society" talk takes us nowhere', http://globalresearch.ca/articles/AZ1201A.html, p. xxi; cf. the call for 'a new international social covenant between markets, states and civil society', in Gerhard Schröder (ed.), *Progressive Governance for the XXI Century* (München, 2002), p. xxi; 'The United Nations: Partners in Civil Society', www.un.org/partners/civil_society/home.htm; Madeleine Albright, *Focus on the Issues. Strengthening Civil Society and the Rule of Law. Excerpts of Testimony, Speeches and Remarks by US Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright* (Washington, DC, 2000).

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of monarchic states claiming authority from God.[3] Beyond this elementary consensus, many discrepancies and disagreements are evident. Some writers see in the idea of global civil society a way of analysing the empirical contours of past, present or emergent social relationships at the world level. Others mainly view the concept in pragmatic terms, as a guide to formulating a political strategy; still others view it as a normative ideal. In practice, these different emphases often criss-cross and complement each other. Yet since they can and do also produce divergent types of claims, it is important to distinguish among them and, as far as possible, to avoid mixing them up and producing confusion.[4]

Analytic–descriptive usages of the term 'global civil society' selectively name key institutions, actors and events, examine their complex dynamics and – using theoretical distinctions, empirical research and informed judgements – attempt to draw some conclusions about their origins, current development patterns and (unintended) consequences. Within such analyses – the first and second sections of this book are an example – the concept of global civil society is used to probe either the past or the present, or both past and present simultaneously. The aim of such probes is not to recommend political strategies or to pass normative judgements on the world; they rather seek an explanatory understanding of the world's complex socio-political realities. The term global civil society also can be used as an aid to *strategic political calculation*. In this second approach, evident in this book's treatment of global social movements, the term serves as a campaigning criterion – to establish what must be done (or what must be avoided) in order to reach goals, like freedom and justice, whose desirability is more or less presumed. Strategic uses of the term are directly concerned with political questions. They concentrate upon institutional constraints and opportunities as well as the manoeuvres of power groups and movements – upon the (potential) political gains and losses of supporters and opponents that operate from within or outside the structures of global civil society. The normative concerns that inevitably attend such 'tactical' approaches are treated as a given; their

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[3] Compare my 'Despotism and Democracy: The Origins and Development of the Distinction Between Civil Society and the State 1750–1850', in John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives* (London and New York, 1988 [reprinted 1998] pp. 35–72 and Adam Seligman, 'Civil Society as Idea and Ideal', in Simone Chambers and Will Kymlicka (eds.), *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society* (Princeton, 2002), pp. 13–33. In my view, Seligman's explanation of the rise of the ideal of a civil society suffers from the same weakness evident in Marxian accounts: their one-sided emphasis upon the growth of market economies and the corresponding search for a new ethical order in which individual interests could be reconciled with the public good.

[4] The importance of distinguishing among these different usages is analysed in more detail in my introduction to *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives* and *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions* (Oxford and Stanford, 1998).

main preoccupation is with the calculation of the *means* of achieving or stabilising a global civil society. Finally – as evidenced by the final section of this book – the term global civil society can be wielded as a *normative ideal*. The ethic or big idea of a global civil society is said to be warranted and plausible and desirable, and on that basis it can be used in two complementary ways: as a *precautionary* concept that serves to issue warnings about the undesirable or unworkable consequences of practical efforts to weaken or abolish the institutions of global civil society, for instance through unilateral military intervention, or the imposition of martial law. Such precautionary usages of the norm are usually reinforced by its *advocacy* function: gentle or strong efforts to explain and highlight the reasons why a global civil society, ethically speaking, is a good thing.

Empirical contours

Given the versatility of the term, which is surely one of the reasons for its rising popularity, it follows that its different usages should not be conflated, as is typically done when the words global civil society are flung about in vague, simplistic or tendentious speech. This is the point at which empirically minded researchers arrive on the scene. They point out that the quest to map and measure the contours of global civil society is essential for clarifying its empirical scope and complexity, its strategic or political capacity and its normative potential. They call upon the facts to speak for themselves. They pursue (what appears to them, anyway) a straightforward empirical approach that supposes (as the American expression has it) that if something in the world walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it is a duck. The approach points to the sketchy data that are available, thanks to the path-breaking contributions of bodies like the Union of International Associations, the *Index on Civil Society* project supported by CIVICUS (World Alliance for Citizen Participation), a Ford Foundation-funded comparative study of civil society in twenty-two countries and other recent publications. These data-gathering efforts are seen to confirm the widespread impression that, during the twentieth century, the world witnessed a tectonic – perhaps two hundred-fold – increase in the number and variety of civil society organisations operating at the planetary level.[5] Today, in addition to many hundreds of thousands

[5] See www.ids.ac.uk; Helmut Anheier *et al.* (eds.) *Global Civil Society 2001* (Oxford, 2001); and the data covering the period 1909–7 presented in the Union of International Associations (ed.), *Yearbook of International Organizations*, 34th edn. (München, 1997–8), vol. 4, p. 559; compare René-Jean Dupuy (ed.), *Manuel sur les organisations internationals* (Dordrecht, 1998); Thomas Risse-Kappen (ed.), *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In. Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions* (Cambridge,

of small, medium and large firms doing business across borders – a trend that is dealt with shortly in this book – there are an estimated 5,000 world congresses held annually and some 50,000 non-governmental, not-for-profit organisations operating at the global level. The numbers of these international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) have grown rapidly in recent years; helped along by access to money and communications technology, many thousands have come into being since 1985. Nearly 90 per cent of them have been formed since 1970.[6] While a disproportionate number (over one-third) have their main offices in the European Union and Switzerland, these INGOs now operate in all four corners of the earth, including sub-Saharan Africa, where hundreds of main offices are now based. INGOs employ or use volunteer labour of several millions of people: one study estimates that in Germany, France, Spain, Japan, Brazil, Argentina, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands alone, INGOs employ over 110,000 full-time equivalent workers as well as many more full-time equivalent volunteers.[7] INGOs currently disburse more money than the United Nations (excluding the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)); more than two-thirds of the European Union's relief aid is currently channelled through them; and in many parts of the world there is a strong trend towards the disbursement of governmental funds – currently totalling $US 7 billion per annum – more or less exclusively through INGOs.[8]

Empirical perspectives on global civil society have limitations. In spite of a growing body of data, the actual contours of global civil society remain elusive, for understandable reasons. Histories of the globalisation of civil society – studies of the rise of cross-border business, religion and sport, for instance – are in short supply.[9] Lots of activities within this society, for instance the travel patterns of individuals, the initiatives of grass-roots groups, the loose networks of organisations and the growth

1995); Jessica T. Matthews, 'Power Shift', *Foreign Affairs*, 76: 1 (January–February 1997), pp. 50–66; and the misleadingly titled, country-by-country study by Lester M. Salamon *et al.*, *Global Civil Society. Dimensions of the Non-Profit Sector* (Baltimore, 2001).

[6] See the country-by-country figures – covering only the numbers of secretariats of not-for-profit NGOs that operate transnationally – in Anheier *et al.* (eds.), *Global Civil Society*, table R19, pp. 283–6; cf. Michael Edwards, 'Herding Cats? Civil Society and Global Governance', *New Economy* (Summer 2002).

[7] See the figures drawn from The Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-Profit Sector Project (1999), originally published as Salamon *et al.*, *Global Civil Society*, summarised in Anheier *et al.* (eds.), *Global Civil Society*, table, R24, p. 302.

[8] OECD, *Geographical Distribution of Financial Aid to Developing Countries* (Paris, 1997); compare Anheier *et al.* (eds.), *Global Civil Society*, table R19, pp. 283–6.

[9] But on these topics see, for instance, Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875–1914* (New York, 1989); Jack Beeching, *An Open Path. Christian Missionaries 1515–1914* (London, 1979); Joseph Maguire, *Global Sport. Identities, Societies, Civilizations* (Oxford, 1999); and Lincoln Allison, 'Sport and Civil Society', *Political Studies*, 46 (1998), pp. 709–6.

of public opinion across borders, are informally structured, and for that reason do not register (easily) as 'data'. Much of the data that is available is also highly imperfect.[10] It presents a picture of the actually existing global civil society that is no more than a torn-edged daguerrotype. Very little reliable empirical data from the past has survived intact, or was collected in the first place – which is not surprising, considering that the concept of global civil society itself had not even been invented. This present-day bias is compounded inadvertently by other forms of bias, for instance in favour of the clusters of northern hemisphere INGOs, whose visibility is greatest because they tend to be based there; data from elsewhere, for instance that related to protests in defence of aboriginal rights or civil liberties or ecological complexity, either go unnoticed or unnoted.

Much potentially usable data on global civil society is distorted by a form of conceptual nationalism. The fact is that most systems of national accounting provide few detailed statistics on either INGOs or social movements or the economic contributions and activities of corporations with a global reach. That is why, sadly, global statistical agencies usually rely on empirical data supplied on a country-by-country basis by individual governments and nationally based organisations. Only a few organisations, for instance some agencies within the United Nations, are experienced collectors of standardised data about global *flows* of people, goods, information and services.[11] Even then, despite stringent efforts to collect, process and disseminate statistics on a standardised basis, huge gaps remain. Statistics on the landscapes of global poverty well exemplify these problems of coverage, comparability and reliability: about one-third of the countries of the world have either no data or inadequate data on the incidence of poverty and malnourishment, and around one-half are similarly lacking information on rates of literacy among youth.[12] Researchers also disagree about which criteria – book translations, diasporas, links among global cities, the spread of the English language, telephone traffic, geographic locations of websites, the mobility patterns of corporate nomads – are the most pertinent for picturing the complex interdependencies of the emerging global society. In-depth, qualitative accounts of global summits, forums and other eye-catching events – like the global campaign against landmines and public protests against the G7 powers – are also rare. And – despite catchy titles that imply more than

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[10] Some of the empirical problems are discussed in Helmut Anheier, 'Measuring Global Civil Society', in Anheier *et al.* (eds.), *Global Civil Society*, pp. 221–30.

[11] See the report of the OECD Development Cooperation Directorate, *Partnerships in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century* (Paris, 2001).

[12] See the UNDP's *Human Development Report 2000: Human Rights and Human Development* (New York, 2000); www.undp.org/hdr2000/english/book/back1.pdf.

they deliver[13] – studies of the intimate details of everyday life, especially research that concentrates on the socialising and civilising effects at the global level of matters like food consumption and television news-watching, are either non-existent or confined to comparative national surveys that neglect cross-border trends.

These empirical and technical barriers to mapping and measuring global civil society are compounded by a basic epistemological difficulty. Simply put, its actors are not mute, empirical bits and bytes of data. Linked to territories but not restricted to territory, caught up in a vast variety of overlapping and interlocking institutions and webs of group affiliations, these actors talk, think, interpret, question, negotiate, comply, innovate, resist. Their recalcitrance in the face of classification is a basic feature of global civil society, which is never a fixed entity, but always a temporary assembly, subject to reshuffling and reassembly. Static measures, like the numbers of INGOs registered within a country, fail to capture many of its qualities. Dynamism is a chronic feature of global civil society: not the dynamism of the restless sea (a naturalistic simile suggested by Victor Pérez-Diaz[14]), but a form of self-reflexive dynamism marked by innovation, conflict, compromise, consensus, as well as rising awareness of the syncretic architecture, the contingencies and dilemmas of global civil society itself. Beck's terse formulation is correct: the emergent global civil society is not only marked by '*non*-integration' and '*multiplicity without unity*', but its actors treat it as '*perceived or reflexive*'.[15] At each moment, the threads of this civil society are deliberately spun, dropped, taken up again, altered, displaced by others, interwoven with others, then deliberately re-spun, again and again. In this way, global civil society enables its participants – athletes, campaigners, musicians, religious believers, managers, aid-workers, teleworkers, medics, scientists, journalists, academics – not only to regard this society as *theirs* but also to see through global civil society by calling it (more impersonally) *this* world or *that* world. For this reason alone, those who speak of global civil society should not lose sight of its elusive, *idealtypisch* quality. The concept of global civil society has what Wittgenstein called 'blurred edges'. This does *not* mean – *pace* Anheier and others – that the term is uniquely imprecise or 'fuzzy' because of its youth.[16] Those who speak

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[13] An example is Ronald Inglehart, 'Globalization and Postmodern Values', *The Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2000), pp. 215–28

[14] Victor M. Pérez-Diaz, *The Return of Civil Society. The Emergence of Democratic Spain* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1993), p. 62; compare my remarks on the self-reflexivity of actually existing civil societies in *Civil Society: Old Images* pp. 49 ff.

[15] Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 10.

[16] Anheier, 'Measuring Global Civil Society', p. 224.

like that unfortunately bring discredit to the term which, like all concepts in the human sciences, is an ill-fitting term clumsily in search of an intelligent object that is always a subject on the run, striding unevenly in many different directions. Anheier is correct: 'Any measurement of global civil society will be simpler and less perfect than the richness, variety, and complexity of the concept it tries to measure.' But the converse of Anheier's rule must also be borne in mind: the conceptual theory of global civil society is infinitely 'purer' and much more abstract than the form and content of actually existing global civil society.

An ideal-type

So the principle is clear – theories without observations are bland, observations without theories are blind – even if the task of clarifying what we mean when we speak of a global civil society is difficult. For purposes of descriptive interpretation, or so this book argues, it is best to use the concept carefully as an ideal-type – as an intentionally produced mental construct or 'cognitive type'[17] that is very useful for heuristic and expository purposes, for naming and clarifying the myriad of elements of a complex social reality, even though it cannot be found in such 'pure' form anywhere within the social world itself. When the term global civil society is used in this way, as an ideal-type, it properly refers to *a dynamic non-governmental system of interconnected socio-economic institutions that straddle the whole earth, and that have complex effects that are felt in its four corners. Global civil society is neither a static object nor a* fait accompli. *It is an unfinished project that consists of sometimes thick, sometimes thinly stretched networks, pyramids and hub-and-spoke clusters of socio-economic institutions and actors who organise themselves across borders, with the deliberate aim of drawing the world together in new ways. These non-governmental institutions and actors tend to pluralise power and to problematise violence; consequently, their peaceful or 'civil' effects are felt everywhere, here and there, far and wide, to and from local areas, through wider regions, to the planetary level itself*.

We need to look carefully at the elements of this rather abstract definition. Considered together, *five* tightly coupled features of this global civil society mark it off as historically distinctive. To begin with, the term global civil society refers to *non-governmental* structures and activities. It comprises individuals, households, profit-seeking businesses, not-for-profit non-governmental organisations, coalitions, social movements and linguistic communities and cultural identities. It feeds upon the work of media celebrities and past or present public personalities – from Gandhi,

[17] Umberto Eco, *Kant and the Platypus. Essays on Language and Cognition* (London, 2000).

Bill Gates, Primo Levi and Martin Luther King to Bono and Aung San Suu Kyi, Bishop Ximenes Belo, Naomi Klein and al-Waleed bin Talal. It includes charities, think-tanks, prominent intellectuals (like Tu Wei-ming and Abdolkarim Soroush), campaigning and lobby groups, citizens' protests responsible for 'clusters of performances',[18] small and large corporate firms, independent media, Internet groups and websites, employers' federations, trades unions, international commissions, parallel summits and sporting organisations. It comprises bodies like Amnesty International, Sony, Falun Gong, Christian Aid, al Jazeera, the Catholic Relief Services, the Indigenous Peoples Bio-Diversity Network, FIFA, Transparency International, Sufi networks like Qadiriyya and Naqsha-bandiyya, the International Red Cross, the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, the Ford Foundation, Shack/Slum Dwellers International, Women Living Under Muslim Laws, News Corporation International, OpenDemocracy.net, and unnamed circles of Buddhist monks, dressed in crimson robes, keeping the mind mindful. Considered together, these institutions and actors constitute a vast, interconnected and multi-layered non-governmental space that comprises many hundreds of thousands of more-or-less self-directing ways of life. All of these forms of life have at least one thing in common: across vast geographic distances and despite barriers of time, they deliberately organise themselves and conduct their cross-border social activities, business and politics outside the boundaries of governmental structures.

Sometimes those who use and defend the term global civil society – the World Passport initiative, for instance[19] – think of it in no other way than as a synonym for an unbounded space of non-governmental institutions and actors. This rather monistic understanding has the advantage of highlighting one of its principal qualities – that it is neither an appendage nor a puppet of governmental power. Yet the price that is paid for this limited definition is high: it enables the critics of the vision of global civil society to accuse their opponents of careless blindness. These critics insist, with some justification, that the term global civil society is too often used as a residual or dustbin category that describes everything and nothing. The term is used to refer to all those parts of life that are *not* the state; it seems that it is a synonym for everything that exists outside of and beyond the reach of the territorial state and other institutions of governance – that it

[18] Charles Tilly, 'From Interactions to Outcomes in Social Movements', in Marco Giugni *et al.* (eds.), *How Social Movements Matter* (Minneapolis and London, 1999), p. 263.
[19] www.worldservice.org/docpass.htmil: 'The World Passport is…a meaningful symbol and sometimes powerful tool for the implementation of the fundamental human right of freedom of travel. By its very existence, it challenges the exclusive assumption of sovereignty of the nation-state system.'

includes not only businesses and not-for-profit organisations and initiatives, but 'mafias, extremist networks of various kinds, and terrorists'.[20] The picture presented by the critics is overdrawn, even inaccurate, for global civil society, when carefully defined, is not a simple-minded *alter ego* of 'the state'. The truth is that in a descriptive sense global civil society is only *one* special set of 'non-state' institutions. Hunting and gathering societies and tribal orders, insofar as they have survived under modern conditions, comprise 'non-state' institutions, but it would be wrong to describe them as 'civil society' orders. The same point applies to mafias and mafia-dominated structures, which have *destructive* effects upon civil society institutions precisely because *mafiosi* rely upon kinship bonds, blood imagery, violence and intrigue to *dissolve* the boundaries between the governmental and civilian domains.[21] The same point can be put in another way: global civil society is indeed an extra-governmental space, but it is much more than that. It is defined by other qualities that beg us to see it with different eyes ...

To say that global civil society is not merely a non-governmental phenomenon, for instance, is to confirm – this is its second feature – that it is also a form of *society*. Global civil society is a dynamic ensemble of more or less tightly interlinked *social* processes.[22] The quest to unlock its secrets cannot be pursued through the biological or mechanical sciences, for this emergent social order is neither an organism nor a mechanism. It is not a thing that grows according to the blind logic of dividing cells, untouched by human judgement and human will, by recursive reflection and self-generated learning; global civil society is also not a piece of machinery which can be assembled and re-assembled according to human design. The processes and methods through which it is produced and reproduced are unique.

So what does it mean then to speak of global civil *society*? The word 'society' is one of those household concepts that help us economise on lengthy and pedantic explanations – by hiding away or setting aside their complicated (sometimes self-contradictory) genealogy. The concept of society certainly has a complicated history, with two distinct and tensely related connotations. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

[20] Barry Buzan, 'An English School Perspective on Global Civil Society', unpublished paper (Centre for the Study of Democracy, 17 January 2002), p. 1; cf. p. 3: 'In descriptive mode, civil society = non-state, and therefore includes mafias, pornography merchants, terrorists and a host of other dark side entities as well as the nicer side of civil society represented by humanitarian, animal welfare and humanitarian organizations.'

[21] Anton Blok, *Honour and Violence* (Oxford 2001), chapter 5.

[22] On the sociological concept of 'society', see Claus Offe, 'Is There, or Can There Be, a "European Society"?', in John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society: Berlin Perspectives* (London, 2004), forthcoming.

especially in the Atlantic region, the term came to be used as a signifier of a whole totality of interrelated processes and events, stretching from (and including) households to governmental institutions. This understanding of 'society' as a whole way of life, as a 'social organism, a holistic system of social relations, the social formation' (Lenin), can be thought of as a depoliticised, less normative version of the much older, early modern idea of a Civill Society, which referred to a well-governed, legally ordered whole way of life. Both usages of 'society' differ from a second, originally medieval meaning of the term: society as a particular fellowship or partnership of equals. St Augustine's description of the Church as the true 'society of the Father and the Son', identical neither with the City of Man nor with the City of God, pointed in this direction. 'Society' means sociable interaction at a distance from government and law. Vocational fellowships and commercial partnerships, the Dutch *matshappeij*, the German *Gesellschaft*, the English 'Societie of Saynt George' (1548) and the Anti-Slavery Society, or today's Society of Authors or the Society of Black Lawyers, all fall in this category. So do eighteenth-century references to the style-setting circles of the upper class, *le Monde*, or what the Germans called 'Die Sozietät', the same group described in Byron's *Don Juan*: 'Society is now one polished horde, Formed of two mighty tribes, the Bores and the Bored.'

We can say that global civil *society* means something quite different from these older usages, to which it is nevertheless genealogically related. It refers to a vast, sprawling non-governmental constellation of many institutionalised structures, associations and networks within which individual and group actors are interrelated and functionally interdependent. As a society of societies, it is 'bigger' and 'weightier' than any individual actor or organisation or combined sum of its thousands of constituent parts – most of whom, paradoxically, neither 'know' each other nor have any chance of ever meeting each other face-to-face. Global civil society is a highly complex ensemble of differently sized, overlapping forms of structured social action; like a Tolstoy novel, it is a vast scenario in which hundreds of thousands and millions of individual and group adventures unfold, sometimes harmoniously through cooperation and compromise, and sometimes conflictually. The key point is that General Motors plus Amnesty International plus the Ruckus Society plus DAWN (Development Alternatives With Women for a New Era) does not equal global civil society. Its social dynamics are more intricate, more dynamic, and more interesting than that.

Like all societies in the strict sense, it has a marked life or momentum or power of its own. Its institutions and rules have a definite durability, in that at least some of them can and do persist through long cycles of

time. Global civil society, as we shall see in the coming pages, has much older roots. Most non-European civilisations have made contributions to it, and the effects upon our own times of early modern European developments – the ground-breaking pacifist tradition[23] and the growth spurt of globalisation during the half-century before the First World War – are easily observed. The institutions of present-day global civil society, like those of any functioning society, both predate the living and outlive the life-span of this society's individual members, every one of whom is shaped and carried along in life by the social customs and *traditions* of this global society. In various ways, the social actors of global civil society are both constrained and empowered by this society. These actors are enmeshed within codes of unwritten and written rules that both enable and restrict their action-in-the-world; they understand that many things are possible, but that not everything goes, that some things are desirable, and that some things are not possible, or that they are forbidden. Within global civil society – which is only one particular form of society – social actors' involvement in institutions obliges them to refrain from certain actions, as well as to observe certain *norms*, for instance those that define what counts as civility.

Civility – respect for others expressed as politeness towards and acceptance of strangers – is a third quality of this global society. Different civilisations entertain different notions of civility – they each make civil persons, as John Ruskin said – but because our world is comprised of intermingling civilisations that are not in any sense self-contained or 'pure',[24] global civil society is a space inhabited by various overlapping norms of *non-violent* politeness covering matters of indirection, self-restraint and face-saving. This society is a complex and multi-dimensional space of non-violence, even if it is not an irenic paradise on earth. On the outskirts of global civil society, and within its nooks and crannies, dastardly things go on, certainly. It provides convenient hideouts for gangsters, war criminals, arms traders and terrorists.[25] It contains pockets of *incivility* – geographic areas that coexist uneasily with 'safe' and highly 'civil' zones, dangerous areas like the Strasbourg district of Neuhof, with its crumbling buildings, walls splattered with graffiti and streets littered with car wrecks; the Los Angeles suburb of South Central, considered

[23] A good discussion of the long-term impact of the world's first peace movement, which appeared during the 1790s, as a reaction against the French wars, is Martin Ceadl, *The Origins of War Prevention. The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1730–1854* (Oxford, 1996).

[24] Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Millennium: A History of Our Last Thousand Years* (London, 1995), chapter 1 and *Civilizations* (London, 2000).

[25] See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God. The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, 2000).

by many a 'no-go area' whose night streets are owned by black, Latino and Asian gangs; and whole cities like Ahmadabad in Gujarat, where in early 2002 many hundreds of people, mainly Muslims, were killed and wounded by semi-planned rioting, sabotage and ethnic cleansing, helped by local police with blind eyes. The spaces of freedom within global civil society also enable individuals and groups to network, in the form of criminal gangs that run world-wide industries. An example is the sale and sex trafficking of young girls and boys – an industry that is now contested by both governments (as in the 1996 Stockholm declaration of 122 countries against all forms of child sexual exploitation) and social campaign networks, like Plan International and End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking. These social initiatives specialise in repairing the torn fabric of global civil society. They organise against harmful prejudices (for instance, the belief that sleeping with a child can give protection against, or even cure HIV infection). They press political authorities to engage in legal and policing reforms which serve to restrict access to predator groups like tourists, businessmen and soldiers on overseas duty. These initiatives also dig away at the root causes of child prostitution: the enforced sale of children by families suffering pauperisation and the orphaning of children by the upheavals caused by war and the AIDS epidemic.[26]

In the wider schema of things, such initiatives provide the reminder – analysed in the third section of the book – that global civil society is marked by a strong and overriding tendency to both marginalise or avoid the use of violence and to take pleasure in violence. Its actors do not especially like mortars or tanks or nuclear weapons. They have an allergic – sometimes disgusted – reaction to images of gunmen firing rockets, or to supersonic fighter planes, or to tanks crashing mercilessly into people or buildings. The actors of global civil society, in their own and varied ways, admire the peaceful. Some do so after witnessing or suffering violence. Others believe that the peaceful right to have rights is fundamental to all human beings. Still others are disgusted by violence because of their belief in a peaceful and loving God, or their attempts to live the principle of Karma. All of them more or less observe the rule that non-violent respect for others overrides any considerations of their national identity or skin colour or religion or sex, or that murder and other forms of violence against others is undesirable, and should be minimised, or strictly prohibited. Thanks to such shared norms, the participants within this society are prone to exercise physical restraint, to mix non-violently with

[26] See www.ecpat.net/eng/index.asp; and Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Chicago and London, 2001).

others, 'foreigners' and 'strangers' included. Normatively speaking, the killing rituals of hunting and gathering orders, or tribal violence, or mafia thuggery tend to have no place within this society. Its extra-governmental institutions and forms of action are marked by a proclivity towards non-violence and respect for the principles of compromise, mutual respect, even power-sharing among different ways of life. The implication is clear: global civil society is not just any old collection of ways of life that have nothing in common but their non-identification with governing institutions. Factually speaking, this society encourages compromise and mutual respect. There is (to speak literally and metaphorically) plenty of room within its walls for people who believe in God, as well as for religious people for whom the idea of a creator God is anathema, as well as for people who feel only diffuse respect for the sacred, as well as for people who believe in nothing else except themselves. Insofar as these various actors have a more or less deep sensitivity towards violence and violence-prone institutions, they enable global civil society to be 'civil' in a double sense: it consists of non-governmental (or 'civilian') institutions that tend to have non-violent (or 'civil') effects.

Precisely because global civil society harbours many ways of life it means many different things to those who live their lives within its structures. This is its fourth quality: it contains both strong traces of *pluralism* – and *strong conflict potential*. Within its economic domains – as the second section of the book explains – this society sustains the livelihoods of many hundreds of millions of people. It is a dynamic source of technological innovation, capital investment, production, distribution and consumption stretched across vast distances. It is home to businesses of all shapes and sizes, ranging from the self-employed importer of goods produced on the other side of earth to retail companies like Sears Roebuck, whose annual sales of commodities produced in more than a hundred countries are comparable to the total annual income of the 100 million citizens of one state alone, Bangla Desh. None of this economic activity could take place unless the institutions of global civil society performed other, non-economic functions: like that of providing social 'homes' or 'nests' within which individuals and groups fashion and re-fashion their identities, familiarise and make sense of each other, find meanings in life, get their bearings through activities that cross borders, which are seen as bridges rather than as places where wars start or trouble begins.

The cross-border links and activities also help to draw boundaries between themselves and governmental power, for instance by pressuring and bouncing off territorial states and their sub-units, as well as regional and supranational government bodies. To speak (as some do) of a 'world order' or 'one world' or 'a global community' is misleading: the world is in

fact sub-divided in two basic ways by the emergent global society. First, its civilian institutions place limits upon government. They guarantee power-sharing by ensuring that cross-border contests with governmental power become commonplace. Global civil society serves as a brake or potential check upon various forms of government, and especially absolutist political rule. *All* governmental institutions, from local councils through territorial states and regional and supranational institutions like the United Nations and the WTO, are now feeling the pinching effects of this civil society. Meanwhile – secondly – scuffles and skirmishes over the distribution of socio-economic power also regularly take place *within* global civil society itself. These contests typically become visible through media coverage, which attracts witnesses to both local and world-wide disputes concerning who gets what, when and how. In this way, global civil society functions as a monitoring and signalling platform, from which both local matters – mimicking the 'butterfly effect' that has been held responsible for fluctuations in whole weather patterns – can assume global importance, and global-level problems (like nuclear weapons, terrorism, the environment) are named, defined and problematised. A sense of 'the world' and 'humanity' as complex and vulnerable totalities consequently strengthens. Global civil society – contrary to its communitarian interpreters – does not resemble a 'global community'.[27] For its participants, rather, this society nurtures a culture of self-awareness about the hybridity and complexity of the world.

The heterogeneity of global civil society works against enforced unity. It throws into question presumptions about spontaneous sympathy and automatic consensus.[28] It heaps doubt upon claims (famously associated with Seneca) that all human beings are 'social animals',[29] or that they stand firm upon some bedrock of essential 'humanity'. This complex society is not a space wherein people naturally touch and feel good about the world. Certainly that happens. Dressed in the clothing of honest pilgrims, young people take time off, travel the world, odd-job, sleep rough, sleep around, wonder and marvel at the complexity and beauty of the world, just like a satisfied botanist observing and contemplating the extraordinary complexity of plant life. Others meanwhile dedicate their lives to charitable or volunteer work by putting their minds and hearts to work with others. They speak of compassion, and practise it. Yet despite all this, the world of global civil society can be tough, calculating

[27] Amitai Etzioni, Implications of the American Anti-Terrorism Coalition for Global Architectures, *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 1, no. 1 (July 2002), 9–30.
[28] Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption. Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (London, 1999), chapter 13.
[29] Seneca, *De Beneficiis* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1935), book 7, section 1.

and rough n tumble. It looks and feels expansive and polyarchic, full of horizontal push and pull, vertical conflict and compromise. Take a stroll through the heart of Riyadh, a city of astonishing contrasts between ancient social customs and ultra-modern norms: women shrouded in black *abayas* shop at Harvey Nichols inside a Norman Foster building, their eyes fully covered; the street corner McDonald's close five times a day for prayers; men crowd into mosques surrounded by giant neon signs advertising Sony. Global civil society – to use a term of psychoanalysis – is richly conflicted. That fact helps many participants within this society to know and to understand that it is neither self-reproducing nor spontaneously self-regulating. They are more or less reflexively aware of its *contingency*. They sense that its dynamic structures and rules and various identities – even supposedly 'ascriptive' primary groups like kinship ties – are not somehow naturally given, for all time; they see that they are subject to strenuous negotiation and modification, through complex processes – parallel summits, blockades, media events, for instance – whose consequences are often better understood after the fact, with hindsight. This shared sense of contingency defies presumptions about the 'natural sociability of humans'.[30] It also feeds social conflict, thus ensuring that global civil society stands precariously between the boundaries of orderly equilibrium and disorder at the edge of chaos.

The volume of this worldly self-awareness of the complexity of the world, should not be exaggerated. It is hard to estimate its extent, but probably only 5 per cent of the world's population has an acute awareness of the tightening interdependence of the world, its ecosystems, institutions and peoples. Perhaps another 25 per cent are moderately or dimly aware of this interdependence.[31] While most others have not (yet) thought over the matter, or don't much care, or are too cynical or self-preoccupied to open their eyes and ears, the aggregate numbers of those who are globally aware are weighty enough to spread awareness that global civil society exists; that it is a force to be reckoned with; that it both operates within, and resembles, a patchwork quilt of power relations. Global civil

[30] Buzan, 'An English School Perspective', p. 3.
[31] Data generated by recent World Values Surveys suggests that 'almost one-fifth of the baby boomers born after World War II see themselves as cosmopolitan citizens of the globe, identifying with their continent or the world as a whole, but this is true of only one in ten of the group brought up in the interwar years, and of even fewer of the prewar generation'; see Pippa Norris, 'Global Governance and Cosmopolitan Citizens', in Joseph S. Nye and John D. Donahue (eds.), *Governance in a Globalizing World* (Cambridge, MA and Washington, DC, 2000), p. 175. From a global civil society perspective, the concept of 'cosmopolitan citizens' is unfortunate, if only because awareness of the *interdependence* of the world is both more subtle and different than positive 'identification' with one's own 'continent' or 'the world'.

society is most definitely riddled with power relations.[32] Its social groups and organisations and movements lobby states, bargain with international organisations, pressure and bounce off other non-state bodies, invest in new forms of production, champion different ways of life and engage in charitable direct action in distant local communities, for instance through 'capacity-building' programmes that supply jobs, clean running water, sporting facilities, hospitals and schools. In these various ways, the members of global civil society help to conserve or to alter the power relations embedded in the chains of interaction linking the local, regional and planetary orders. Their cross-border links and networks help to define and redefine who gets what, when, and how in the world. Of great importance is the fact that these cross-border patterns have the power to stimulate awareness among the world's inhabitants that mutual understanding of different ways of life is a practical necessity, that we are being drawn into the first genuinely bottom-up transnational order, a global civil society, in which millions of people come to realise, in effect, that they are incarnations of world-wide webs of interdependence, whose complexity is riddled with opportunity, as well as danger.

To say this is to note – this fifth point is obvious, but most crucial – that global civil society is *global*. To speak of a *global* civil society is to refer to politically framed and circumscribed social relations that stretch across and underneath state boundaries and other governmental forms. This 'macro-society' or 'society of interlocking societies' consists of a myriad of social interactions stretched across vast geographic distances. Global civil society is the most complex society in the history of the human species. It comprises a multitude of different parts, which are connected in a multitude of different ways. These diverse components interact both serially and in parallel, and they produce effects that are often both simultaneous and sequential. These effects, while normally generated by local interactions and events, have emergent properties that tend to be global. We are not exactly speaking here of a 'vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth' (Wordsworth[33]) – global civil society is neither a new form of empire nor encompassing of the whole earth[34] – but it certainly is a special form of *unbounded* society marked by constant feedback among its many components.

[32] On the concept of power and its wide variety of forms, see my *Václav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts* (London and New York, 1999).
[33] From William Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems* (2nd edn., London, 1800).
[34] Compare the claim that there is a spreading new form of empire – a 'global society of control' – ruled by global capital in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2000), esp. pp. 325–50.

Global civil society can be likened – to draw for a moment upon eco-logical similes – to a vast, dynamic biosphere. It comprises a bewildering variety of interacting habitats and species: INGOs, voluntary groups, new businesses, civic initiatives, social movements, protest organisations, whole nations, ethnic and linguistic clusters, pyramids and networks. To compare this society with a vast biosphere that stretches to every corner of the earth is to underscore both the great complexity of its linkages and (as we shall see) its vulnerability to internal and external interfer-ence. Just as nearly every part of the Earth, from the highest mountains to the deepest seas, supports life, so too global civil society is now found on virtually every part of the earth's surface. To be sure, everywhere it is tissue-thin – just like the natural biosphere, which resembles a paper wrapping that covers a sphere the size of a football – and its fringes, where ice and permafrost predominate, are virtually inhospitable. In the inte-rior of the Antarctic, only restricted populations of bacteria and insects are to be found; and even on its coasts there are very few living inhab-itants, among which are a handful of flowering plant species, as well as seals, whales, penguins and other birds. Global civil society is similarly subject to geographic limits: whole zones of the earth, parts of contempo-rary Afghanistan, Burma, Chechenya and Sierra Leone for instance, are 'no-go areas' for civil society actors and institutions, which can survive only by going underground, living in microniches, like the tens of millions of little invertebrates that run the biosphere.[35]

But in those areas of the earth where it does exist, global civil society comprises many biomes – whole areas (like North America and the European Union and parts of the Muslim world) characterised by specific animals and plants and climatic conditions. Each biome in turn comprises large numbers of living ecosystems made up of clusters of organisms living within a non-living physical environment of rocks, soil and climate. These ecosystems of global civil society – cities, business corridors and regions for instance – are interconnected. And they are more or less intricately balanced, through continuous flows and recycling of efforts among (as it were) populations of individuals of the same species, which thrive within communities (such as smaller cities) that are themselves embedded within non-living geographic contexts.

Biospheric similes are helpful in picturing the cross-border contours of global civil society, but they should not be overextended, if only because this society is not simply a *naturally occurring* phenomenon. Although it is embedded within a terrestrial biosphere – it is the first-ever planetary

order to understand itself as precarious, as *naturally* embedded – global civil society is *socially produced*. Its intricate social linkages stretched across vast distances are puzzling, indeed so difficult to grasp that new metaphors are urgently needed to help us to picture and understand them. Perhaps (to take an example) it is better to liken this society to the tens and hundreds of thousands of 'nested systems within nested systems' de-scribed in certain versions of complexity theory.[36] Certainly, this global society is both integrated and de-centred. It draws upon and is sustained by many different actually existing societies, whose members regularly interact and/or feel the effects of others' actions across political bound-aries. These effects are not due to proximity alone; they are felt at great distances, usually by social actors who have no direct contact with one another, and who are otherwise fated to remain 'strangers' to one another.

The complexity and interdependence of the linkages is staggering, and striking as well is their combined effect, which is to 'socialise' actors in ways that 'thicken' or increase the density of social interactions across political borders. Consider one example: the luxuriant variety of lan-guages spoken within global civil society. While today's 6,000 languages are rapidly disappearing, one by one, on average every two weeks, many of them still spawn pidgins (rudimentary languages concocted to facilitate communication among speakers of mutually unintelligible tongues) that sometimes mutate into Creoles (pidgins that have matured into the first language of a community). Meanwhile, global efforts to revive dying or dead languages, such as Ainu in Japan and Romansch in Switzerland, are underway. Strong resistance to extinction is also evident in the fact that the remaining top twenty languages that are today spoken by over 95 per cent of the world's population are deeply resilient; they are highly complex clusters of intermingling sub-languages and dialect families. None of them is 'pure' – 99 per cent of words in the *Oxford English Dictionary* are of foreign descent – and all of them are split into sub-varieties that are constantly subject to further hybridisation.[37] Or consider one other example: the rapidly increasing mobility of people across borders in re-cent decades, especially into and out of rich countries (nearly 90 million people enter Britain annually, for instance). The trend has many faces: it includes the influx of visitors, working migrants and their households, refugees and asylum seekers, all of whom have made many so-called 'national' societies both much more heterogeneous and other-regarding. Cultural minorities are no longer easily assimilated, partly because of the

[35] See Edward O. Wilson, 'The Little Things that Run the World', in Edward O. Wilson, *In Search of Nature* (Washington, DC, 1996), pp. 141–5.

[36] The vast literature includes David Bohm and F. David Peat, *Science, Order, and Creativity* (London, 2000) and John Briggs and F. David Peat, *Turbulent Mirror* (New York, 1990).
[37] John McWhorter, *The Power of Babel. A Natural History of Language* (London, 2002).

speed and volume of migration, but also because of their socially diverse origins and the ease with which they remain in contact with their society of origin. Many countries consequently contain whole categories of people who can be described as 'denizens' (Tomas Hammar), people who are foreign citizens enjoying permanent legal resident status, or as 'margizens', long-term immigrants who lack secure residence status: illegal workers, unauthorised family entrants, asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers who have not (yet) been deported, and temporary workers who are in fact permanently integrated into the workforce.[38]

Old habits

Defined in this way, as a vast, interconnected and multi-layered non-governmental space that comprises many hundreds of thousands of self-directing institutions and ways of life that generate global effects, the ideal-type concept of global civil society invites us to improve our understanding of the emerging planetary order. It calls on us to think more deeply about it, in the hope that we can strengthen our collective powers of guiding and transforming it. This clearly requires sharpening up our courage to confront the unknown and to imagine different futures.[39] And it most definitely obliges us to abandon some worn-out certainties and outdated prejudices. Let us dwell for a moment on what the new understanding of global civil society obliges us to give up.

The words 'global civil society' may be said to resemble signs that fix our thoughts on winding pathways that stretch not only in front of us, but also behind us. To utter the words 'global civil society', for instance, is to sup with the dead, with an early modern world in which, among the educated classes of Europe, 'world civil society' meant something quite different than what it means, or ought to mean, today. Just how different our times are can be seen by revisiting this older, exhausted meaning of 'world civil society'.

Consider the works of two influential authors of the eighteenth century: Emmerich de Vattel's *Le droit des gens* (1758) and Immanuel Kant's *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784) and *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1795).[40] These books stand at the end phase of a long

[38] Stephen Castles and Alistair Davidson, *Citizenship and Migration. Globalization and the Politics of Belonging* (Basingstoke, 2000).

[39] A stimulating example of such rethinking that is guided by the idea of a global civil society is Michael Edwards, *Future Positive. International Co-Operation in the 21st Century* (London, 2000).

[40] Emmerich de Vattel, *Le droit des gens, ou principes de la loi naturelle, appliqués à la conduite et aux affaires des nations et des souverains* (London, 1758); Immanuel Kant, *Idee*

cycle of European thinking that understands civil society (*societas civilis*) as the condition of living within an armed legal order that guarantees its subjects stable peace and good government. 'A State is more or less perfect according as it is more or less adapted to attain the end of civil society', wrote Vattel, for whom the distinction between state and civil society was literally *unthinkable*. A civil society is a special form of government. It 'consists in procuring for its citizens the necessities, the comforts, and the pleasures of life, and in general their happiness; and in securing to each the peaceful enjoyment of his property and a sure means of obtaining justice, and finally in defending the whole body against all external violence.'[41] Kant joined him in making it clear that civil society in this normative sense was not necessarily synonymous with the modern territorial state and its legal codes (*ius civile*). Their classically minded theory of civil society emphasised that war-mongering among states and what Kant called the 'unsocial sociability' of subjects could be cured by subordinating them within a cosmopolitan alliance of states that is over-ridden and protected by its own legal codes. Vattel insisted that states are obliged to respect and to protect what he called the universal society of the human race. 'When . . . men unite in civil society and form a separate State or Nation . . . their duties towards the rest of the human race remain unchanged.'[42] Kant went further. He envisaged a two-tiered 'law of world citizenship' [*ius cosmopoliticum*] which binds citizens and states into a higher republican commonwealth of states. This commonwealth, which resembles not a peace treaty [*pactum pacis*] but a league of peace [*foedus pacificum*], would put an end to violence forever by treating its subjects as citizens of a new law-governed political union. This union he called 'universal civil society' (*einer allgemein das Recht verwaltenden bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*).[43]

The invention of the distinction between government and civil society, and the subsequent birth of modern colonial empires, the rise of nationalism from the time of the French Revolution, and the trend towards a global system of complex governance, or cosmocracy – analysed below – arguably confounded this eighteenth-century vision of two-tiered global government, or a world civil society. Two centuries later, the concept

zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht, first published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (Berlin), November 1784, pp. 385–411, and *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (Königsberg, 1795). The emergence of the distinction between civil society and governmental/state institutions is examined in my 'Despotism and Democracy: The Origins and Development of the Distinction between State and Civil Society, 1750–1850', in John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives* (London and New York, 1988 [reprinted 1998]).

[41] Vattel, 1758, chapter 1, section 6.   [42] *Ibid.*, book 1, introduction, section 11.

[43] Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, fifth thesis.

of 'international society', familiar in the early work of Philip Marshall Brown and the work of later scholars like Hedley Bull and Martin Wight, tried both to register this historical change and to preserve something of the old-fashioned meaning of *societas civilis*. The global system of interlocking territorial states was said not to resemble Hobbes' classic description of a lawless state of nature racked by deathly strivings after power over others. Territorial states were rather seen by Bull and others as socialised by the behaviour of other states. They were linked into 'the most comprehensive form of society on earth',[44] an increasingly global framework of mutually recognised, informal customs and formal rules – diplomatic protocol, embassy functions, multilateral treaties, and laws governing matters as diverse as trade and commerce, war crimes and the right of non-interference. These state-enforced customs and rules that limit sovereignty by respecting it came to be called international society, a strangely state-centred term that Hedley Bull considered to be a basic precondition of contemporary world order. International society, he wrote, 'exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions'.[45]

The terms 'world civil society' and 'international society' still have their champions,[46] but from the standpoint of the new concept of global civil society their 'governmentality' or state-centredness are today deeply problematic. Neither the classical term *societas civilis* nor the state-centric concept of 'international society' is capable of grasping the latter-day emergence of a *non-governmental* social sphere that is called global civil society. These words, 'global civil society' may well sound old-fashioned,

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44 Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, eds. Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad (Leicester, 1978), p. 106; cf. Philip Marshall Brown, *International Society. Its Nature and Interests* (New York, 1928).

45 Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics*, 2nd edn. (New York, 1995 [1977]), p. 13; see also his 'The Importance of Grotius in the Study of International Relations', in Hedley Bull *et al.* (eds.), *Hugo Grotius and International Relations* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 64–93.

46 Examples include Ralf Dahrendorf's stimulating neo-Kantian defence of a universal civil society in *The Modern Social Conflict. An Essay on the Politics of Liberty* (London, 1988), p. 189: 'The next step towards a World Civil Society is the recognition of universal rights of all men and women by the creation of a body of international law.' Compare the systems-theoretical interpretation of 'world society' (*Weltgesellschaft*) in Niklas Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main, 1998), pp. 148–71, and the argument that a 'mature anarchy' among states is a precondition of a strong 'international society', in Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York and London, 1991), pp. 174–81.

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but today they have an entirely new meaning and political significance. Sustained and deeper reflection on the subject – and a willingness to puncture old thinking habits – is definitely warranted. Some examples are especially pertinent in this book's attempt to define and to understand global civil society in fresh ways.

Levels?

Among the primary needs is to question the current habit among researchers of speaking of civil societies as 'national' phenomena and, thus, of supposing or implying that global civil society and domestic civil societies are binary opposites. Many are still tempted to think in (architectural) terms of two different 'levels' of civil society – the 'national' and the 'global' – as if *homo civilis* was a divided creature, strangely at odds with itself, rather like a figure in the prose of Kleist: a figure pulled simultaneously in two different directions, towards 'home' and away from 'home'. 'Global civil society', runs one version of this way of thinking, is 'a transnational domain in which people form relationships and develop elements of identity outside their role as a citizen of a particular state'. It 'represents a sphere that thus transcends the self-regarding character of the state system and can work in the service of a genuinely transnational, public interest'.[47] Note the strong presumption that politically defined territory remains the ultimate foundation of civil society institutions – as if 'the global' was an add-on extra, a homeless extra-territorial phenomenon. Note as well how such images of global civil society draw upon architectural metaphors of up and down, here and there. They imply that the world of civil societies is split into two levels – that 'domestic' civil society is 'self-regarding', whereas the other-regarding global civil society is 'above and beyond national, regional, or local societies', or 'above the national level'.[48] Exactly how the two 'levels' are related, or how 'citizens' climb up and down the ladders in between, is left unclear.

In fact – the exemplary case is that of Ireland, easily the most globalised country in the world, according to the Globalisation Index[49] – the language of 'domestic' and 'foreign' or 'the local' and 'the global', as well as the architectural simile of 'above and beyond', are downright misleading.

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47 Paul Wapner, 'The Normative Promise of Nonstate Actors: A Theoretical Account of Global Civil Society', in Paul Wapner and Lester Edwin J. Ruiz (eds.), *Principled World Politics. The Challenge of Normative International Relations* (Lanham, MD, 2000), p. 261.

48 Helmut Anheier *et al.*, 'Introducing Global Civil Society', in Anheier *et al.* (eds.), *Global Civil Society*, pp. 4, 3.

49 *Financial Times* (London), 9 January 2002.

Within the forces and processes that operate from within global society there is no clear line separating the 'national' from the 'global'; the two dimensions – the 'inside' and the 'outside' – constantly intersect and co-define each other. Take a simple example: jeans. This item of clothing is worn world-wide, and one might even say, with just a touch of exaggeration, that jeans are the prized uniform of millions of people who live, work and play within civil societies. As an item of clothing, everybody knows that it had local American origins, and that as an American commodity jeans have travelled well. They are today a relatively cheap and popular form of casual dress on every continent, in over a hundred countries. Yet this globalisation of jeans has not been synonymous with the homogenisation of meaningful ways of life. Jeans are not worn in identical ways with identical connotations – Marlboro Man on his ranch competes for attention with Thai youths on motorcycles and Lebanese young women, veiled and unveiled, relaxing together in esplanade cafés, all wearing jeans, in non-standard ways. All these figures are incarnations of world-wide cultural webs that are themselves bound up with latticed global networks of production – including raw and processed materials like copper from Namibia, cotton from Benin and Pakistan, zinc from Australia, thread from Northern Ireland and Hungary, synthetic dye from Germany, pumice from Turkey, polyester tape from France, and steel zips machined in Japan. This single example highlights the normal patterns of complexity in the globalisation of civil society. It drives home the point that the so-called domestic and the global – to draw upon similes from the field of physics – are marked by strong interactions of the kind that hold together the protons and neutrons inside an atomic nucleus; or, to switch to the language of complexity theory, the domestic and the global are normally linked together in complex, cross-border patterns of looped and re-looped circuitry. When it comes to understanding the dynamics of global civil society, there is no definable or decidable boundary between interiority and exteriority. The 'micro' and the 'meso' and the 'macro' dimensions of this society are both interconnected and co-determinant of each other. The tiniest and the largest operations and events are implicated in loops that produce feedback – ranging from system-simplifying and system-upsetting (or negative) forms through to feedback that is more positive, in that it produces effects that are disproportionate to their causes, so adding to the overall heterogeneity and dynamism of the components of the global social system.

To repeat: the use of ecological similes and themes drawn from complexity theory may be questionable, but they serve the basic purpose of identifying the urgent need to develop theoretical imagery for better imagining global civil society, as it is and as it might become. The rule

of thumb, both in the past and in the present, is that the liveliest 'local' civil societies are those enjoying the strongest world-wide links. To speak of a global civil society is to highlight the intricate patterns of interdependence and co-dependence of its many different parts, their implication as nodal points within an open system of networks fuelled by feedback and feed-forward loops. It is important to see that just as within locally bounded societies larger social aggregates like trade unions often reinforce (rather than simply subsume) the power and status of smaller social units, like households, so the relationship between these more local civil society units and their more distant or globalising connectors is not a zero-sum relationship.

Instead of a single commodity like jeans, consider a whole country, such as contemporary Japan: its government officials once regarded civil society organisations as interlopers in affairs of state, and it is therefore unsurprising that in 1960, the density of its non-profit associations (11.1 associations per 100,000 people) was only one-third that of the United States (34.6). By the early 1990s, the density had reached a level of more than 80 per cent of that of the United States (29.2 per 100,000 people versus 35.2).[50] Many factors help to explain this transformation, but among the principal causes has been the country's internationalisation (the local term is *kokusai-ka*), beginning with the widespread public involvement of citizens in assisting refugees from Indochina during 1979, and greatly boosted by a series of conferences hosted by the United Nations during the 1990s and media events like World Cup 2002. The result has confirmed the interdependence of 'the national' and 'the international': faced with the growing *de facto* involvement of civil society organisations in shaping foreign policy, Japanese government officials were pressured into including representatives of these organisations in their policy deliberations (during the G-8 Summit held in Japan, the government even appointed a special 'Ambassador in Charge of Civil Society' [*shibiru sosaeti tantshibiru*]), while the shift from patron–client relations in the foreign policy sector of government towards a model of political negotiation with civil society actors has been replicated in various fields of domestic policy.[51]

[50] Yutaka Tsujinaka, 'Interest Group Structure and Regime Change in Japan', in I. M. Destler (ed.), *Maryland/Tsukubu Papers on US–Japan Relations* (College Park, MD, 1996), p. 57.

[51] Toshihiro Menju and Takaka Aoki, 'The Evolution of Japanese NGOs in the Asia Pacific Context', in Tadashi Yamamoto (ed.), *Emerging Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Community: Nongovernmental Underpinnings of the Emerging Asia Pacific Regional Community* (Singapore and Tokyo, 1995), pp. 143–6, and Tadashi Yamamoto, 'Emergence of Japan's Civil Society and Its Future Challenges', in Tadashi Yamamoto (ed.), *Deciding the Public Good: Governance and Civil Society in Japan* (Tokyo, 1999), pp. 99–103.

European towns

This point about the dynamic osmosis between the 'domestic' and 'global' dimensions of civil societies must be taken into account when trying to understand the genealogy of civil societies, for instance in the European region. In practice, the development of modern civil societies within the framework of European states and empires contained from the outset the seeds of their own trans-nationalisation and interpenetration. This trend can be seen even in the most local civil societies, whose roots are partly traceable to the revival of towns in Europe during the eleventh century. The urban revival not only nurtured long-distance trade that linked the Europes of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the Baltic; it also marked the beginning of the continent's rise to world eminence – and its contribution to the laying of the foundations of a global civil society.[52] Although the distribution of these European towns – unusual clumps of people engaged in many different tasks, living in houses close together, often joined wall to wall – was highly uneven, with the weakest patterns of urbanisation in Russia and the strongest in Holland, they were typically linked to each other in networks, or archipelagos stretching across vast distances. Wherever these urban archipelagos thrived, they functioned like magnets that attracted strangers fascinated by their well-lit complexity, their real or imagined freedom, or their higher wages.

Towns like Bruges, Genoa, Nuremberg and London resembled electric transformers. They constantly recharged life by adding not only motion but also tension to its elements. Town-dwellers seemed to be perpetually on the move. They travelled regularly to and fro among built-up areas and regularly spent only part of their lives there: during harvest-times, for instance, artisans and others typically abandoned their trades and houses for work in fields elsewhere. The constant rumble of wheeled carriages, the weekly or daily markets and the numerous trades added to the sense of motion across distance: town-dwellers encountered water-carriers, floor polishers, sawyers, porters and chair-carriers, pedlars, rabbit-skin merchants, wigmakers, barbers, cobblers and domestic servants. All these occupations in turn rubbed shoulders with members of the better sort: merchants, some of them very rich, masters, mercenaries, engineers, ships' captains, doctors, professors, painters and architects, all of whom knew what it meant to travel through time and space.

The winding, twisting layout of towns added to their appearance of geographic and social dynamism. Medieval Europe was one of only two

[52] The following section draws upon the documents assembled in John H. Mundy and Peter Riesenberg, *The Medieval Town* (Princeton, 1858) and Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism. 15th–18th Century*, vol. 1 (London, 1981), chapter 8.

civilisations – the other was Islam – that fashioned large towns with an irregular maze of streets. What was different about the medieval and early modern European towns was their unparalleled freedom from the political authorities of the emerging territorial states. Local merchants, traders, craft guilds, manufacturers and bankers formed the backbone of a long-distance money economy endowed with the power to dictate the terms and conditions on which governments ruled. Seen in this way, urban markets were the cuckoo's egg laid in the little nests of the medieval towns. These nests were woven from various non-governmental institutions, which together with the markets helped to nurture something brand new: unbounded social space within which the absolutist state could be checked, criticised and generally held at arm's length from citizens.

Universal history

The birth of civil societies in this sense did not simply lay the foundations for 'strongly connected national civil societies living in a system of many states'.[53] Historically speaking, the institutions of civil society were never exclusively 'national' or constituted by their exclusive relationship to the nation-state. All hitherto-existing civil societies have been linked by some common threads, which is why global civil society has to be thought of as more than the simple sum of territorially based and defined civil societies. It rather comprises local, regional, state-ordered and supranational civil society institutions that are melded together in complex chains of inter-dependence. The birth of local civil societies heralded the dawn of what has been called universal history marked by the constant reciprocal inter-action between local and far-distant events.[54] The neologism, global civil society, belatedly names this old tendency of local and regional civil societies to link up and to penetrate regions of the earth that had previously not known the ethics and structures of civil society in the modern European sense. But the neologism points as well to current developments that speed up the growth, and greatly 'thicken', the networks of transnational, non-governmental activities. Universal history so understood is *not* the clichéd story of the one-way spreading of a bundle of 'Western' ideals to the rest of the world, whose contribution is a non-history of non-contributions, or what Mamdani has called a 'history of absences'.[55]

[53] M. J. Peterson, 'Transnational Activity, International Society and World Politics', *Millennium*, 21:3 (1992), p. 388.
[54] Raymond Aron, 'The Dawn of Universal History', in Miriam Conant (ed.), *Politics and History. Selected Essays by Raymond Aron* (New York and London, 1978), pp. 212–33.
[55] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, 1996).

It is universal in a more complex and messier sense: the local and the beyond are interrelated recursively, through power-ridden processes of entangled pasts and presents. So, for instance, it can be said that the eighteenth-century vision of cosmopolitanism defended by Vattel, Kant and others was a child of local civil societies; and that that cosmopolitanism was the privilege of those whose lives were already anchored in local civil societies. This does not mean or imply that their vision of cosmopolitanism was superior. Seen from the perspective of universal history, it was just one among many other modernities. The other-regarding, outward-looking openness of these local civil societies – their glimpse of themselves as part of a wider, complex world, their capacity to see space and time not as part of the bare bones of the world, but as constructions – constantly tempted them to engage and transform that world. Their stocks of social skills, their capacities for commercial enterprise, technical innovation, freedom of communication, for learning languages and saving souls in independently minded churches: all these qualities fed the developing worldliness and laid the foundations for their later globalisation.

Think for a moment of the example of the colonising process triggered by the British Empire, which at its height governed nearly one-third of the world's population.[56] Unlike the Spanish colonies, which were the product of a species of absolute monarchy that charged into the world under the flags of evangelisation and military glory, the British Empire was driven not only by maritime-backed colonial power, but also non-state initiatives based at home. These were either for profit, as in the Virginia Company and the East India Company, which combined the capital of wealthy magnates with the navigational skills of freebooting maritime adventurers to form a joint-stock organisation that not only conquered India and laid the foundations of the Raj, but also provided the means by which people, commodities, animals, plants and ideas circulated to and from the east. The British Empire also spawned non-state initiatives driven by religious ends, evident in extensive Christian missionary activity and the emigration of dissenters: Puritans to New England, Quakers to Pennsylvania, Methodists to Australia and Presbyterians to Canada. These non-state or civil initiatives did not simply have one-way effects

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[56] Two phases of the expansion of Europe are commonly distinguished. The first encompasses the European conquest of the Americas; it stretches from Columbus' first voyage in 1492 to the final defeat of the Spanish armies in South America during the 1830s. During the second phase, the net of European power was cast over Asia, Africa and the Pacific; it began in the 1730s, but crystallised only after the American Revolution, which signalled the end of European dominance in the Atlantic; see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World. Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500–c.1800* (New Haven and London, 1995).

upon the colonised; they rather established complex social and economic chains of interdependence that contained a large number of components that interacted simultaneously with a rich variety of effects that soon began to be felt in all four corners of the earth. Empire promoted independence at a distance; various factors of socio-economic life, previously unrelated, became involved with one another.

Conceptual imperialism?

With this example of empire, a critic of the idea of a global civil society might well at this point lodge the objection that the language of civil society speaks with a Western accent. The development of long-distance social relations, the critic might observe, certainly had the effect of spreading the norms and institutions that would later be named civil society in the modern sense.[57] Yet a cursory glance at the historical record shows that this diffusion of the institutions and language of civil society everywhere encountered resistance – sometimes (as in parts of the East African mainland, during the Christian missions of the 1840s[58]) armed hostility, followed by a fight to the death. It is therefore obvious, or so our critic might conclude, that 'civil society' is not just a geographically specific concept with pseudo-universal pretensions; it also has a strong elective affinity with 'the West', and even potentially plays the role of an agent of Western power and influence in the world.

Might talk of a *global* civil society indeed be a wooden horse of European domination? Are there indeed good reasons 'to send back the concept of civil society to where … it properly belongs – the provincialism of European social philosophy'?[59] Given the *prima facie* evidence, the suspicion that the language of civil society is mixed up in the nasty businesses of hubris and blood has to be taken seriously, and certainly any contemporary use of the phrase needs to be highly sensitive to what is conceptually and politically at stake here. At a minimum – there are many other controversial issues, discussed later in this book, such as the difficulties facing practical efforts to develop the idea of civil society as a

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[57] The mid-eighteenth-century transition from classical European usages of *societas civilis* (a well-governed political community) to the modern sense of civil society as legally secured spaces of non-violent social interaction is examined in my 'Despotism and Democracy: The Origins and Development of the Distinction Between Civil Society and the State 1750–1850', in John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives* (London and New York, 1988 [reprinted 1998]), pp. 35–72.

[58] Philip D. Curtin, *The World and the West. The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge and New York, 2000), chapter 7.

[59] Partha Chatterjee, 'A Response to Taylor's "Modes of Civil Society" ', *Public Culture* 3:1 (Fall 1990), p. 120.

global *norm* – it should be remembered that the phrase global civil society has so far been used in this discussion as an ideal-type, for heuristic purposes. This means (as Max Weber first pointed out[60]) that it does not aim initially to manipulate or to dominate others, but rather seeks to name and to describe and to clarify and interpret the world, either past or present. In other words, it seeks to help us better understand the world in all its complexity by simplifying it, intellectually speaking. Whether and how well it manages to perform this task can be decided only by bringing it to bear on the empirical 'reality', whose dynamics it seeks to interpret and to explain. The Western origins of the concept and the possibility that it imposes alien values are thus at this stage irrelevant considerations. What is rather at stake is whether and how well the research questions and empirical findings elucidated by the concept of global civil society prove to be illuminating for others elsewhere in the world.

Illumination here presupposes and requires clean hands. For one of the bitter truths lurking within the contemporary popularity of the language of civil society is the fact that European talk of civil society originally presupposed and required the disempowerment or outright crushing of others elsewhere in the world. Those who today want to universalise this language, to utilise it for descriptive interpretations throughout the world, must face up to this fact. They must acknowledge candidly – in effect, ask others forgiveness for the bad consequences of – some embarrassing historical facts.

The stench of violence that once surrounded talk of 'civilised society', 'civilisation' and 'civility' is prime among these facts. The foundations of civil societies have often been soaked in blood. 'Civilised' worldliness typically developed hand in hand with profoundly 'uncivil' or barbaric forms of domination. Worldly civil societies could nowhere have developed or survived without the superior naval power, deep-rooted pugnacity and comparative immunity to disease that had earlier facilitated the rise of the West, from around 1500 onwards, often in violent, uncivilised form. Among its landmarks, which appear barbaric by today's standards of civility, are the ruthless aggression of Almeida and Albuquerque in the Indian Ocean, the destruction of the Amerindian civilisations of Peru and Mexico, and the generalised hostility towards peoples as diverse as Muslim traders in the Mediterranean basin and aboriginal hunters and gatherers in such countries as Australia and Canada.[61]

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[60] Max Weber, ' "Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy', in Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (eds.), *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1949), p. 90.
[61] William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West. A History of the Human Community* (Chicago and London, 1963), chapter 11.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, when the modern language of civil society was still young, those who favoured its institutions and norms were often prepared to wield violence against its enemies, both at home and abroad. Supposing that they were on the side of God, or the angels, they were prepared to traverse unknown frontiers into strange lands, full sail or mounted on horseback, armed with swords, pistols and cannon. They were prepared to stand by the distinction between the 'non-torturable' and 'torturable' classes (Graham Greene). Napoleon's well-known address to his troops just before setting off to conquer Egypt – 'Soldiers', he shouted, 'you are undertaking a conquest with incalculable consequences for civilisation' – was the battle-cry of civil society on the march. The willingness of British colonisers to heap vast quantities of violence onto the bodies of the aboriginal occupants of the lands that they wanted to seize also stands in this tradition.

As well, outer-lying areas of the British Empire were laboratories in which 'civilising' measures were tested on the colonisers themselves. Norfolk Island, originally occupied by British settlers from 1788 to 1814 and today famous for its peaceful and austere beauty, counts as an example. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, it was transformed by the British authorities into a place of extreme punishment for male convicts who had re-offended in Van Diemen's Land or New South Wales. In the name of a 'civilised society', they were forced to labour from dawn to dusk, and to eat like animals without utensils. At the smallest hints of disobedience, they were fed only bread and water. Frequent lashings – 500 at a time – were commonplace; stubborn offenders were locked in cells where they could neither lie nor stand; and since death was naturally a merciful release from this island hell, prisoners commonly drew lots to decide who would kill whom – and so to decide who could leave the island for Sydney, where murder charges were heard.[62]

Big violence, little violence

Insofar as the civilising mission of the friends of civil society assumed such forms, it should come as no surprise that many early modern champions of civil society scorned others for their alleged inability to develop its institutions. This is another historical fact to be grasped by those who today speak positively of global civil society: in early modern usages, 'civil society' was typically contrasted with 'the Asiatic' region, in which, or so it was said, civil societies had manifestly failed to appear. 'Among the Hindus,

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[62] See the various pieces of documented evidence in Suzanne Rickard (ed.), *George Barrington's Voyage to Botany Bay* (Leicester, 2001).

according to the Asiatic model', wrote James Mill with India in mind, 'the government was monarchical, and, with the usual exception of religion and its ministers, absolute. No idea of any system of rule, different from the will of a single person, appears to have entered the minds of them or their legislators.'[63] Marx and Engels, who were otherwise no friends of modern civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), similarly observed that in the East the 'first basic condition of bourgeois acquisition is lacking: the security of the person and the property of the trader'.[64] And along parallel lines, Tocqueville noted that whereas in America the spirit of Christianity enabled the growth of a civil society and democratic institutions, the Muslim faith and manners had heaped materialism and fatalism onto its believers. The chronic decadence of Islam meant that 'the great violence of conquest' initially carried out by Europeans in countries like Algeria would need to be supplemented by 'smaller violences'. He considered that 'there have been few religions in the world as deadly to men as that of Mohammed', and he was sure that it was 'the principal cause of the decadence so visible today in the Muslim world'. Civil society was impossible in Muslim societies. Their pacification required a two-tier political order: a ruling group based on the principles of Christian civilisation, and a ruled group of natives who would continue to live by the laws of the *Qur'ān*.[65]

Friends of global civil society must today be encouraged to ask tough questions of such views. They would be wise to cultivate an allergic reaction to such claims, not only because in practice (in the extreme) they can have murderous consequences, but also because the early modern picture of the Muslim world that pre-existed Western colonisation typically blanked out its plurality of social institutions that had all the qualities – but not the name – of a certain religious form of civil society.[66] Here the theory of global civil society encounters a semantic problem: the name (*koinonia politike*; *societas civilis*; civil society) was of course a European invention, but the substance of civil association protected by law was

[63] James Mill, *The History of British India* (London, 1817), vol. 1, p. 122.

[64] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'The Foreign Policy of Russian Czarism', in *The Russian Menace in Europe* (London, 1953), p. 40.

[65] See the letter to Gobineau in Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. J. P. Mayer (Paris, 1951–), vol. 9, p. 69; the unpublished letter to Lamoricière (5 April 1846), cited in André Jardin, *Tocqueville: A Biography* (New York, 1988), p. 318; and Pierre Michel, 'Démocratie et Barbarie', in *Un mythe romantique, les Barbares, 1789–1848* (Lyons, 1981), pp. 267–92. More generally, see the important essay by Bryan S. Turner, 'Orientalism and the Problem of Civil Society in Islam', in Asaf Hussain *et al.* (eds.), *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists* (Brattleboro, VT, 1984), pp. 23–42.

[66] The literature on this topic is vast, but see Ira M. Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, 1988) and 'Muslim Cities and Islamic Societies', in Ira M. Lapidus (ed.), *Middle Eastern Cities: A Symposium on Ancient Islamic and Contemporary Middle Eastern Urbanism* (Berkeley, 1969), pp. 47–74.

common throughout the world of Muslim societies *before* European conquest. This point was noted by quite a few eighteenth-century European observers with clear eyes and an open mind. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (who admittedly favoured undivided, small republics) even complained that Muslims too strictly distinguished between the theological and political systems. 'Mahomet held very sane views, and linked his political system well together; and, as long as the form of his government continued under the caliphs who succeeded him, that government was indeed one, and so far good', he wrote. 'But the Arabs', he added, 'having grown prosperous, lettered, civilized, slack, and cowardly, were conquered by barbarians: the division between the two [theological and political] powers began again; and, although it is less apparent among the Mahometans than among the Christians, it none the less exists, especially in the sect of Ali, and there are States, such as Persia, where it is continually making itself felt'.[67]

Rousseau's observation stood the charge of Caesaro-papism against the Islamic world on its head. It suggested, and more recent observers have agreed, that the East – a slothful term that projects ignorance onto the profound complexity of the vast geographic and cultural area to which it refers – was not a sewer of slavishness, a world without private property ruled by Great Monarchs who treated their subjects as if they were mere households of women, children and slaves. The fragmentary evidence that survives instead suggests that these early civil societies most probably were pioneers in the field of contract law. These societies, for instance, were dotted with cities that functioned as cosmopolitan traffic nodes, entrepôts and facilitators of a vast proto-world system.[68] These societies also had the longest recorded history of private and civil law covering the protection of trade and property, whose predominant form was that of partnership.[69] These partnerships were not based on the familiar European employer–employee relation (which was widely regarded as a form of slavery) and they certainly did not give rise to class differences between owners and non-owners of property; property, production and trade were rather embedded in households, neighbourhood or confessional groupings, in which business partners, women and men alike, considered each other as 'owners', regardless of whether they contributed capital or labour to the partnership. Social ties were typically multiple, fluid, and dynamic – 'fuzzy' rather than monolithic, enumerated, and

[67] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, in *The Social Contract and Discourses* (New York, 1913), book 4, chapter 8, p. 109.

[68] J. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System AD 1250–1350* (Cambridge, 1989).

[69] Mikhail Rostovtzeff, *Caravan Cities* (Oxford, 1932), pp. 8–9; Solomon Goitein, 'Commercial and Family Partnerships in the Countries of Medieval Islam', *Islamic Studies* 3 (1964), pp. 315–37, and his *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 270–8.

homogeneous, like many of the later forms of colonial bonds.[70] The effect, among others, was to block the emergence of large-scale trading and manufacturing firms of the kind that first developed in Britain, France and the Netherlands, and the rise of absolutist forms of political rule as well. Seen in this way, the 'Oriental' despotic state much analysed and feared by European writers was an *effect* of foreign conquest and Western colonisation. Its *'grande violence'* (de Tocqueville) typically succeeded because the colonisers had at their disposal military and communications resources and long experience of the arts of absolutist rule.

The effect, in most cases, was to destroy or badly maim the complex of pre-existing social institutions and business partnerships, so creating vacuums that could be filled up by the *étatiste* institutions of the colonial powers and their comprador rulers (shahs, emirs, kings).[71] The new Turkey under Kemalist rule (1923–38) is a clear case in point: the nationalist state-building led by Mustafa Kemal (later crowned with the name of Atatürk, or 'Father of the Turks') eliminated the entire system of religious schools, with the *mekteps* and *medreses* compulsorily reorganised under the direction of the Ministry of Education. Secular codes of law based on Italian, Swiss and German precedents were rigorously applied in the fields of civil, criminal and commercial law. Materials printed in the Arabic and Persian languages were banned, and Turkish translations of the *Qur'ān*, anathema to orthodox Muslims, were encouraged and recited publicly. Religious titles and their use were abolished, and dervish lodges (*tekke*) and cells (*zaviye*) were closed. Western clothing was officially encouraged, and Sunday, rather than the Muslim Friday holiday, was declared the official day of rest. The old system of locating places in relation to public squares and places was countered by laws specifying that buildings and houses had to be numbered and all streets named, according to the European custom. The first Turkish beauty contests were staged; alcohol was legalised for Muslims; and civil marriages for all became compulsory. And, as if to crown all these 'secular' measures backed by threats of military violence from above, regal statues and majestic paintings of Kemal were placed in public places – so violating the old Muslim tradition of opposition to the inflated representation and deification of living things.[72]

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[70] Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds.), *Subaltern Studies*, VII (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 20–6.

[71] See Hannah Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, 1978); the claim that theories of oriental despotism sprang up as a foil for classical republicanism is well defended in Patricia Springborg, *Western Republicanism and the Oriental Prince* (Cambridge, 1992).

[72] See, for instance, Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2 (Cambridge and London, 1977), esp. chapter 6; Andrew Davison, *Secularism and Revivalism in Turkey* (New Haven and London, 1998).

Travelling

A final introductory thought: it is significant, and profoundly ironical, that descriptive usages of the concept of global civil society have now spread to every continent of the globe. The birth and maturation of global civil society has been riddled with many ironies. We shall see later that its civil institutions can even be understood and defended as the condition of a healthy, publicly shared sense of irony, but for the moment here is among the strangest ironies of all: an originally European way of life, some of whose members set out brutally to colonise the world in the name of a civil society, helped lay the foundations for its own universal appeal and, with that, strengthened civil resistance to colonising forms of power and prejudice originally traceable to the European region. The revolts of the colonised in the name of a 'civilised society' against British imperial power in the eighteenth-century American colonies was the first-ever case in point of this unintended consequence. There have subsequently been many more and recent instances of these ironic, failed attempts to crush the willpower of a (potentially) self-governing civil society through armed state or imperial power that once prided itself on its own 'civilising mission'. Examples range from the gentle and prolonged resistance to imperial power by locally formed civil societies (as in Australia and New Zealand) to the volcanic upheavals against colonial and post-colonial power in contexts otherwise as different as Haiti, India, South Africa and Nigeria.

One important effect of such unintended developments is observable: the contemporary 'emigration' of the language of civil society, from its original birthplace in Europe to all four corners of the earth.[73] In recent years, the family of terms 'civil society' and 'global civil society' have proved to be good travellers. After making a first appearance in Japan and then developing vigorously in the European region, including its eastern fringes – the *New York Times* has reported that civil society is 'almost a mantra in Russian politics these days'[74] – the terms spread to the United States and Canada, and throughout central and South America. They have appeared as well throughout sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, and all regions of Asia and the Muslim world.[75] This globalisation of the concept of civil society is one aspect of the emergent global civil society,

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[73] See my *Civil Society and the State: Old Images and New Visions*, esp. pp. 32 ff.

[74] *New York Times*, June 22, 2000.

[75] The literature is vast and still growing rapidly. Among the best-known contributions are Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds.), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge and New York, 2001); Richard Augustus Norton (ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1995); Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn (eds.), *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models* (New York, 1996); Tadashi Yamamoto (ed.) *Emerging Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Community: Nongovernmental Underpinnings of the Emerging Asia*

for it shows how civil society ideas and languages and institutions are spreading beyond their place of origin into new contexts, where they are in turn conceptualised or re-conceptualised in local contexts, from where the revisions, which are sometimes cast in very different terms, may and often do feed back into the original donor contexts.[76] Not only is talk of civil society now heard world-wide within circles of journalists, lawyers and academics. NGOs, business people, professionals, diplomats and politicians of various persuasions also like to speak the same language. Its popularity may well convince future historians to look back on this globalisation of the term and to judge that its global extension, which is without precedent, signalled the first step in the long-term emergence of common frameworks of social meaning against the tyranny of distance and the constrictions of state boundaries. Tomorrow's historians may well conclude that the spreading talk of civil society was not just talk. They may highlight the fact that something new was born in the world – the unprecedented (if unevenly distributed) growth of the sense within NGOs and publics at large that civilians live in one world, and that they have obligations to other civilians living beyond their borders, simply because they are civilians.

Proof positive of this trend is the reception by scholars and activists alike of the idea and ideal of civil society in the Indian sub-continent. In recent years, this reception has been driven by renewed interest in indigenous traditions of civility, widespread disappointment with the post-colonial state, market reforms, and the defence of civil and political rights against religious nationalism and authoritarian state policies. Three different versions of the case for civil society seem to predominate. The *traditionalist* approach criticises state violence and calls for 'humane governance' based upon strengthened indigenous traditions. The project of strengthening a civil society that is 'rooted in diversity yet cohering and holding together' must draw upon 'surviving traditions of togetherness, mutuality and resolution of differences and conflict'.[77] Others reject this traditionalist approach as nostalgia for traditions that harbour inequality and individual unfreedom – and produce instability within modern institutions. These critics prefer instead to walk the path originally trodden by Paine and Tocqueville, to reach a different understanding of civil society as a distinctively modern sphere of voluntary associations, some of

Pacific Regional Community (Singapore and Tokyo, 1995); John L. and Jean Comaroff (eds.), *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago and London, 1999); and John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives.*

[76] Makoto Iokibe, 'Japan's Civil Society: An Historical Overview', in Tadashi Yamamoto (ed.), *Deciding the Public Good: Governance and Civil Society in Japan* (Tokyo, 1999).

[77] Rajni Kothari, *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance* (Delhi, 1988).

them of colonial origin, that stand as buffer zones between the individual and governmental institutions. Constitutional democracy in India is seen to require a *modern* civil society: a plurality of secular and inclusive institutions that enjoy considerable autonomy from state power.[78]

Some who are otherwise sympathetic to this *modernist* approach doubt its implied teleology: they point out that such 'civil–social' institutions are in short supply, that they are confined to well-to-do strata, and that this *lack* of modern civil associations in a society dominated by caste and religious ties is the key indicator of the post-colonial condition.[79] Still others – the *anthropological* approach – question this interpretation of post-colonialism. They seek to cut through the pre-colonial/post-colonial dualism by pointing to the ways in which castes and religious communities deserve to be included in any descriptive–analytical account of civil society. Randeria, for instance, denies that castes and religious communities are (or were ever) describable as traditional 'organic bonds of kinship', as standard accounts of the tradition/modernity divide have supposed.[80] She points out, persuasively, that the social groupings within pre-colonial India, castes included, were typically multiple, flexible and fluid, rather than rigid and exclusive in outlook. The Gujarat community of Mole-Salam Garasia Rajputs, which until recently assigned a Hindu and Muslim name to each one of its members, is an example of this dynamic heterogeneity, which evidently survived colonial conquest: in the 1911 census, nearly a quarter of a million Indians described themselves as 'Mohammedan Hindus'.[81]

Randeria acknowledges that colonial administration, which sought to map and control Indian society, was responsible for the refashioning of territorially defined castes into enumerated communities through bureaucratic definition: for the purposes of census classification and counting, employment in the colonial administration, and the allocation of seats in representative bodies, colonial administrators twisted social identities like religion and caste (*samaj*, or society, in Gujarat) into political

[78] André Béteille, *Civil Society and Its Institutions*, delivered as the first Fulbright Memorial Lecture (Calcutta, 1996), as well as his *Society and Politics in India* (London, 1991) and 'The Conflict of Norms and Values in Contemporary Indian Society', in Peter Berger (ed.), *The Limits of Social Cohesion: Conflict and Mediation in Plural Societies* (Boulder, Co. 1998), pp. 265–92.

[79] Partha Chatterjee, 'On Civil and Political Society in Post-Colonial Democracies', in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds.), *Civil Society. History and Possibilities* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 165–78.

[80] Shalini Randeria, 'Geteilte Geschichte und verwobene Moderne', in Jörn Rüsen *et al.* (eds), *Zukunftsentwürfe. Ideen für eine Kultur der Veränderung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), pp. 87–96, and 'From Cohesion to Connectedness: Civil Society, Caste Solidarities and Legal Pluralism in Post-Colonial India', in Keane (ed.), *Civil Society: Berlin Perspectives.*

[81] S. T. Lokhandwala, 'Indian Islam: Composite Culture and Integration', *New Quest*, 50 (1985), pp. 87–101.

categories. Randeria also acknowledges that these bureaucratic classifications had profound political and social effects, so that by the early decades of the twentieth century, caste organisations and communal parties were mobilising to define and protect their interests on an India-wide basis. Yet she goes on to point out – against politically loaded, nationalist claims on behalf of a homogeneous Hindu majority – that, despite their ascriptive qualities, most lower castes, including the so-called 'untouchable castes' (scheduled castes, as the Indian constitution calls them), continue to be largely self-governing local collectivities. They enjoy a measure of self-conscious jurisdiction and authority over their members – a power that is often jealously guarded against state intrusions. Castes are far from being kinship groups with unalterable customs and procedures. Their assemblies (*panchayat*), comprising all the adult members of a local caste unit (*paraganu*), are sites of deliberations about rules and the contestation of norms that are vital for maintaining the patterns of solidarity and belonging – and for resisting unwanted state intervention in such matters as the rules of marriage, divorce and re-marriage, the exchange of food and care arrangements for children.

Randeria points out that the European language of civil society first travelled to India during the nineteenth century. With the founding of the colonial state, the civil sphere – often not named as such[82] – took the form of spaces of social life either untampered with by colonial rulers or established through the resistance to their power by colonial subjects themselves. Randeria shows that the subsequent debates about civil society in India have come to interact with different European images of civil society, so highlighting not only their travelling potential but also the ways in which 'foreign' or 'imported' languages both resonate within local contexts, and are often (heavily) refashioned as a result. They then become subject to 're-export', back to the context from which they originally came, in consequence of which the language of civil society is both *pluralised* and *globalised*. The impressive cooperation between the coalition called Narmada Bachao Andolan (formed in 1988) and INGOs like Oxfam and The Environment Defense Fund in campaigns in support of

[82] A difficult but interesting and inescapable problem of interpretation arises here: the possibility that some of the institutional practices of global civil society in various parts of the world neither presently consider themselves participants within this society nor use nor understand the language of civil society. Throughout this book, the problem is treated as generously as possible, in that actors and institutions that more or less abide by the rules of global civil society, outlined in this introduction, can legitimately be called by that proper name. Just as we commonly distinguish between the terms in which people describe themselves and how they are described by others, so global civil society is a space containing many identities that go by other names – including identities that smell sweet despite the fact that they are not called roses.

the right of people *not* to be displaced by dam construction in western India illustrates what Randeria has in mind. The profound theoretical implication of her point should not be missed: *multiple* and *multi-dimensional* and *entangled* languages of civil society now contribute to the definition of the world of global civil society. Contrary to Gellner and Hall and others, civil society is not a uniquely Western achievement.[83] Its forms appeared in a large number of different contexts – even in the so-called 'dark' continent of Africa, with its pre-colonial institutions like the Tswana *kgolta* and old traditions of 'invisible governance' articulated through local, socially shared styles, aspirations and secrets of individuals and groups.[84] Not only that: Western definitions of civil society are not universal in any simple sense. The plural understandings of civil society within the modern West – the term itself now grates, since modern European definitions of civil society are much messier and more divided than that – are to be seen as one *particular* approach, and not as a universal language that is thought to be synonymous with a world history that leads teleologically, smugly, triumphantly, to the silencing or annihilation of other, 'residual' definitions of social order.

[83] Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty. Civil Society and Its Rivals* (London, 1994); J. A. Hall (ed.), *Civil Society: Theory, History and Comparison* (Cambridge, 1995).
[84] See David Hecht and Maliqalim Simone, *Invisible Governance: The Art of African Micropolitics* (New York, 1994); Ali A. Mazrui, 'Globalisation and the Future of Islamic Civilisation' (Centre for the Study of Democracy, London, June 2000); and John L. and Jean Comaroff, 'Postcolonial Politics and Discourses of Democracy in Southern Africa: An Anthropological Reflection on African Political Modernities', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 53:2 (1997), pp. 123–46.