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Secularity through a 'Soft Distinction' in the Islamic Ecumene? *Adab* as a Counterpoint to *Shari'a*

Armando Salvatore *

Abstract: *»Säkularität durch eine ,weiche Unterscheidung' in der islamischen Ökumene.* Adab *als Gegenpol zur* Scharia*«.* This article highlights a 'soft' distinction in the regulation of human conduct which emerged through various epochs of Islamicate history: between *adab* as the marker of an ethical and literary tradition, on the one hand, and the normative claims covered by *shari'a* and drawing particularly on the exemplary sayings of Prophet Muhammad, the hadith corpus, on the other. *Adab* became a counterpoint to the hadith-*shari'a* discourse by relying on non-Prophetic and, in this sense, non-divine sources of knowledge. The first part of the study reconstructs the trajectory of *adab* in pre-colonial times while the second part explores crucial transformations occurring under the impact of European colonial modernity, whose discourse propagated a strongly autonomous notion of secular civility. The interventions of several Muslim reformers of the era contributed to make *adab* the hub of an autochthonous type of secularity. Here *adab* still works as a marker of a soft distinction – only that it now becomes a 'double distinction': both between a mundane and a prophetic tradition within the Islamic ecumene, and between an emerging Muslim secularity and the European colonial one.

Keywords: Secularity, civility, Islam, modernity, colonialism, *adab*, *hadith*, *shari'a*.

1. Introduction: Religion, Distinction, Differentiation

This study intervenes in the discussion on Islamicate secularities by focusing on a crucial, though 'soft' distinction, developed through various stages in the course of Islamicate history, which affected the regulation of human conduct. The outcome of this distinction was the way the ethical and literary tradition of *adab* worked as a harmonious counterpoint, more than a sheer alternative, to the normative discourse subsumed under the notion of *shari'a*, the law originating from Divine will (*shar'*). *Adab* operated thus, however, through clearly affirming a distinctive, non-divine source of norms of human interaction. The

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article is divided up in two parts: the first delineates key traits of *adab* in pre-colonial times, while the second focuses on some key transformations it underwent during the colonial era. It should also be added that arguing in favor of a view of distinction that is not drastic but fraught with a good degree of ambivalence (mediated, as it were, by the plastic and malleable becoming of discursive traditions) should not be understood as a token of an 'Islamic exception' to norms of modern differentiation. As alluded to in the introduction to this HSR Special Issue, what may appear as ambivalent from a modern Western scholarly viewpoint can be perfectly rational within the perspective of a non-Western tradition originating in the premodern era (Dressler, Salvatore, and Wohlrab-Sahr, 2019). Disambiguation strains only intervene in the tradition through the solicitations of Western cultural hegemony during the colonial epoch.

The background to the 'normalcy' of this process of distinction unfolding within Islamicate history could be seen in the view, cultivated by an important branch of the comparative historical sociology of religions and civilizations, according to which religion in a variety of regions and civilizations differentiated itself from cosmological holistic views and rituals during the so-called Axial Age (ca. 800-200 BCE). This *Ur*-differentiation of religion was facilitated by its main carriers (i.e., increasingly specialized religious personnel) mostly by invoking a transcendent realm, represented either by a personal God or an impersonal force. This was conceived as a realm that imposes norms of ethical and compassionate behavior on all members of a given collectivity, including its rulers. The operation, originally performed by a variety of prophets, philosophers, and sages (from Isaiah through Plato to the Buddha), instituted a principled autonomy of religion from other social fields. The carriers of religious visions aspired to embrace the entire human condition, torn between immanent interests and transcendent norms (Jaspers 1953 [1949]; Eisenstadt 1982).

Over the long-term, this initial differentiation of religion opened up the social space to a cascade of further differentiations, which instituted the autonomy of politics, the law, the economy, art, etc. via distinctions from comprehensive religious claims. Yet while we observe such successive fields differentiating from religion and creating non-religious or secular spaces, discourses, and institutions, the initial differentiation of religion from the archaic and holistic understanding of reality still operates, as it were, in the background. Too often, we take for granted this *Ur*-differentiation or forget it altogether. On the other hand, the outcome of differentiation processes is rarely clear-cut and without residues, as sociological parlance often describes them. Often, degrees of ambivalence are observable, themselves functional to the operation of the relatively autonomous fields, and favoring their interfacing.

Thus, the boundaries between fields are seldom drawn in the sharpest possible ways. This allows for grey areas that do not necessarily hinder, and may actually favor, an intermediation between the dynamics of the different fields

and a negotiation among their normative rationales. This is precisely what in several cases, located beyond the West and its modernity, prevents differentiations of secular spaces and forms of action from becoming sharp and producing fully autonomous fields governed by specific values and norms. Differentiations do occur, but they appear most often as soft, ambivalent, and hazy – like the one I shall explore here. Moreover, differentiation describes a process, while distinction points to its (relatively stable) outcome. In the case analyzed, it is more suitable to refer to the notion of discourses and practices bundled together within more or less coherent traditions rather than use the sociological metaphors of fields and spaces.

2. The Tradition of *Adab* in Pre-Colonial Times

From quite early stages after the onset of the Islamicate civilization, one can observe the crystallization of two major discursive traditions, both of which consist of intersecting registers of narration, habitualization and, ultimately, normativity – albeit in a variety of combinations and degrees. They are the traditions associated with the idea of *adab*, which I shall define in some detail, and the tradition governed by *hadith*, the increasingly systematic body of reports/narrations providing the quantitatively (and to a large extent also qualitatively) most solid 'database' to the entire normative system subsumed under the umbrella keyword of *shari'a*. While *hadith* takes shape as a tradition originating from prophetic action and speech (through the narrative chain, habitualization prism, and normative template initiated within Muhammad's inner circle: Şentürk 2005; Hallaq 2013), the origins of *adab* are more fluid and mixed. This genre alternately evokes (pre-Islamic) Arab and Persian components and 'roots'. What is not contested is that it has no specifically prophetic origin. *Adab*, the non-prophetic tradition, primarily designated the quintessence of practical wisdom accumulated over the generations: the opposite, in principle, of a type of knowledge and practice originating in revelation. This non-prophetic origin did not hinder it from harmonizing with the *hadith* tradition rather than clashing with it. However, the two traditions maintained a fundamental, mutual demarcation, even in the works of the scholars who eagerly and simultaneously cultivated both of them. As networked sets of narrations with their more or less certified transmitters, both traditions crystallized in late Umayyad/early 'Abbasid' times, between the 8th and 9th century CE, as exemplified by the work and career of the polymath Ibn Qutayba (d. 889; Bellino 2016). Thus, a principled distinction was seldom over-emphasized. Hypothetically, we can talk about a 'soft distinction' linking (more than separating) the two traditions.

Representing a type of practical wisdom acquired through learning, *adab* rapidly became a key Islamicate concept of etiquette and mastery of forms

(including, if not mainly, forms of life conduct). It designated the right, proper way to order and invest interests and values within social interaction. As famously defined by Barbara Metcalf, it provided "proper discrimination of correct order, behaviour and taste" (Metcalf 1984, 2). *Adab* was primarily cultivated by courtiers and literati within a variety of Islamicate courts and their attached bureaucracies, but it amounted to much more than self-complacent aristocratic refinement. Thus, one step further, the most general definition of *adab* would embrace the ensemble of the ethical and practical norms of virtuous and beautiful life. Far from eclipsing with the collapse of the High Caliphate during the 10th century CE, *adab* became even more ubiquitous during the Islamicate Middle Periods (10th to 15th century), when it morphed into a key notion linking life conduct to the ways of governance and statecraft (*siyasa*).

Siyasa is the concept we normally translate as "public policy" or simply "politics," but which in fact circumscribes a borderline area of human activity that is both legitimized from within the jurisprudential dimension of the *shari'a* tradition, and escapes it for demarcating the autonomy of rulers from a too rigid application of religious norms (March 2016). More broadly, *siyasa* is a key human practice helping subjects to deal with what, in a Machiavellian vocabulary, we would call the conundrum of virtue and *fortuna* (Yavari 2014; Papas 2018). By linking self-governance to *siyasa*, *adab* provides a narrative and normative umbrella to a proliferating grid of concepts, practices and institutions that have been identified as potential carriers of a secular ethos of distinction within pre-colonial, Islamicate history. Often this proto-secular conceptual network matches the lukewarm, highly ambivalent reliance on *shari'a* to be found in the "mirrors for princes" literature. The rise of dynastic law (*yasa, qanun*) within Mongol and Turkic empires fed into earlier contaminations of *adab* with *siyasa*.

Notwithstanding such contaminations, *adab* legitimately intersected the core dynamics in the production of religious knowledge and throve alongside the *shari'a* tradition and its norms based on Qur'an (Gilliot 1999) and, even more, *hadith*, which – we should not forget – is a narrative corpus through which the Prophet's wisdom of character shines and becomes exemplary, and so normative. It is important to observe that unlike their Sasanian predecessors, pious merchants operating within the Islamic ecumene often had a share in the court culture where *adab* flourished, even while keeping an ambivalent relation to court milieus. This participation of non-aristocratic strata in *adab* contributed to an intense interfacing between *adab* and *hadith*. Qur'anic verses could be woven into the edifying stories of the *adab* genre such as the *Kalila wa Dimna* (an 8th century translation of ancient Indian fables), without however altering the inherently mundane teachings of the genre (Yavari 2014, 57).

We could define *adab* as a discursive tradition in its own right, including aesthetical and entertaining dimensions alongside edifying and normative ones.

It stressed the requirements of civilized interaction at court, but also outside of it, namely with administrators and literati of other courts, with religious scholars, with traders, etc. It taught a know-how that was integral to the building of social relations. Thus, more broadly, it also served the goal of conflict prevention and social integration. It ultimately expressed style and distinction, in the sense famously elucidated by Pierre Bourdieu (1979), by emphasizing the need to acquire a knowledge of social complexity and of the nuances and vagaries of human interaction, which are caused by the proliferation of difference in taste, values, and interests among human beings. This knowledge of 'social commerce' also helps human subjects to maximize their own reputation by way of eloquence, good speech, and effective communication (Heck 2018). Such an approach is supported by the idea that good speech and elegant manners are not just an embellishment, but a necessary ingredient of good, cultured, civilized life. In turn, this is seen as a condition for developing a capacity for discernment between good and bad, harmful and useful, pleasant and unpleasant – in what turns out to be at once practical reason and ethical formation, either of them independent in principle from the use of religious references.

From the zenith of 'Abbasid rule onwards, the two traditions of *adab* and *hadith* consolidated their normative grip over vast social strata in parallel to each other. One can in principle distinguish the culture and knowledge of the *'ulama'*, the *fuqaha*', and the *mufti*s, which are largely dependent on *hadith*, on the one hand, and the *adab* court culture of the scribes and bureaucrats, on the other. Not surprisingly, Marshall Hodgson described the *shar'i* culture as "piety-minded," yet also suitable to regulate multiple aspects of social life, to facilitate the integration of various types of popular religiosity within a coherent institutional framework (Hodgson 1974, 273-5). Similarly, a cosmopolitan court culture, like the one that was built at the center of the 'Abbasid Empire following the Sasanian model, never suppressed or replaced the knowledge that could be acquired by studying *hadith* and practicing *fiqh* with the support of Qur'anic piety (Arnason 2006, 45).

Particularly some Sufi trends contributed to blend these two traditions, most notably during the transition between the Middle Periods and the modern era (Lapidus 1984; Papas 2008). *Adab* took root ever more solidly while being increasingly codified and practiced within a variety of Sufi brotherhoods, which thus contributed to interlacing court and government milieus, trader circles, and the 'commoners' (Papas 2018). In several cases, *adab* became a crucial concept not only for Sufi practice, but also for Sufi theory, in that it occupied a central place in several manuals addressed to aspirants and practitioners. Sufi brotherhoods played a mediating role between the courts and the commoners. Sufi leaders were not just at the receiving end of a higher culture 'trickling down' from the courts, but enriched it through their active presence within courtly milieus, while engaging in daily practice and dialogue with a

great variety of subjects and groups within society at large (Rahimi and Salvatore 2018).

To summarize, we could say that the culture of *adab*, while initially radiating from court milieus, could embrace wider social groups, particularly thanks to its absorption by the higher middle strata, with commercial entrepreneurs playing a salient role. This class also showed a propensity to imitate and appropriate aristocratic life styles by acquiring the social prestige resulting from becoming patrons of the arts and sciences. Yet it was also because of the role played by some Sufi brotherhoods that the process was not merely unidirectional or sharply vertical, as in the European cases studied by Norbert Elias (1983 [1969]; 2000 [1939; 1968].). It was more a case of appropriation and diffusion, across various milieus, of both the prestige-laden label of *adab* and the practices and disciplines of self-cultivation associated with it (Salvatore 2016, 124-6).

Playing more generally on this Eliasian analogy, one could argue that *adab* helped in providing a significant nexus between the cultivation of the self, on the one hand, and general ideas of integration of the body politic, on the other. This happened not only because *adab* provided an ethical grammar to the high bureaucracy, but also due to its frequent association with discourses on the "circle of justice" and/or through the previously mentioned genre of "mirrors for princes," both of which contributed to the political literature of the epoch by defining virtues and duties of rulers and administrators. Within this wider field, incidentally, the use of *hadith* was not so rare and was often combined with tales of non-prophetic exemplary characters (see Yavari 2014). We might even observe a certain isomorphism between the *adab* and *hadith* traditions in matching character-building with ideas of a general (cosmological and socio-political) order – a hypothesis that might reorient the analysis of the underlying discourse through targeted inquiries.

In the process, *adab* assisted to complexify (and in a sense civilize) the predominantly military character of political rule during the Middle Periods, and also helped transform it during the transition to the early modern era via the emergence of an ever more self-conscious and assertive bureaucratic culture (Salvatore 2018). Especially after the advent of Mongol rule and the ensuing crystallization of a dualism between dynastic law (*yasa*) and the *shari'a*, *adab* could work as a civilizing emollient on both sides. Thus, overall, the distinction innervated by *adab* was not unidirectional. When I suggest the existence of a soft distinction, I do not intend to state that the distinction excluded in principle a challenge to prophetic tradition, but rather to emphasize the process-like and open-ended character of the distinction. This could serve multiple goals by affecting both self-formation and social interactions (in this sense, being socio-cultural, civic, and ethical) and by becoming influential at the level of governance via the issuing of rulings and decisions (so having a political and even legal significance).

This idea and practice of *adab* was also entertained by several religious scholars and enlivened parts of the *hadith* corpus itself, in spite of the fact that *adab* is a non-Qur'anic term. One *hadith* presents the Prophet as a champion of *adab*. Likewise, one can look at the fields of *adab al-mufti*, *adab al-fatawa*, and *adab al-qadi*, explicitly addressed to the practitioners of *shari'a* law (Masud 1984). The key argument justifying such ultimate compatibility consisted in stressing that *adab* is 'obviously' Islamic, since it promotes virtue: as such, it cannot be against Islam. But such understandings, wherever available, are the outcome of a long-term absorption process that does not invalidate the principled autonomy of *adab* as a type of discourse originating and developing outside of the scriptural corpus – only that the distinction is soft and ambivalent, not hard and straightforward.

Moreover, we can observe an internal differentiation within *adab*, and even *adab* operating as a factor of differentiation between various social functions and fields. The mother of all differentiation is in *Adab al-dunya wa-l-din* of al-Mawardi (d. 1058), where *adab* is simultaneously, yet differentially applied to "the world" (*al-dunya*) with its complex relations and "the religion" (*al-din*) as the ethical pursuit of the hereafter. However, this malleability of *adab* also included a promise of reconciliation of differences, as evident in al-Ghazali (d. 1111), for whom the *adab* of the self and the *adab* of political community basically coincided. On the other hand, in his famous *Ihya 'ulum al-din*, *adab*-related chapters are divided up into discrete sections like between *adab al-akl* (food), *adab al-nikah* (marriage), and *al-adab fi-l-mujalasa* (courtly, polite society), but also *adab tilawat al-Qur'an* (Qur'an recitation). The consequence is that *adab* is essentially a method (or even a metanorm) more than a sheer norm, to be applied to all aspects of life, including the fields regulated by the religious sciences and the *shari'a* (Bonebakker 1990, 24-5; Leder 2011).

In the same way in which the Islamic ecumene is larger than the Islamic religious community proper (the *umma*), there seems to be an ethical code that the religious scholars themselves have to acknowledge as having a broader purchase than the religious law. Therefore, *fuqaha'* who are well-versed in *adab* will have better capacities to read and interpret Qur'an and *hadith*. Moreover, *adab* was addressed to rulers and their key advisors and viziers/ministers, with a frequent emphasis on the virtue of self-restraint and the rational control of passions that are instrumental to implementing a viable statecraft (as it happens in the previously mentioned, often ambivalent "mirror" genre: Yavari 2014). Accordingly, we have *adab al-muluk* (kings), *adab al-sultaniyya* (sultanate), and *adab al-wuzara'* (ministers). *Adab* was addressed to the leaders and their followers, to the "big" (*adab al-kabir*) and to the "small" ones (*adab al-saghir*) within society and politics, measured in terms of power and social standing (Walker 2011, 106; Hartung 2011, 302-3).

One can hypothesize that this regulating impetus of the *adab* tradition was driven by the perception among cultural elites of various epochs that the nor-

mative import of *shari'a*, while being essential in keeping together the Islamic ecumene, could not be self-sufficient in the task of governing its complexity and the increasingly intricate relations with its partners and foes. We could see the traditions of *shari'a* and *adab* as not building a stale symmetric binary, but as engaging in a continuous mutual accommodation through which each could be constructed as the internal limit of the other: while devotion to the *shari'a* and its implementation required the civilizing restraint of *adab*, *adab* in turn could not openly contravene *shari'a*, not merely due to the latter's sacredness, but because civility without morality risks becoming an empty shell. To abridge the intersecting trajectories of the two traditions within the pre-colonial Islamic ecumene, we could say that rather than searching for forms of the secular as distinguished from religion, we can identify socio-cultural forms delineating ways of soft distinction between a corpus of norms of prophetic origin constituting the *umma* (the community of the faithful proper), and a type of civil ethic innervating a 'civilizing process' of sorts, providing a scaffolding to both the competitive and the cohesive dimensions of social life in the Islamic ecumene.

During pre-colonial times, within the wide and internally diversified realms of the ecumene, means of distinction remained largely open-ended and allowed for a fluid process of continuous demarcations and re-amalgamations. Moreover, whatever kind of distinction might seem to emerge which we could identify as proto-secular, it acquires a narrative and a habitualized form rather than a normative armature, a form embedded in knowledge of the nuances and ambivalences of social life. This finding matches the hypothesis that we face "different levels of sharpness and quality of distinction" when we move beyond the West and beyond colonial modernity (Wohlrab-Sahr and Kleine 2016). This hypothesis also resonates with the view of Thomas Bauer, who, by stressing the Islamic (or Islamicate) "culture of ambiguity," helps shed light on an in-built capacity of Muslim historic actors to distinguish spaces and concepts without creating irreversible institutional differentiations (Bauer 2011). This capacity is not a pale prefiguration of processes that will finally usher in a sharp discursive and institutional differentiation, with the advent of colonial, Western-dominated modernity. The dense interfacing and mutual 'irritation' between the two traditions appear more meaningful if we adopt an approach stressing the socially constructive side of the "culture of ambiguity" rather than sign up to a paradigm of differentiation enshrined by subsequent waves of Eurocentric modernization theory. As I have argued elsewhere, given the historical and geopolitical centrality of the Islamic ecumene, these processes would make for a more plausible benchmark than the 'Westernist' armamentarium of concepts of the 'secular' and cognates, also for the sake of interregional comparisons (Salvatore 2016).

3. The Metamorphosis of *Adab* during the Colonial Era

The relationship between the *adab* and *shari'a* traditions was subjected to strains and changes during colonial and post-colonial times without ever producing a linear transformation toward a 'hard distinction' of religion vs. secularity. It is rather that the two traditions could no longer quite harmoniously (and often tacitly) co-exist and interact. Starting in the late 19th century, several Muslim reformers saw themselves compelled to essentialize *shari'a* into a quite systemic normative idea. They often did so by defining *shari'a* as "Islamic law" (Buskens and Dupret 2015) and by emancipating it from the *hadith* corpus, where the narrative and the normative dimensions are tightly intertwined. Often the most culturally knowledgeable among Muslim reformers were also led to clarify the mutual relations between *shari'a* and *adab*, an operation that in a few cases pushed them to subsume one under the other. And moving toward the 20th century, *shari'a* happened to take the upper hand: a *shari'a* now increasingly 'purified' from its historic reliance on the *hadith* corpus, where its normative content was aligned with narration and habitus and was therefore particularly porous to *adab*.

At this historical juncture one even has the impression that *shari'a* leaps out of its 'discursively' normative armature altogether to become a sort of pure metanorm (Salvatore 1998). Curiously, however, *adab* seems to undergo a similar process, to the extent that Muslim reform discourse molded it into an abstract value or ideal of proper, civilized, modern behavior. This development unfolded in the context of the rise of a print-based public sphere that favored conceptual abstraction over narration and habitualization. Such a public sphere largely operated under the aegis of colonial patterns of governance. Within this public sphere, both traditions were reframed on the basis of their potential to help redeploy the type of subjectivity and governmentality that was in high demand within the new colonial settings (Mitchell 1991 [1988]).

However, during the first half of the 19th century in the Egypt of Mehmet Ali, not yet subjected to direct colonial pressures and interventions but committed to ideas of modernization influenced by European models, the leading scholar and reformer al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) was still able to reconstruct a precarious balance between *shari'a* and *adab*. In classic theories of the body politic, *adab* operated as the knowledge code inspiring the proper execution of the differentiated tasks of the various organs and limbs of the body. In his *Manahij al-albab fi mabahij al-adab al 'asriyya*, al-Tahtawi reworked this classic trope in ways that transformed the *adab*, traditionally incumbent on both the ruler and the subjects, into a unitary engine of self-control now specifically centered on the hearts (*albab*) of the "people," an emergent category of a proto-nationalist dictionary. As shown in a recent study by Ellen McLarney, al-Tahtawi transformed *adab* by referring to modern French concepts like liberty, equality, and fraternity, but also, and most crucially, to the Islamic concepts of

justice and political participation/consultation (McLarney 2016, 25). Politics (*siyasa*) was no longer considered an exclusive prerogative of the ruler. It became a legitimate field of interest and action for his subjects.

The contemporary *adab* theorized by al-Tahtawi, or "*adab* of the age" (*al-adab al-'asriyya*), is ever more centered on the self-mastery of individual citizens (ibid., 31) but is also of growing importance for politics (ibid., 34). The connection between *adab* and *siyasa* pre-dated the colonial era, as previously noted. But now within *siyasa* the individual subject is prioritized over the ruler and his court and becomes the centerpiece of a process of reflective self-construction. This shift resonates with the idea of the civilizing process of Elias, or, according to an author like Tim Mitchell, with a Foucaultian view of the capillarity of power and its circulation, with subjects acting as nodes in the social system (Mitchell 1991 [1988]). Interestingly, al-Tahtawi transformed *adab* by also resorting to the metaphor of the inner forum, or inner court, of the subject as the hub of ethics, which had provided a key trope to European 18th century political philosophy (see Koselleck 1988 [1959]). More generally, as put by Ellen McLarney, al-Tahtawi "maps – or translates – the *adab* of one sphere into the *adab* of another" (McLarney 2016, 37), from individual creativity through the learning of proper linguistic skills to bodily composure and discipline (ibid., 42).

Al-Tahtawi also advocated the cultivation of language, intended as proper speech, being no longer a prerogative of the courtier and administrator, but now a set of skills to be taught to a wider public. He implemented this program by undertaking linguistic interventions and reforms, helping to move from an elite-centered Arabic lexicon to a discourse and dictionary that could be appropriated and shared by the general public (ibid., 36). Interestingly, al-Tahtawi, after training as an *'alim*, became an expert in translation (particularly from French to Arabic). Developing such translation skills required the strengthening of his classical Arabic, a task considered co-essential to cultivating the literary dimension of *adab*. He contributed to the creation of the new socio-political Arabic lexicon and was also the editor of the first official, printed government bulletin in Egypt. These initiatives were urgently needed to inaugurate a program of higher education on a larger scale, located outside the traditional system of instruction controlled by religious scholars. The new Arabic lexicon was also instrumental in inspiring the first print media of the age (ibid., 27-8).

We can see here a process of adaptation and appropriation of earlier meanings of *adab* in order to cope with European colonial modernity, which was increasingly married to a strong notion of secularity. Therefore, interventions like those of al-Tahtawi can be interpreted as finalized to define an autochthonous type of secular civility whereby *adab* still works, as in precolonial times, as the marker of a soft distinction – only that this time it is a 'double distinction': both between a mundane and a prophetic tradition within the Islamic ecumene and between the emerging patterns of Muslim secularity and the

European, colonial, hegemonic one (Salvatore 1997, 41-79). But what is most remarkable at this juncture is that the previously diffuse working of *adab* as a metanorm of good conduct serving a variety of social and political roles (including those of religious personnel) becomes now much more explicitly integrated within the civilizational project articulated by the Muslim reform discourse. This project challenged the European colonial hegemony and agenda of what was called a "civilizing mission" addressed to non-European populations.

The focus of this *adab* becoming the marker of a modern Muslim secularity is increasingly laid on 'educational' patterns of reciprocity, as in the relation between the *'ulama* and the *muta'allimun*, i.e., the teachers and the students/learners, but also between parents and children, and rulers and citizens. In such relationships, *adab* facilitates balancing mutual duties, and at times becomes the source of an autonomous discourse of rights, which the *shari'a* tradition had not shunned but formulated in quite oblique ways. Al-Tahtawi also comes pretty close to formulating *adab* in terms of freedom, equality, and fraternity (yet matched by mercy and compassion). He was quite explicit in grounding the *adab* of freedom in terms of a broadly natural rather than strictly divine law (McLarney 2016, 37). Accordingly, the way *adab* could be distinguished from *shari'a* was subjected to significant changes in comparison with the precolonial era. The previously crystallized 'soft distinction' was not actually hardened, but remolded in ways that started to expose the two traditions to a continual, mutual, explicit attrition. The emerging consciousness of the attrition between a now 'religious' and a 'secular' tradition affected the further course of the reform process starting from the second half of the 19th century and progressing onwards.

The *'ulama'*, a category that, for al-Tahtawi, was not restricted to religious scholars, were redefined as precisely those teachers who secure this *adab* of freedom from oppression, being the main interpreters and teachers (or disseminators) of *adab* to the general public. In parallel, the ethic of citizenship was increasingly anchored in the virtuous consciousness of the individual, regardless of social class and level of instruction (ibid., 38). This is a big transformation but does not amount to the sudden emergence of a class of secular intellectuals opposing (or competing with) religious scholars. Interestingly, this change is facilitated by retrieving the traditional metaphor of the "heart," which now explicitly mediates between the private sphere of the inner forum and the public realm of responsibilities for the nation (ibid., 39).

It is also important to note that in spite of his deep knowledge of French concepts, and particularly of the French modern political dictionary, al-Tahtawi insisted on molding his vision on the basis of the traditional vocabulary of *adab* (ibid., 40). Accordingly, the *'ulama'* are now tasked with teaching *adab al-mu'asharat*, i.e., the *adab* of social relations. And here *tanwir*, "enlightenment," comes onto the scene. The *'ulama'* should enlighten the people, the citizens, and the common men into knowing their rights and learning self-

mastery. The main instrument of *tanwir* is *ta'dib*, the verbal noun that designates the enforcement of *adab* as a program of disciplining and training (ibid., 41). Dynamizing *adab* as *ta'dib*, as an educational-disciplining process and project, facilitates building a link to the emerging concept of *tamaddun*, a quite explicit match to the notion of 'civilizing process.' Becoming popular in the second half of the 19th century, this keyword explicitly reflected, on a linguistic level, the process-like character of the transformation and its investment into urban modes of behavior (Gasper 2008).

Contemporary with al-Tahtawi, the wave of Ottoman reforms known as *tanzimat* also favored a reformulation of *adab* (*edep* in Ottoman Turkish) as a larger and more inclusive cultural tool than a *shari'a*-based social discourse, one suitable to educate and civilize the entire political community, and deliver it from ignorance and error. Some scholars have referred to the use of *adab* in the 19th century as an 'invented tradition,' but others, starting with Şerif Mardin, have preferred to stress a stronger line of continuity of *adab* culture among the Ottoman ruling elites from the zenith of the empire in the 16th century up to the so-called long Ottoman century, the 19th. Indeed, the reforms themselves did not start with the *tanzimat* but much earlier, in the 18th century, and elite criticism of the stagnation of the empire even earlier than that. Among key Ottoman scholars and personalities associated with this development of *edep*, we should remember Ahmet Cevdet Pasha (1822-1895) and Ahmet Midhat (1844-1912) who authored *Adab-i-muasheret* ("The *adab* of social relations"), where Midhat stressed forms of propriety, also comparing Western and Ottoman norms of behavior (Mardin 2006).

Overall, in Egypt as in the center of the Ottoman Empire and in other parts of what by this time was called the "Muslim world" (Aydin 2017), there was a proliferation of attempts to upgrade the narrative and normative culture of *adab* into the matrix of a rather self-sustaining civilizing project. This consisted in reconstructing, from the top down, viable patterns of secular civility and belonging, catering to an ever more differentiated grid of social classes and groups. Among the vast array of measures affecting such fields were the reforms of the military, finance and the law, the institution of schools for aspiring civil servants, and the launch of identity cards or papers. Such measures exemplify the extent to which the practical dimension of reform was matched by a quite vocal concern with collective representation, which could often rely on a reconstructed and even potentiated view of *adab*.

From the end of the 19th century until he 1920s, a further push in the reconstruction of *adab* was effected by deepening and rephrasing the teachings of key classic authors (like the previously mentioned al-Ghazali and al-Mawardi, but also Miskawayh and Ibn Khaldun) who had articulated *adab* as a complex code innervating ways of being and appearing, and for managing their mutual tensions. This area of intellectual endeavor and public discourse produced increasing distinctions among the *adab* of different, often very specific issue-

defined fields: as between an *adab* providing instruction on how to cope with military occupation, how to educate children, how to be a wise consumer, how to cut up an artichoke, or how to keep a distance from one's partner in a polka, but also how to avoid an excessive display of one's own religiosity in public. *Adab* became a compass providing orientation to the complex work of governing a dizzying variety of civilized self-other relationships (Farag 2001).

Values that were increasingly functional to novel, colonial modes of development, like saving and hygiene, or knowing one's own rights, received ever more attention. At this juncture one could detect resonances with the earlier Scottish discourse on the "moral sense" as the key to a civil society of mutual others (Salvatore 2018). It is at this late-colonial stage that *adab*'s contemporaneity prevailed over any attempt to provide a unitary, essential, or even genealogical definition of it. *Adab* proliferated through a common register applied to a differentiating social world. It became the main arrow of the educational-civilizing project of several leading Muslim reformers and increasingly central to the emerging elite represented by those teaching the teachers, i.e., the new pedagogical masters. Often graduates of the Cairene new schools like the *Tawfiqiyya* or *Dar al-'ulum* (founded 1872), and also influenced by al-Tahtawi, these were also authors of textbooks, and were frequently sent with grants to higher learning institutions in France or England (Farag 2011).

Adab is now central to a pedagogical project to educate and civilize the members of the *watan* ("homeland" or "nation") often via a kind of neo-organicist discourse deployed through the grids of what at the same time Durkheim and his school were defining as a social division of labor approaching organic solidarity. Another author of the late 19th century, al-Marsafi (1815-1890), made *adab* the key to the civility of both the subjects and the rulers. The implication of this move was that, without a sound articulation of *adab,* there could be no sound implementation of *shari'a* either. Muslim public intellectuals voiced worries that the reform of the educational system occurring in a colonial situation might actually end up shaping citizens who are merely functional to the interests of the colonial state but dysfunctional to the concerns of their communities. *Adab* becomes the key to offset this worry. This discourse also rejects the definition of *adab* as "literature" that European orientalists were starting to promote (Allan 2016). According to the Egyptian sociologist Iman Farag, this *adab* discourse also became the main conduit through which the autonomization and the institutionalization of the social sciences and humanities were legitimized within higher education in Egypt in the course of the 20th century. As al-Marsafi wrote, "Do not believe that *adab*, as the crowd imagines, consists of poems, anecdotes, tales and similar things" (Farag 2001, 98).

By opening up to ideas of participation in a modern and increasingly accessible public sphere, *adab* provided the foundation stone to the articulation of an original conceptualization of social intercourse. This is where *shari'a* re-enters the normative field. While in the first half of the 19th century al-Tahtawi could

still be seen as a champion of the disciplining impetus of an autarchic yet modern state formation, another late 19th century prolific Egyptian author, al-Nadim (1845-1896), gained recognition as a leading public educator by explicitly acknowledging the Western challenge. He developed a consciously antagonist stance towards colonial European cultures based on a reformed and reforming, civic type of Islam (Farag 2001, Gasper 2008). The recombination of the two traditions of *adab* and *shari'a* occurs now within a field of permanent tension between the notions and rationalities deployed within Islamic traditions and the modern norms and disciplines of a centralizing state intent on legal reform, supported by the power of modern positive law.

Al-Nadim stands out as one major disseminator of a strong disciplinary notion of *adab* that is intended explicitly as a type of internalized civility called to facilitate the implementation of *shari'a*'s normativity. Yet with al-Nadim, the concept of *adab* also reflects an ethic of respect for the sensibilities of the members of other autochthonous, non-Muslim religious communities like Christians and Jews. Clearly the involvement of *shari'a* in such a radically renewed discourse of *adab* purported momentous changes for the conceptions and implementations of *shari'a* itself within the reformist discourse and, later, from the 1920s onwards, with regard to the rise of Islamism. Trying to summarize the new relationship, we can say that, while *adab* is now conceived as the practical motor of the civilizing process, *shari'a* works increasingly as its ideological 'rotor.' In the process, the latter becomes ever more essentialized and, in its public propagation as Islamic normativity, severed from its traditional narrative framework and habitualizing prism. It is not by chance that many reformers called for going back to the Qur'an – a call entailing a marginalization of *hadith*.

4. Conclusion: Continuities and Breakthroughs in the Working of *Adab*

In this long trajectory, we have observed a proliferating variety of forms of *adab* expressing ideas and practices of civility. The process sharply accelerated during the colonial era and led to imparting a soft secular connotation to *adab*, also (if not even more) when a coordination with *shari'a* was attempted. However, factors of continuity also stand out in the trajectory. The most significant seem to be:

1) a principled reliance on non-prophetic, hence fundamentally 'non-religious' sources;
2) the function of regulation of life conduct ('values') via appeal to a collective ideal of ethical life, deployed from the inside out with the aid of exemplary models to be followed;

3) an often tacit work of restraining potential excesses in the implementation of *shari'a* both from without (social relations) and from within (the self)

In this long-drawn-out process, we see an increasing blurring of *adab* as an emic concept with etic notions of secular civility. As shown by Farag (2001), this also happens via the interaction of the *adab* discourse with incipient social science paradigms (most notably influenced by Durkheimian ideas).

As I have shown in this essay, we have to do here with a process of 'secular encapsulation' of a strong 'value rationalization' narrative *within* Islamic traditions, rather than with an outright secular differentiation *from* Islamic traditions. *Adab* works as a metanormative core or capsule, radiating on the normative field, which is still largely covered by *shari'a* discourse. We might even dare to say that, throughout this process, Islamicate civilization should be seen as possessing a secular 'core' (Bellah 1991 [1970], 146-67). This may also explain why, especially since the beginning of the 20th century, several socio-political forces have positioned themselves to resist, though not unconditionally, the harder secular differentiation promoted by the forces of colonial and post-colonial modernity.

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