

Book Review

***The Sociology of Islam: Knowledge, Power and Civility.* By Armando Salvatore. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016. xiv + 328 pp. \$94.95 Cloth, \$37.95 Paper**

doi:10.1017/S1755048317000529

Q1 Jeremy Menchik
Boston University

Armando Salvatore’s ambitious text, *The Sociology of Islam*, investigates the “nexus of religion and civility” (xi) in order to explain how Islam shapes social, cultural, and political dynamics. Updating and building on Bryan S. Turner’s influential *Weber and Islam*, Salvatore draws on the analytical tools of sociology in order to explore the way that knowledge and power shape Islamic traditions. By attempting to transcend post-orientalist and post-colonial critiques of sociology’s parochialism, Salvatore seeks to use the sociology of Islam as a lens with which to critique Western notions of modernity. As he says, “The critical angle opened up by the sociology of Islam within the body of sociological enquiry and theory allows us to not only look at Western modernity as if from its margins but also to critique the idea itself of a fixed core of modernity within a rapidly evolving global order” (12). In other words, as an internally diverse civilizational idea and a blueprint of life, Islam provides Salvatore with a means of pushing the discipline of sociology away from teleological, evolutionary arguments about society evolving from traditional, religious societies toward modern, secular ones modeled on a Western-European prototype.

The other lodestone for Salvatore’s analysis is Marshall Hodgson’s three-volume *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. In that work, Hodgson pioneered the world history approach to Islam and positioned his subject on par with global Christendom. “Global Islamdom” included a strong moral vision for society and a powerful set of organizing institutions. Published in 1974, Hodgson’s

41 magnum opus was a critique and rebuttal of Orientalist approaches to
 42 Islam that depicted it as backward, hostile to modernity, and subject to
 43 change only as a result of Western influence. Salvatore's charge is
 44 similar. He seeks to rebut Orientalist approaches to Islam, including
 45 those by Max Weber, and takes as his scope a world historical approach
 46 to Islam, comparing select concepts like *waqf* (pious endowment) in
 47 Islamdom to the commons in Christendom.

48 This book is the first in a planned three-volume set. This first text
 49 focuses on the ideas of knowledge, power, and civility as analytical frame-
 50 works to understand Islamic institutions and traditions. The second
 51 volume will focus on the issues of law, the state, and the public sphere,
 52 which are more immediately germane to political science. The third
 53 volume will explore issues of nationalism and transnational using the
 54 concept of the *umma* (community) as the locus of inquiry.

55 Salvatore's goals are at cross-purposes to the bulk of contemporary
 56 comparative politics and international relations scholarship on Islam.
 57 The experimental turn in political science is only the latest of a long
 58 drive toward causal explanation with a high degree of measurement valid-
 59 ity. Salvatore's book is instead oriented around broad conceptual compar-
 60 isons across centuries of civilizations. His arguments are unapologetically
 61 non-falsifiable. The dominant (if flailing) approach to religion in political
 62 science is modernization theory. Salvatore takes the failure of moderniza-
 63 tion theory for granted. Comparative political scientists frequently take
 64 advantage of variation in states or societies to use structured comparative
 65 analysis and explain religion's power. Salvatore, meanwhile, takes the
 66 constitutive power of Islamic civilization for granted. Given the
 67 common ties of both sociology and political science to Max Weber's polit-
 68 ical sociology, it is stunning how far our disciplinary norms have diverged.
 69 In contrast, John R. Bowen's *The New Anthropology of Islam*'s focuses on
 70 education, ritual, ethics, agency, and local comparison, and is far more
 71 intelligible to our discipline than *The Sociology of Islam*.

72 Nonetheless, Salvatore's volume is immediately useful to political sci-
 73 entists in at least two respects. First, Salvatore develops the concept of
 74 civility, which he rightly describes as the "quintessentially modern form
 75 of religion" (5) and which provides a source for social cohesion and mobi-
 76 lization. Salvatore deploys the concept of civility in empirical chapters on
 77 Sufi Brotherhoods and Egyptian and Ottoman Court relations, among
 78 others. Political science struggles to understand varieties of religious
 79 agency that seek ends other than freedom and power maximization,
 80 despite the fact that religious organizations often do not seek power.

81 Rather, many religious organizations seek to build social welfare, charis-
82 matic authority, or brotherhood. Salvatore provides a nice example of a
83 pathway beyond the hegemony of liberal conceptions of agency.

84 A second immediate value of the text for political scientists is in updat-
85 ing Turner's critiques and adaptations of the Weberian approaches to
86 Islam. Weber is best known for his study of Protestantism and its work
87 ethic, which drove large numbers of people to engage in trade, enterprise,
88 and other entrepreneurial activity that led to the accumulation of wealth for
89 investment. Weber's writings on Islam were sparse and often factually
90 incorrect. He argued, for example, that the uniquely patrimonial nature
91 of Muslim political institutions prevented the emergence of a money
92 economy and rational law. This line of analysis has unfortunately been
93 parroted by contemporary pundits despite the fact that patrimonial institu-
94 tions are common across the world and not a function of Islam. Salvatore
95 suggests, instead, that Islam provides a common idiom of civility that
96 enables trade and cooperation across groups that differ by status, wealth,
97 or geographic distance. As a result, rather than being inflexible and incom-
98 patible with bureaucratic rationality or modern capitalism, civility provides
99 the group cohesion necessary to support modern political institutions and
100 trade.

101 A short review cannot do justice to this book's sweeping historical
102 vision of Islam nor the intricate analytical framework. Scholars interested
103 in civilizational analysis, ethical comparisons across centuries, and the
104 ongoing debates about how to approach Islam as an object of study will
105 find much to appreciate and digest in Salvatore's bold first volume on
106 *The Sociology of Islam*.

107
108
109
110
111
112
113
114
115
116
117
118
119
120