

Book Presentation

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***Muslim Traditions and Modern Techniques of Power, Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam* deals with historical and contemporary articulations of the relation of tension between the civilizing impetus of Muslim traditions, and modern forms, fields and techniques of power. These techniques are associated with the process of state-building, as well as with the related constraints of disciplining, normative cohesion, control of the territory and monitored social differentiation.**

The entry point into the investigation is the following question: Is there any method to conceive of Muslim traditions in sociological terms, while at the same time avoiding to reduce traditions – as Western sociology mostly does – to either cultural residues of the social contexts where modernization did not work out well enough, or to ‘local resources’ for modernization strategies? A third option (or a culturalist variant of the second) that has acquired currency in recent years is to see Muslim traditions as a legitimate locus of authenticity within global modernity.

The fourteen contributions to this volume basically discard all three options. They conceptualize Muslim traditions as deriving their legitimacy, authority, as well as normative and organizing power from being embedded in Islamic discourses and institutions, which constitute one major centre within world history, by now also encompassing Muslim communities within Western societies. The specific context of the analysis of Muslim traditions is given by the

transformations associated with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of modern nation-states, as well as with the new conflicts taking place in Europe due to the presence and rooting of migrant communities of Muslim faith.

Though the approach adopted might appear at first sight as a move toward re-essentializing Islam, it turns out to be exactly the opposite. While analysing the multiple workings of Muslim traditions, the authors of the volume operate a shift of focus from the Islam that is the object of a reifying ‘hyperdiscourse’ engaging both Western authors and media and their Muslim counterparts, to Muslims as individuals, devotees, and citizens. While they are committed to various forms of Islamic faith and ‘culture’, they are also involved with local, national and global networks and institutions. It is shown that Islam – through Muslims, their practices, and discourses – is entangled in a world of multiple commitments, loyalties and conflicts, yet as a discursive tradition it is able to keep some autonomy from social

constraints and structures. It is also able to engage projects of reform of the discourse itself as well as of the normative models of self and of community. Therefore, modernity impacts Islam not as a ‘rival tradition’, but as a set of techniques of power which affect the authority and regulating-disciplining impetus of Muslim traditions.

*Salvatore, Armando (ed.) (2001), Muslim Traditions and Modern Techniques of Power, Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam, 3, Hamburg: Lit Verlag; New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers. ISBN 3-8258-4801-9
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