

Bourdieu and Historical Analysis

Philip S. Gorski, ed.

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013. 422 pages.

Many scholars, among them Omar S. Kasule (“Islamic Epistemology and Integration of Knowledge in the Islamic University” [2009]) and Fathi Hasan Malkawi (*Epistemological Integration: Essentials of an Islamic Methodology* [2014]) call for the epistemological integration of knowledge. I seek to answer this call, in part, by demonstrating the relevance of Pierre Bourdieu’s (d. 2002) theory to the study of Islam, Muslims, and Islamic movements. One precedent in this direction is Stephane Lacroix’s *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (2011), which studies the Saudi Sahwa movement from the 1950s to the 1990s. I contend that studies of Islam must go even further in this direction. As this approach deserves our attention, I will present Bourdieu’s theory to those who study Islam and Muslims.

Bourdieu's theory contains three core concepts: field (a social arena in which people or agents position themselves in order to compete among themselves for resources or capital), capital (economic, social, cultural, or symbolic assets that can be utilized by agents to negotiate their positions), and the habitus (the set of dispositions, including ways of speaking, gestures, and so on, informed by the agent's doxa [i.e., a person's learned, deep-seated, and unconscious set of values and presuppositions, or pre-commitments, as Marshall Hodgson calls them]). Examples can be found in the "fields of cultural production" (e.g., the religious, intellectual, literary, artistic, or media fields). While these fields contain their own species of capital, primarily of the symbolic sort, other fields (e.g., political and military fields) historically have been the most autonomous and authoritative ones within the larger field of power, which runs horizontally through all fields.

In the context of Islamic studies, the traditional ulema class can represent the power-wielders within the religious field of cultural production. They may utilize various forms of social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capital. This latter type of capital includes lineage (e.g., the *Aal al-Sheikh* of Saudi Arabia, the sayyids and sharifs of the Ahl al-Bayt), or via the classical *ijāzah* and *sil-silah* traditions of transmitting sacred knowledge. This, along with their habitus, whether informed by *al-sunnah al-nabawīyah* or classical *adab* (etiquette, manners) literature, can be used to exclude members of the religious hierarchy (e.g., Islamist intellectuals or modernists) from higher positions.

This book is part of the International Institute at the University of Michigan's series on politics, history, and culture. Its title is meant to emphasize the usefulness of Bourdieu's theory of practice for the study of diachronic structural change through social action equivalent to its usefulness in explaining social reproduction of the status quo. Its overall purpose, then, is to examine his sociological theory as both sociological and as a theory with far greater explanatory power.

The editor's extensive introduction details one of Gorski's main arguments: Due to the translation history of Bourdieu's works from French to English, his approach has been perceived as focusing primarily on social reproduction and not social transformation. The ensuing thirteen articles are grouped into three parts: "Situating Bourdieu," "Theoretical Engagements," and "Historical Extensions." The contributors differ on their views of Bourdieu's theory: as complete and sufficient in-and-of-itself for historical analysis, in need of revision, or as needing to be supplemented with economic and psychoanalytical concepts and approaches. Gorski concludes the volume with an exposition on how Bourdieu's primary theoretical concepts are useful con-

structs for documenting and explaining socio-historical change, particularly in moments of historical crisis.

David L. Swartz's "Metaprinciples for Sociological Research in a Bourdieusian Perspective" identifies six analytical strategies, or meta-principles, viewed as the core theoretical constructs undergirding his research: (1) focusing on power's cultural and symbolic forms, (2) questioning the "given" views regarding the social, (3) focusing on relations rather than causation, (4) engaging with both the micro- and macro-levels of analysis, (5) being dedicated to self-criticism or reflexivity, and (6) aligning one's sociological work with social activism. Craig Calhoun's "For the Social History of the Present: Bourdieu as Historical Sociologist" calls for viewing Bourdieu as a historical sociologist whose works identified four processes of social change: (1) the state and the market's uprooting of traditional ways of life, (2) the creation of modern society and the formation of its fields, (3) the welfare state project of the post-WWII era, and (4) the reversal of this project due to the advent of neoliberalism.

Christophe Charle's "Comparative and Transnational History and the Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu: Historical Theory and Practice" discusses this sociologist's influence on French historiography. He aptly concludes that at this point in the history of sociology in France, Bourdieu's theory would best be served by applying it to cases outside the French context. This shift in regional focus would be beneficial "not only for a French analyst but also for analysts from the culture in question." Analysts of Islam and Muslims who come from within the Muslim cultures they are analyzing would do well to heed this call and give serious attention to how, as Bourdieu said, one can "become an ethnologist of one's own society" (p. 85).

Ivan Ermakoff's "Rational Choice May Take Over" argues that Bourdieu's practice theory must be augmented by rational choice theory to explain the changes that occur during times of crisis and social rupture. However, this chapter seems to suffer from the same misreading and limited understanding that this volume is trying to correct. Ermakoff takes issue with Bourdieu's statement that "times of crisis, in which the routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures is brutally disrupted, constitute a class of circumstances when indeed 'rational choice' may take over, at least among those agents who are in a position to be rational" (*An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 2012). Analysts of Islam and Muslims can test this hypothesis by examining the Mongol invasion and the subsequent fall of Baghdad, the disintegration of the Cordoba Caliphate, and the beginnings of the Reconquista with an eye toward the ensuing intellectual production by such figures as Ibn

Taymiyyah and his students in the first case, and that of Ibn Hazm, Ibn Rushd, and al-Shatibi in the latter case.

George Steinmetz's "Toward Socioanalysis: The Traumatic Kernel of Psychoanalysis and Neo-Bourdiesian Theory" argues for the synthesis of Bourdiesian theory and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to form a historical socioanalysis. If, as Bourdieu said, sociology is a martial art, then historical psychosocial analysis is the mixed martial art of social science that he may have been moving toward all along. Mustafa Emirbayer and Eric Schneiderhan's "Dewey and Bourdieu on Democracy" call for the incorporation of John Dewey's pragmatism and theory of democracy and good governance to compensate for what he sees as a deficiency in Bourdiesian theory in this regard. Although the prospect is interesting, it seems that Bourdieu clearly views the socialist welfare state as the ideal of good governance; therefore, his theory is not quite as lacking in this area as the article presumes.

Gil Eyal's "Spaces between Fields" claims that while Bourdieu's field-theoretic approach adequately explains field-internal dynamics, Bruno Latour's actor-network theory is needed for the "spaces between fields." He cites the example of the blurred line between the fields of Israeli academia and military intelligence. Charles Camic's "Bourdieu's Two Sociologies of Knowledge" claims that Bourdieu's sociology of knowledge suffered from ambiguities that can be remedied by more contemporary theories of knowledge. I would argue that Bourdieu's study of knowledge presents perhaps his most refined work. His call for an approach that could transcend the dichotomy of internal and external analysis would work well, for example, on a study of the material history of Islamic law.

The third and final part starts with Chad Alan Goldberg's "T. H. Marshall Meets Pierre Bourdieu: Citizens and Paupers in the Development of the U.S. Welfare State." It uses Bourdieu's "classification struggles" concept to understand the morphing notion of citizenship in the post-WWII United States. Gorski's "Nation-ization Struggles: A Bourdiesian Theory of Nationalism" coins the term *nation-ization struggles*, a modification of Bourdieu's *classification struggle*, to explain contested notions of nationalism, national identity, and the nation. One of his more intriguing ideas is the call to widen the scope of the modern and contested term *nation* to include "smaller nations that have been absorbed into larger ones and erased from memory" (p. 248). If this were the case, one might easily study the Almohads, the Zaydi Imamate in Yemen, the Idrisids of pre-modern Morocco or ask, as Gorski suggests, questions about "how Protestant nationalism differs from Islamic nationalism" (p. 249) by utilizing a concept of the nation firmly embedded

within the systematic methodology employed by Bourdieu without any fear of being guilty of ahistoricity.

Gisèle Sapiro's "Structural History and Crisis Analysis: The Literary Field in France during the Second World War" refers to Bourdieu's concept of field "synchronization" during moments of crisis, and Robert Nye's "The Transmission of Masculinities: The Case of Early Modern France" uses Bourdieu's approach in his *Masculine Domination* (2001) to study gender. Finally, Jacques Defrance's "The Making of a Field with Weak Autonomy: The Case of the Sports Field in France, 1895-1955" provides a comparative study of the creation of the sports field in modern France under the influence of contemporary developments in England.

The conclusion, "Bourdieu's Theory and Historical Analysis: Maps, Mechanisms, and Methods," highlights how Bourdieu's main concepts, typically used in sociology to track social reproduction, can be used in history with equal facility to explain social action and structural change. Gorski's discussion of boundary change, the contraction or expansion of particular fields, is particularly insightful. The loss of autonomy and authority described in his definition of a zero-sum boundary change helps explain the historical dispossession of the ulema class in Egypt and elsewhere of certain domains of competence due to the encroachment of the *muthāqaf* (modern public intellectual) class. This can work in tandem with Eval's description of the spaces between fields identifying the blurring of the lines between the religious and modern intellectual fields by many contemporary Muslim thinkers and reformers.

A fruitful attempt to integrate knowledge can be made combining Bourdieu's sociological theory with that of Ibn Khaldun, as can be seen in Leila O. Hudson's *Transforming Damascus: Space and Modernity in an Islamic City* (London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008). Like Ibn Khaldun's theory of civilizational cycles, Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction has been greatly misunderstood. Like Ibn Khaldun, who sought a way out of this cycle, Bourdieu sought a way out of reproducing social inequality and civilizational regress, as exemplified by the categorical destruction of the state's "left hand" (i.e., the government programs dedicated to its citizens' social welfare). Bourdieu's analysis of the May 1968 French University's nearly successful attempt at social transformation and his study of Heidegger and Flaubert's successful revolutionizing of their respective fields, in addition to his own activism, readily showcase his belief in the power and duty of social science research to help implement social change and progress. Bourdieusian historical socio-analysis remains the best framework for studying continuity and change simultaneously within a social field with the intent of

engaging and participating in that very continuity and transformation for the sake of societal improvement not just within Bourdieu's European context, but also when applied to the study of the Muslim world. The most obvious example here would be the historical dialectic between *taqlīd* (reproduction) and *ijtihād* (transformation).

In conclusion, Islamic social science needs to be further integrated into the larger social science community, while not losing its distinct identity, in order to glean new approaches and ideas.

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