empirical lines of inquiry. He supports Merton's postulate that it is a main task of sociology to relate empirical discoveries to theories of the middle range. Mark Gould criticizes Merton and Blalock for their underestimation of the role of general theory which is "vital for at least a tentative codification of social research into grounded theory" (p. 399). The final chapter is an essay by Simonetta Tabboni on the considerable contribution of Merton to studies of time which have "pointed the way for future studies in this area" (p. 427).

This is an important and challenging book. Its validity is manifold. First, it offers the most comprehensive presentation of Mertonian sociology ever produced. The editors were successful in attracting the most qualified contributors. The organization of the chapters constitutes a classificatory scheme for Mertonian sociology. Also important is Jon Clark's editorial contribution of Merton's Intellectual Biography in Outline, a full bibliography of Merton's writings from 1975 to 1989 prepared by Mary W. Miles and Rosa Haritos, and a list of commentaries on Merton's work published worldwide. Second, Merton's writing is an excellent point of departure for an examination of a number of fundamental issues in contemporary sociology. Most of his scholarly achievements now furnish the core of modern theoretical sociology. His concepts of middle range theory, structural analysis, role theory, self-fulfilling prophecy, the theory of anomie, and sociological ambivalence are but leading examples of concepts widely incorporated in contemporary social science. Third, but not the least merit of the volume, is the manifestation, once more, of the controversial nature of sociological theorizing. The debate format of this book on one of the founders of the discipline confirms that settling methodological and interpretational conflicts is an important part of progress in social science. The book also illustrates that sociology is still a vigorous science capable of attracting the best minds in its service.

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The title of this impressive book is somewhat misleading or at least incomplete. As the first six of the Library of Congress's seven categories on the backside of the title page suggest, the setting for this book is Morocco, yet that basic fact is oddly missing in the title and subtitle.

The "Sacred Performances" of the title are three Islamic rituals performed in Morocco: the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, the rite of first marriage, and the sacrifice of a ram by the head of household on the Muslim holiday 'Id al-Kabir, the fortieth day after the end of the month of Ramadan. These rituals are not performed universally throughout the Islamic world, nor have they always formed an integral part of Moroccan religious and cultural practices. The heart of this book is the author's argument that their performance in Morocco over the last few centuries has had a significant impact on the country's society and politics.

Morocco entered the sixteenth century in a period of crisis. Internal decline, weakness, and disorder left the country poorly positioned to defend itself against the increasing external pressure of a variety of European imperialist powers. After five

hundred years of rule by a succession of Berber dynasties—including a long and glorious period of Moroccan history—there arose in Morocco in the sixteenth century an Arab dynasty, the Sa‘dis, that rallied the nation to resist the invading Portuguese. The Sa‘di rulers claimed blood descent from the Prophet Muhammad, and Combs-Schilling argues that this “sharifi” quality struck a responsive chord among Moroccans and was an effective source of the dynasty’s legitimacy.

In the wake of a dramatic victory over Portuguese forces in 1578, the Sa‘di ruler Ahmad al-Mansur developed an elaborate ritual to celebrate the Prophet’s Birthday. According to the author, this ritual solidified popular support for the dynasty by stressing the ruler’s link to the Prophet and his unique position of leadership within the Moroccan body politic. The following passage (p. 160), explaining this point, is typical of Combs-Schilling’s sweeping analysis throughout the book: “In the Prophet’s Birthday celebrations, the sharifi caliphate was made a link to the basic Muslim understandings of the truth of the universe as well as to the evanescent drives of earth—food, sexuality, and worldly wealth. Up to God and down to pleasure: the ritual of the Prophet’s Birthday transformed the sharifi monarchy into a pathway for both.”

Morocco’s present ruling dynasty, the ‘Alawis (who are also Arab and sharifi), came to power in 1666. During their first century of rule, ‘Alawi leaders developed the other two “sacred performances.” In the rite of first marriage, the groom takes on the personage of the ‘Alawi ruler during the long ceremony that culminates with his spilling of the virginal blood of his bride. In the “Great Sacrifice”—for Combs-Schilling, the most important of the three sacred performances—the ‘Alawi ruler slaughters a ram on behalf of the Moroccan national community. The ritual is based on a practice begun by the Prophet in the second year of the Islamic community, based in turn on the Prophet Abraham’s mythic slaughter of a ram substituted by God at the last moment to spare the son whom Abraham was prepared to sacrifice. Following their ruler, Moroccan heads of household then sacrifice a ram to bring good fortune to their families for the coming year.

Like the celebration of the Prophet’s Birthday, the other two sacred performances have powerful emotional and political significance for Moroccans. Combs-Schilling argues that, together, the three rituals have gone a long way to infuse the Moroccan body politic with a unifying and defining religious culture. Further, they have helped to strengthen the nation internally to enable it to withstand foreign encroachment. During a prolonged period of relative weakness from c. 1750 to c. 1950, the three religious practices helped to sustain the Moroccan community and prevent its disintegration. Finally, by fusing communal values and identity with the ruling dynasty, the ‘Alawis have strengthened their political legitimacy and simultaneously protected themselves against potential usurpers of power who hesitate before attacking the symbol of national unity and values.

In addition to the political implications of these sacred performances, the author argues at length that the rituals have contributed greatly to Morocco’s cultural values. An anthropologist who teaches at Columbia University, Combs-Schilling stresses that the religious practices contain powerful symbolic messages of male dominance and female submissiveness. At some points, the sexual significance of the rituals seems overdrawn. For example, in the Great Sacrifice, the image of the dominant male—first the ruler and then the head of household—slaughtered a strong male ram is clear. But the metaphorical link between the sharp pointed knife that slits the ram’s throat and the male phallus in sexual intercourse that is so clear in the author’s mind is far less clear in this reviewer’s mind.