ARABS IN TREATMENT:
Development of Mental Health System
And Psychoanalysis in The Arabo-Islamic World

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CONTENTS
Abstract
Abbreviations
Tables And Charts
Quotations
Glossary
Chapter 1: Introduction
   Overview Of The Book
PART I: Historical Interactions Between Psychoanalysis And Islam
Chapter 2: Jahiliya Period
   Historical Context
   Arabs’ Origins
   Appearance Of Tribes And Ruling Clans
Chapter 3: Primal Cultural Worldview
   Beliefs
   Customs And Cults
   Poetry
Chapter 4: Advent Of Islam
   Revelation Of Quran
   Hijra
   The Death Of Prophet
Chapter 5: Pre-Colonial Period
   The Arab Medicine And Philosophy
   Prophetic Medicine
   Experimental Medicine
   Spiritual Medicine
   Phenomenological Medicine
   Traditional Therapies
   Al-Firasa
Ilm Al-Nafs
“Bimaristan”, The First Mental Hospital
Muslim Scholars Of Khalifat Period And Their Main Ideas In The Field Of Psychology
Development Of Psychology Science During The Ottoman Empire
Role Of Sharia Law In The Management Of Psychological Disorders
Roots Of Psychoanalysis In Islam

Chapter 6: Colonial Period
Chapter 7: Post-Colonial Period
   Egypt
   Maghreb Countries
      Algeria
      Morocco
      Tunisia
   Mashriq Countries
      Iraq
      Lebanon
      Syria
      Gulf Cooperation Countries
      Saudi Arabia

Chapter 8: Modern Period (1990-)
   Egypt
   Somalia
   Maghreb Countries
   Algeria
   Lybia
   Morocco
   Tunisia
   Mashriq Countries
   Iraq
   Jordan
   Lebanon
   Palestine
   Syria
   Gulf Cooperation Countries
   Bahrain
   Kuwait
   Oman
   Qatar
   Saudi Arabia
   United Arab Emirates
   Yemen

PART II : The Structure Of Muslim Psyche
Chapter 9: Collective Ethnoconsciousness
   Malaikat
Chapter 10: Muslim Archetypes And Complexes
- Identity “A Bedouin”
- Brother-Sister Love
- Desire Of A Muslim Mother
- Presence As The Absence Of Father
- One Man And Four Wives
- Eunuch
- Oedipus Complex
- Mohamed Complex
- Cain Complex
- Jawdar Complex
- Alladdin Complex

Chapter 11: Customs And Taboos
- Maktoub (Fatalism)
- Virginity
- Feminism
- Democracy
- Sexuality

Chapter 12: The Muslim Exegesis
- Concept Of Id, Ego And Superego Of Arab People
- Concept Of Fitra
- The Arabic Mythology

Chapter 13: The Structure Of Arabic Language
- Specificities Of Pronunciation

Chapter 14: Islamic Arts
- Architecture
- Ornaments. Arabesques (Islimi)
- Dance

Chapter 15: In The Name Of Allah. Athwart Allah
- The Economy Of Death
- Fear Of Life
- The Culture Of Martyrdom
- Extremism: A Flee From Allah?
- Jihad And Jihadism
- Homo Religiosis Or A Muslim Without Religion
- The Notion Of Allah
- Quran
- Judgement Day

PART III: Mental Disorders In The Contemporary Arab World
Chapter 16: Prevalent Mental Conditions

Identity Crisis
Depression And Culture
In The Shadow Of Anxiety
Consanguinity And Psychotic Disorders
Addiction, But, In Reality, Addiction To What?
The Eternal Hysteria: Like Mother, Like Daughter
Families` Ties And Adhd
The Stable Mental Retardation
War Traumatism
Suicide Beyond The Dimension Of Jihad

Chapter 17: Does Psychoanalysis Contradict Islam?

Chapter 18: Conclusions

ABSTRACT

“There is no God in this book,” such were the last words of Freud before his death. And somewhat earlier, Nietzsche proclaimed that God had died. Were they both the precursors of the apocalypse, or, conversely, of a relief for the nihilistic Europe? Nobody knew that. However, when looking back into the epoch of denial, Europe was found soaking in the abyss of moral dissolution, all-permissiveness and, at once, desperately looking for its lost object. For Europe God is dead. And its place has been gradually taken by the objects of material wealth, luxury, and enjoyment. In contrast to the Muslim world, which stands as the total opposite of the Freud’s enunciation. It experienced a wholly different exposure. In Islam, God is ubiquitous and it is the central signifier of the Muslim psyche. If God cannot be personified, which Islam forbids, He can also not become part of history or die. God is thus omnipresent, humankind can never be alone in the world, every movement is watched by God. Islam is the last phase of a long development of Revelation in history. Two principal phases preceded Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The Islamic world, which has its concrete term in Arabic ummah, is more than 30% of the world’s population and this number is constantly growing. The Muslim world lives now in its fifteenth century. The stagnation period started in the end of the fourteenth century and continued until the eighteenth. During the stagnation period, the Arabs became divided between loyalty to the Muslim non-Arab rulers in their fight against the European Crusaders and opposition to these rulers. For the first time in Arab history, however, the Arabic identity became distinct from the Islamic. At the end of that period the pan-Arabic movement emerged, and Arabic and Islamic identities became distinct one from another. Today the Arab states comprise Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, SaudiArabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United ArabEmirates and Yemen. And among the Muslim states there are Afghanistan, Albania, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Benin, Brunei, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Maldives, Chad, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Togo, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda and Uzbekistan. As shown above, the question of the Muslim is not only that of religion but also of identity. When dealing with identity, here the Islamic will be often intertwined with the Arabic. Since it is a double identity, specifically this standpoint gives a broader and fuller grasp of understanding of the core of the contemporary Muslim mind. Also, the reader might be contemplating upon the
differences between the Muslim and the Islamic, which are distinct concepts, applied in this book. “Islamic”, grammatically speaking, refers to the religion or the acts done in the name of that religion, and not a person who practices that religion. Consequently, it can be referred to the community or Islamic art. And “Muslim” is used to describe all people of the Islamic faith but not the faith itself. You will find this book mentioning the religion of Muslims, but not the Muslim religion. In such a way, we have gradually approached the original query, which stood at the roots of the idea of creating this book. So, why there ever arose a need of writing separately about the Muslim consciousness? Cannot the same metapsychological discourse apply productively to Muslims as well as to non-Muslims? Actually, the very idea of this book came up as a result of constant reflections upon the issues, which, among others, also include:

• Whether, psychoanalysis is possible and needed in the Muslim world?
• What challenges might psychoanalysis face in the Muslim world?
• What can be considered as the sufficient knowledge about the functioning of the Islamic mind so that to work effectively with the Muslim patient?

This is a book about the other psycholinguistic and sensuously perceptive structure, which is also an attempt to:

1) Fill in the existing gap of information about:
   a) the interaction between Islam and psychoanalysis;
   b) the up-to-date psychological treatment, which would respect the tradition and recognize the modern changes at once;
2) Find analytical explanation to the metapsychological occurrences in the Muslim life;
3) Explain and establish the correlation between the prevalent mental conditions in the Arab region and its cultural specificities.

The difficulties encountered in the course of the research about the psychoanalysis in the Muslim world have prompted me to envisage the presentation of this work not only in a form of portrayal of the range of problems, but also through attaching of more significance to the particular conditions of reception of the analytical practice in the Muslim world, and illustrating the still existing limits of psychoanalysis in the context of the modern Muslim society. Hopefully, this research will inspire more discussion and raise more questions.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Gustav Jung taught that remnants of the past are strong determining factors of reaction patterns to stresses, symptomatology of mental illnesses and the way a people look at disease, treatment, life, death, human emotions and the like. History and mythology are living determinants for psychiatry and mental health. Thence, to comprehend better the state of psychoanalysis in the Islamic world, we should look closer at the evolutionary stages, it has gone through, starting from the pre-Islamic era and proceeding until the present days. Islam and psychoanalysis are not a so-called “tale of mutual ignorance”. Certain
elements of psychoanalytic treatment existed in Muslim world even earlier before they were introduced in Europe by Freud. Hegel called Islam “the religion of sublimity”. In Hegel’s “passion for abstraction” narrative from the Philosophy of History (1837), Islam appears an abstraction that vanquished the imaginary.

Religion, history, culture, language and climate, which such vast territories, as the Islamic world shares, are at the same time common uniting and disuniting factors. The divergences lay in different approaches to the interpretation of key historic events and cultural customs; the existence of a huge number of spoken dialects, as well as concepts of health and illness. Even in the religious domain, which is a part of shared identity, the disparities happen (e.g. sunnits and shiites). Islam is more than just a religion, it has become a way of life. Throughout the history, the national cultures and traditions have left such a deep impact on the practice of Islam, that nowadays an average Muslim finds it difficult to tell apart one from another. Moreover, the permanent interactions with the outside world (via trade) have brought in the elements of foreign, oftentimes, opposite cultures into the region, therefore, enabling the coexistence of numerous autochthonous worldviews on one land. And this is another phenomenon, that constitutes a Muslim identity. Medicine along with psychiatry, in particular, was the first one to benefit from this synthesis.

The interest in the psychoanalysis in the Muslim world is a relatively recent fact, which can be dated to the period 1970-1990. The reasons for this late reception shall be sought for at once in the status of the developing countries and their difficulties in the domain of education of human resources after the independence, rather than in the specificities of relations maintained between the Muslim world and the West.

Overview of the Book

The book is divided into three main parts in addition to an introduction and a conclusion.

Part I (Historical Interactions between Psychoanalysis and Islam) introduces the historical background, on the basis of which the book is organized. The chronological timeline begins with the jahiliya epoch and extends until nowadays. The analytical element comprises various theories, hypothetical reflections and conceptual equations regarding the events, which occurred in the Arab history and influenced the formation of the collective mind. All good things need not come together — so, the synopsis of the strengths and the weaknesses of the mental health systems in the Arab region is also included. It also contains the in-depth country examples with inclusive statistics provided by WHO and other stakeholders.

Part II (The Structure of Muslim Psyche) introduces the identification for the main signifiers of the Muslim psyche and comprehensively provides the cultural underpinning for each of them. The conceptual grounds are supported by the practical experience of the world influential psychoanalysts.

Part III (Mental Health Disorders in the Contemporary Arab World) shifts the focus from the broad macro-dynamical survey to the specifics of mental dysfunctions of modern Arabs less as ends in themselves than as means to address the prevalent symptomatology and the therapeutic constraints of the region.

The conclusion to the book seeks to draw out lessons from the glorious past of the Arab medicine and apply its principles to the modern Muslim mental health care system. It also reviews the actual problematics of the relation...
between psychoanalysis and Islam and seeks a way to overcome the underlying challenges.


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