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Omnia El Shakry. *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. Pp. xiii, 206. $35.00.

Historians have defined "the modern" in a number of ways. Originally used to describe the particular trajectory of Europe—and differentiate a dynamic "West" from the rest of the globe—the term has come to connote, variously, industrialism, structures of governance borne of the French Revolution, the contemporary world system of nation-states and/or the world economic system, and, most recently, a form of subjectivity marked by self-consciousness, independently held beliefs and desires, and willfulness. Viewing the modern in the last way has not only loosed the concept from its Eurocentric roots, it has opened up possibilities for formulating modernity's heterogeneous forms.

Perhaps no one is as associated with the psychic realm as Sigmund Freud, and Shakry's project is to investigate how Freudianism—which she defines in the Egyptian context as "a multivalent tradition and metonym for broader Arabic debates surrounding the status of the unconscious in psychic life (1)"—became a touchstone for the exploration and shaping of Egyptian self-perception by select Egyptian psychologists and philosophers. Egyptian intellectuals began to engage with Freud's ideas as early as the 1920s, sometimes drawing from his own works, sometimes from works of other psychoanalytic luminaries, including Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, Ian Suttie, and Ranyard West.

Shakry, however, is not writing a history of reception; rather, her purpose is to demonstrate how Freudianism interacted with older Islamic traditions—including those pioneered by medieval philosophers, theologians, and polymaths such as Ibn Sina, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, and, in particular, the twelfth-thirteenth century Andalusian

sufi, Ibn ‘Arabi—to create something altogether new in Egypt. Her project is not to present this synthesis as a footnote or aberrant addition to the psychoanalytic corpus; rather, it is to redraw the boundaries of the discursive community of psychoanalysis so that it might contain multiple psychoanalytic traditions that coexist and complement one another within.

According to Shakry, two factors contributed to the making of a unique Egyptian Freudianism, one that accepted some aspects of (and contributors to) the Western canon while rejecting others. First, circumstances peculiar to Egypt, particularly during the early period of post-colonialism of the 1950s, when psychoanalysis was in its heyday and Egypt’s government and intellectual and scientific community were in the throes of a scientism whose purpose was the total reconstruction of Egypt’s social and economic order. For example, according to Shakry, the integrative psychology of Yusuf Murad, whose central premise was the unity of the self, resonated with the Free Officers who took power in 1952. “The themes of psychological unity and harmonious totality,” Shakry writes, “were echoed in the revolution’s call for national unity in the aftermath of colonization and its desire to create a ‘happy family of workers and peasants (39).’” For its part, the Egyptian psychoanalytic community devoted itself to such socially useful projects as creating blueprints for the reform of sexual outliers and criminals.

The second factor that contributed to the making of a unique Egyptian Freudianism was the “influence” of the Islamic tradition on those practitioners and theorists embedded within it. Thus, Yusuf Murad derived his integrative psychology from a melding of *Gestalttheorie* and Ibn ‘Arabi’s mysticism. As Shakry puts it,

> This contemporaneity of classical Islamic texts, coexisting and intermingling with psychoanalytic models, allows us to trace the epistemological resonances of discursive traditions as they come into contact. Translating and blending key concepts from psychoanalysis with classical Islamic concepts, Egyptian thinkers explored the resonances between psychoanalytic and pre-psychoanalytic traditions in order to produce a theory of the self that was at once in concert with and

heterogenous to European analytic thought (2).

Perhaps. And this is not the only passage in the book whose meaning is muddied by the use of imprecise or obscure language or metaphors substituting for straightforward, declarative sentences (as in "a new grammar of the subject was soldered to older notions of the ethical cultivation of sexual ideals and practices [82]," and numerous other examples). But there is another way to look at the relationship between past and present that calls the above cited passage—and, indeed, the central thesis of this book—into question.

Start with the problem of "influence." Rather than ascribing agency to one or another "tradition," most contemporary intellectual historians argue that the past does not reach out to the present; rather, it is the present that dips into a trove of artifacts from the past, selects some that resonate, and situates them within a new cultural context where they serve to validate, add clarity, or lend local color to the present. Nationalisms do this all the time. This means that the past and the present are not two equal moments in a dialectic—a more apt description of what takes place is "appropriation" or "reworking," and not "synthesis." Thus, rather than claiming that Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism decentered Western *Gestalttheorie* within some grand synthesis, a more plausible assessment would be that Ibn 'Arabi's contribution to contemporary Egyptian psychology is superficial, at best.

Although the existence of a "heterogenous" Egyptian school of psychoanalysis remains unproven, *The Arabic Freud* does provide an in depth exegesis of the literature of psychoanalysis in Egypt, demonstrating how a select group of intellectuals grappled with, translated into the local vernacular, and, in some cases, sought to apply the latest techniques and theories that science had to offer to bring the inner workings of the mind into plain view. While a less

ambitious accomplishment than Shakry anticipated, it is an accomplishment nonetheless. For that alone Shakry is to be commended.

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