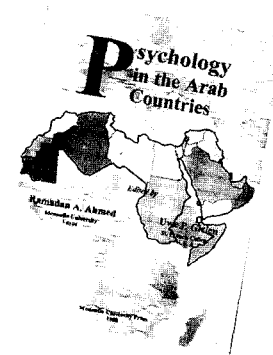


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# Psychology in the Arab countries

by Ramadan Ahmed & Uwe P. Gielen

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“Psychology in the Arab countries” is a book edited by Ramadan Ahmed from Egypt and Uwe Gielen from USA, and published in Egypt by Menoufia University Press 1998. Its 592 pages divided into nine sections and covers the following topics: psychology in the Arab world, developmental issues, education and creativity, personality, social and organizational psychology, biological psychology and experimental issues, pathology and clinical issues, psychology in cultural context and conclusion. The editors it appears worked hard in collecting contributions from some Arab psychologists as well as translations of topics from Arabic to English. However, there are some limitations that the reader must bear in mind when reading the book.

First, the book is titled “Psychology in the Arab countries” it includes contributions of 19 psychologists, mainly from Egypt (17) with one contribution from Kuwait and another from Algeria. Psychologists in Egypt therefore contributed about 90% while the others 17 Arab countries contributed around 10%. There are very active and productive psychologists from Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, KSA, and Bahrain not represented in the book. It seems to me that a book will not be truly representative of all the “Arab countries”

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without contributions of psychologists such as Abu Hatab from Egypt, Hijazi or Mekki or El-Zein from Lebanon, Ahrashaw or Ozi from Morocco, Ammar or Bin Mohamed from Tunisia, Adas or Touq from Jordan, Hajjar or Yasin or Al-Tahhan or A'gil from Syria, Al-A'ni or Al-Jusmani from Iraq, Badri or Taha from Sudan, Al-Sarraf or Al-Rashidi or Al-Omar or Fozia Hadi from Kuwait, Al-Nafea or Al-Hashimi from KSA, Al-Beili or Bou-Hannad from UAE, Kamal and Al-Moghaiseeb from Qatar, Al-Mutaw'a or Al-Omran from Bahrain, etc.

Second, from a cross-cultural perspective, western psychology has been criticized on the grounds that it is ethnocentric. This view hold true even in the present book. It gives the impression that psychology in the "Arab countries" is only Egyptian. Additionally, there are quite a few wrong conclusions, such as: "Only Egyptian universities offer Ph.D programs in psychology" (p.15). In fact, there are many Ph.D programs in Arab countries such as Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco. I know, at least, eight Sudanese who obtained Ph.Ds from the University of Khartoum. Professor Al-A'ni from Iraq mentioned that some of the Ph.D students whom he supervised later became professors in Iraqi Universities. The ethnocentric view also appears in such statements "Except for Egypt, psychology in the Arab countries is still in its infancy" (p.23). "Only in Egypt have some psychologists developed psychological models during the last 50 years" (p.39). One may ask, what about original contributions from other Arab countries?

Third, the main theme that is discussed by the two editors is "psychology in the Arab countries", however, in many statements they separate between Egypt and other "Arab countries". For example: "Some attempts have been made to trace the match of psychology in Egypt and other Arab countries as well " (p.40).

Also “psychology in Egypt (and the other Arab countries) is still taught and practiced within the framework of the governmental section” (p.40). Note “and the other Arab countries” between brackets. “There is little specialization among Egyptian and Arab psychology departments” (p.41). It seems that separation needs justifying.

Fourth, most of the contributions came from psychologists in faculties of arts; and it seems that only two contributions are from the faculty of education. This reflects a serious conflict between psychologists in the two different departments in Egypt. The situation of psychology departments, particularly in Gulf countries, is also influenced by the Egyptian spirit. For that reason, an eminent psychologist from Egypt such as Abu Hatab does not appear in this book, perhaps because he is from an educational college. He has made a major contribution to psychology, at international as well as regional level. Arab psychologists need to resolve this conflict between psychology in colleges of education and that in colleges of arts.

Fifth in the introductory section written by the editors, on the history of psychology in the Muslim and Arab world, they refer only to secondary sources. They mention the contribution of early Muslim scholars such as Al-Kindi (801-866), Al-Razi (864-925), Al-Farabi (d. 950), Ibn Sina (980-1037), Averroes (1126-1198), Al-Ghazzali (1058-1111), Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406) and others. However, the editors omitted the most original, scientific and influential contribution that was made by Ibn Al-Haytham in his well known book “Kitab al-Manazir” or “The Book of Optics” in which he provides not only new concepts and theories regarding the psychology of vision but also new methods of measurement in experimental psychology (see e.g., Ibn Al-Haytham, 1989; Khaleefa, 1999; Howard, 1996; Rusell, 1979; Taha, 1990).

Sixth, most contributors are assumed to be authorities in their fields and the majority are full professors. However, this large number did not result in many original topics, new concepts, innovative theories, adapted methods, creative techniques or even high quality studies or reviews as I expected when I first read the titles of contributors. Most articles are collections of studies without adequate organization or digestion. They remain like the scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. This reflects the rigid format followed in Arabic research, associated with reviewing studies without serious discussion. For example, see sections 11, 111 & IV. In the reality of the Arab world, creative and innovative articles that do not follow that rigid format, most probably, would be rejected when submitted to many Arab journals.

Seventh, the section on “animal behavior” is written or edited by Ali & Ramadan. The first is a veterinary scientist and the second is a psychologist. However, it seems that empirical studies were carried out by veterinary scientists not psychologists. Most contributions edited are M.V Sc and Ph.D veterinary thesis (76%). This reflects the fact that there is no interest among Arab psychologists in studying animal behavior and very few articles or books written by them in Arabic. Among all the references cited by Ali and Ramadan there is no single article published in an international journal by an Arab psychologist. A Sudanese zoologist who moved from the Zoology to psychology department I have often been asked what was the connection between them. I have written an article regarding animal psychology which has been rejected in 5 journals that publish psychological studies, however, it found acceptance only in the “Arab Journal of Science”.

Eighth, it is not only animal psychology that not has not taken root in Arab countries, but equally experimental psychology.

Abosheasah (1998) who contributed a section on “Experimental and physiological psychology” argues that in “the proceedings of the fourth, fifth and sixth conferences of the Egyptian Association for Psychological Studies published in 1988, 1999, 1990 respectively, do not contain any papers in areas of experimental psychology such as attention, perception, psychophysics, learning and memory, or performance. Research on these topics is published only sporadically” (p.395). This paragraph really reflects the status of experimental psychology in the Arab world. Abosheasha relied on 16 references in the writing of this chapter and there is only a single study related to experimental psychology that is published in English in “ Perceptual and Motor Skills” (Amir, 1989).

Abosheasha (1998) argues that “Only at three or four institutions-the college of Arts, Zagezig University, Banha Branch, Egypt; the College of Education, Tanta University, Egypt; and the College of Education, King Saud University, Saudia Arabia- is physiological psychology being taught by specialists” (p. 396). He added “only one or two specialists in this major are found in Egypt” (p. 396) and also added “on the graduate level, physiological psychology is not taught at any department of psychology except at King Saud University were this writer-Abosheasha has instructed graduate students in neuropsychology on two occasions” (p. 396). This is an error in a psychology book intended to be a reference. It looks similar to the ethnocentric Egyptian view of psychology in the Arab world. Indeed, I studied physiological psychology in the academic year 1983/1994, taught by an eminent specialist in the field who obtained his Ph.D from a British university. Dr. Taha who was a head of the Psychology Department, University of Khartoum and at present is the president of the same university. Physiological psychology in the

Sudan is taught both at the undergraduate and graduate level. Dr. Khalil is another neurocognitive psychologist and obtained his Ph.D from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK who also taught at the same university.

Tenth: there is an interesting section in the book “cross-cultural research” reviewing 53 studies supposed to be cross-cultural. However, many of them are comparisons between two groups without any cross-cultural dimension. Abou-el-Neil (1998) argues “most of the Arab research studies in cross-cultural psychology have been conducted for personal objectives, such as obtaining an academic degree. In addition, much Arab cross-cultural researches, whether conducted locally or abroad, represents only replication, extension, or expansion of previous work” (p 521). This fact leads to serious and harmful results, for example, Fahmy (1965) when applying Goodenough Draw-A-Man test and the Maze Test to a group Sheluk children in southern Sudan found their performance was similar to that of retarded children in the U.S.A.

One serious problem facing Abou el-Neil’s contribution is that he included studies which have cross-cultural titles but no cultural discussion. For example, he mentioned that Eissa and Hannourah (1985) compared the creative abilities of fluency and originality in a group of Kuwaiti male and female university students with results of a previous study conducted on similar Egyptian samples. It was found that Kuwaiti students excelled the Egyptians in originality and fluency. The researchers attributed the results to a) the differences in measuring tools applied to each sample; b) the differences in the scoring code used; and c) the differences among person who scored the obtained data (p. 524). This is the author had to say about a good sample of a cross cultural study. There is no sign of any conceptual or theoretical

issues regarding cross-cultural comparisons between the Kuwaiti and Egyptians samples.

Abou-el-Neil (1998) mentioned that “only two Arab cross-cultural research studies have investigated creative abilities” (p.524). This is wrong result by an Arab cross-cultural psychologist. For example, Soliman (1989) did an excellent study regarding creativity and I did four studies regarding creativity in an Afro-Arab Islamic culture (Khaleefa, Erdos & Ashria, 1996a, 1996b 1996c, 1997). It seems that the author is not familiar with Arab research that is published on an international level. For this reason he did not cite excellent cross-cultural research carried out by Arab psychologists and published not locally but in the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology and International Journal of Psychology. For example, Yousif & Korte (1995); El-Zahar & Hocevar (1991); El-Sheikh & Klaczynski (1993); El-Feky (1991); Hede & Yousif (1992); Shackleton & Ali (1990). All these studies were published at least three years before the publication of the book.

Historically, Egypt was indeed a mecca of psychology in the Arab world. However, today, much serious psychology is being done in other “Arab countries”.My extensive experience leads me to a quite different conclusion about the state of psychology in the 90s in the Arab world. Excellent psychology textbooks in Arabic it seems are published in Jordan, cognitive psychology is more developed in Morocco, psychoanalysis in Lebanon and Tunisia, traumatic psychology in Kuwait, and indigenous and cross-cultural psychology in Sudan. Thus, Egypt is no longer the only mecca for Arab psychologists. In the last two decades many psychologists from all Arab countries have been trained in UK or USA universities. Thus, there are new meccas or centers of psychology in the Arab world, e.g Jordan. Ethocentrism, or neglect-



ing the contribution of other psychologists, is not good for the development of psychology in “Arab countries”. Egyptian psychologists must be aware of this reality. We remind them that there is a well known chapter in most introductory books of psychology called “sensation and perception”.

Genuine Arab professional academics are willing to give information. In the nineties communication is very easy in the Arab world. Why have the most eminent Arab psychologists not contributed to this book? Why are the main trends of psychology in different Arab countries not presented? Why are the main issues or problems of psychology not discussed? It seems that the problem is not the teaching of psychology in Kuwait or physiological psychology in KSA. The main issues that need to be discussed by Arab psychologists are such as the export and import of psychology, adoption and adaptation of Western psychology and competition between traditional and modern psychology. Other issues included the influence of Arab culture on individual and group behavior, collective representation, and individualism and collectivism. Furthermore, problems of publishing in international journals, slim participation in conferences, absence of the Arabic facts in many international textbooks, and absence of active and influential memberships in international organizations related to psychology are important. Other important issues that need to be discussed are such as violation by Egyptian psychologists of the copyright of psychological tests that are published by the “Psychological Corporation” such as Wechsler tests of intelligence, Stanford-Binet Test, Guilford and Torrance tests of creativity and etc. In addition, there is misuse and abuse of statistics, repetition and unauthorized translation of psychology books, subjectivity or lack of objectivity in publishing in Arab journals of psychology, monopoly in psychology books, and in participation

in conferences as well as in Arab societies related to psychology by certain groups of narrow minded psychologists. Other issues that need to be discussed are the problem of micro specialization in psychology, the real function of psychology and its role in policy making, structural tendencies and issues of research, paper and pencil psychology, the underdevelopment of hard psychology, the lack of training for professional psychologists, problems of legislation and, most importantly, the issues of indigenization of psychology in the Arab world.

“Psychology in the Arab countries” indeed to live up to its expansive title, and had serious shortcomings tied to poor scholarship and perhaps political rivalries. However, the book documents admirably many theses, articles, unpublished papers, and books regarding psychology in the Arab world. It seems that it is the first book of its kind in English intended to be either for psychologists in the West or for those interested in psychology in Arab countries, or for those who do not read Arabic. However, has many errors, ethnocentrism and is marked by reductionism. Thus, readers of the book “Psychology in the Arab countries” must be cautious about several statements and conclusions provided.

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