Modern Intellectual History (2022), **19**, 297–308
doi:10.1017/S1479244320000086

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

REVIEW ESSAY

An Isthmus of Modern Thought: Islam and Psychoanalysis in North Africa and the Middle East

Benjamin Claude Brower*

History Department, the University of Texas at Austin
*Corresponding author. E-mail: benbrower@utexas.edu

Omnia El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017)

Stefania Pandolfo, *Knot of the Soul: Madness, Psychoanalysis, Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018)

On three occasions the Qur'an mentions what it calls *barzakh*, an enigmatic word that denotes a partition such as that found between fresh and sea water, good and evil, faith and knowledge, even this world and the next. Nimble thinkers have made good use of the in-betweenness of *barzakh*. Its divisions make possible distinctions and provide form. And yet, just as it divides, the *barzakh* also connects. In fact, the word is often rendered in English as "isthmus," which shows up its usefulness for thinking about difference in a way that does not presuppose stark oppositions, on the one hand, nor conflation and indistinction, on the other. The twelfth-century philosopher Ibn 'Arabi used *barzakh* to describe that which separates/unites the created and the Creator, making it a key concept within his theory of the unity of existence.[1] Building upon these insights, modern readers have found this concept useful to negotiate contemporary questions of self and other, questions that became particularly important in the colonial and post-colonial eras. For example, the late Algerian novelist Mohammed Dib used *barzakh* to signify his personal struggles to think across North (Europe) and South (North Africa), French and Arabic.[2] Likewise, the Moroccan scholar Taieb Belghazi has mobilized *barzakh* to rethink the Mediterranean Sea as a heterogenous space that joins and "disjoins" lands, languages, and people.[3] *Barzakh* also names an important new publishing house in Algiers and its

[1]William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, 1989); Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn al-'Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World* (Albany, 2004).

[2]Mohammed Dib, *Neiges de marbre* (Paris, 1990).

[3]Taieb Belghazi, "The Mediterranean(s): Barzakh, Event," in Taieb Belghazi and Lahcen Haddad, eds., *Global/Local Cultures and Sustainable Development* (Rabat, 2001), 217–36.

concept frames the editors' work producing titles in which questions of (post) colonialism and of cultural liminality figure prominently.[4]

In its ability to simultaneously join and divide, connecting but maintaining difference, *barzakh* serves as a useful metaphor to begin this review essay on two recent books examining psychoanalysis in Muslim societies. Psychoanalysis and Islam, like science and religion, are generally separated from each other. Or, when they are brought together, it is typically to use psychoanalysis to gain insights into Muslims, a form of applied psychoanalysis that is best represented by Fethi Benslama's influential critique of contemporary political Islamist movements.[5] The separation is premised on a supposed incommensurability of Islam, a corpus of thought founded upon God's revelations, with psychoanalysis, founded in the secular sciences (even if it is a minor, critical member of this group). Stefania Pandolfo and Omnia El Shakry reject this opposition, and they use their research to develop a forceful argument against the supposed epistemological break between "reason and revelation." In this respect they continue a line of thinking pioneered by Michel de Certeau's *The Possession at Loudun* (1970), which placed religion and psychoanalysis in a dialogic relationship in order to understand a seventeenth-century case of spirit possession.[6] Another forebear of this approach is Henry Corbin (d. 1978), who worked across the "Orient" and "Occident" when he proposed that European and Islamic philosophy be studied in common, showing in his work (which included the first French translation of Martin Heidegger) that "there is no dichotomy of 'Western philosophy' and 'Islamic philosophy' but only philosophy."[7] In this way, Corbin broke with his peers who had on the one hand confined the writings of Muslim thinkers to the domain of "mysticism," or on the other assigned them a limited role as "transmitters" of the classical Greek tradition to Europeans.[8]

Framed in this manner, the primary significance of El Shakry's and Pandolfo's books for modern intellectual history lies in their shared argument that psychoanalysis and Islam can be fruitfully understood within a common frame of analysis. To this end, they have themselves evoked the notion of the *barzakh* in their separate works, even if it does not play an explicit role in these two books.[9] This approach recognizes the distinctions separating the two fields while seeking to understand points of co-implication and mutual transformation. For Pandolfo this means thinking "the problematic of the cure in a contrastive proximity, between the

[4]See Alice Kaplan, "Algeria's New Imprint," *The Nation* 304/11 (2017), 20–24.

[5]Fethi Benslama, *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis, 2009).

[6]Michel de Certeau, *The Possession at Loudun*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago, 2000; first published in French 1970).

[7]As expressed by Nile Green in "Between Heidegger and the Hidden Imam: Reflections on Henry Corbin's Approaches to Mystical Islam," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 17/3 (2005), 219–26, at 221.

[8]Hermann Landolt, "Henry Corbin, 1903–1978: Between Philosophy and Orientalism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119/3 (1999), 484–90.

[9]See Omnia El Shakry, "Translation, Tradition, and the Ethical Turn: A Reply to Bardawil and Allan," *Immanent Frame*, 11 Oct. 2018, at https://tif.ssrc.org/2018/10/11/translation-tradition-and-the-ethical-turn; Stefania Pandolfo, "The Barzakh of the Image and the Speculative Scene of Possession," in Vyjayanthi Venuturupalli Rao, Prem Krishnamurthy, and Carin Kuoni, eds., *Speculation, Now: Essays and Artwork* (Durham, NC, 2014), 168–184.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

thought of the unconscious in psychoanalysis, and the maladies of the soul in Islamic tradition" (3). Thus she moves away from those who would see the psychological sciences producing an epistemological rupture with Islamic notions when they propose human causes for madness, which Muslim societies might have understood as having otherworldly origins. Likewise, El Shakry asks, "what might it mean to think the relationship between psychoanalysis and the Islamic tradition, while respecting the 'ontological stakes' of the latter, namely the belief in divine transcendence and divine discourse?" (43). This takes both Pandolfo and El Shakry far from those who would place Islam and Muslims on the couch and moves them instead towards sources that demonstrate a creative meeting of Islam and psychoanalysis, which in turn, as El Shakry states, "unsettles the assumption of an alleged incommensurability between psychoanalysis and Islam" (2).

* * *

El Shakry's *The Arabic Freud* centers on a group of Egyptian academics who worked after the Second World War to adapt psychoanalysis to the Arabic language and concomitant Islamic concepts. This group translated, commented upon, and rewrote psychoanalysis, popularizing Freud in Egyptian society. They published their work in the first Arabic-language psychology journal, entitled *Majallat 'Ilm al-Nafs* (literally, the "journal of the science of the soul/psyche"). In their writings, they developed a distinctively Arabo-Islamic language of psychoanalysis by rendering psychoanalytic terms into Arabic, using the words, idioms, and concepts of medieval or post-classical-era Islamic philosophical texts and Sufi writings. Most importantly in this respect are terms such *al-nafs* (soul) of Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 CE) and al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), which the Egyptians used to render "psyche" into modern Arabic. Another is *al-lā-shu'ūr* (literally, the "not conscious," or the "not known"), taken from Ibn 'Arabi's discussions of the alterity of God, which served to render psychoanalysis's "unconscious." In this way, they produced a dialogical relationship between psychoanalysis and Islam that El Shakry describes as a "coproduction of psychoanalytic knowledge across Egyptian and European knowledge formations" (24).

El Shakry's group was led by Yusuf Murad (d. 1966), who likely deserves the title of the founder of Egyptian psychoanalysis, although she does not describe him as such. *MIH* readers might know his story already, based upon the 2014 article El Shakry published in this journal, but it is worth repeating here.[10] Murad trained as a philosopher in Egypt before studying psychology in Paris for a doctoral degree obtained in 1940. Returning to teach psychology at Cairo University (in the philosophy department), he educated generations of students and cultivated a field of thought that shaped not only psychology, psychoanalysis, and philosophy, but also literature and a wide array of the social sciences. Another important figure is Abu al-Wafa al-Ghunaymi al-Taftazani (d. 1994), a specialist of Sufism and Islamic philosophy who also taught at Cairo University and rose to the top of several different educational and religious administrative positions during his long

[10]Omni El Shakry, "The Arabic Freud: The Unconscious and the Modern Subject," *Modern Intellectual History* 11/1 (2014), 89–118.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

career. He is known for his defense of Sufism in the face of the attacks made by neo-orthodoxy movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which denigrated Sufism's cult of the saints and popular religious practices while triumphing their own sober, literalist theology. Al-Taftazani's defense positioned him well in Egyptian politics when President Jamal ʿAbd al-Nasir suppressed the Brotherhood and turned to the Sufi orders because he saw them as more amenable to his vision of Islam's place in Egypt. El Shakry only glosses al-Taftazani's career, focusing instead on his rereading of the Sufi typology of the self which he used as a complement to Freudian understandings of the psyche, revealing the former's affinities with modern psychological sciences.

All of this intellectual work required that the Egyptians find Arabic words for psychoanalysis and its conceptual vocabulary previously known only in European languages. Rather than using loanwords words from German, French, and English and Arabizing them morphologically and/or phonetically (e.g. *al-lībirāl* for "the liberal"), a common practice in the transformation of Arabic into its standardized modern form, the Egyptian translators revived classical Arabic words for most of their specialized terms.[11] Many of these came from famous figures like Ibn ʿArabi, as well as the lesser known Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209/10 CE). The work of this Sufi and early rationalist thinker was well known to Freud's Egyptian readers. Murad took al-Razi as the subject of his doctoral thesis, translating and annotating the philosopher's treatise on physiognomy in an effort to reveal the contributions of early Muslims to modern science. Murad chose his interlocuter well. As Ahmed Oulddali's new study of al-Razi's Qur'anic exegesis shows, al-Razi effectively squared the circle of reason and revelation by showing how the former establishes the latter.[12] The universalism of Ibn ʿArabi also appealed to Murad, even though he was not a Muslim but had been born into the Greek Orthodox church and later converted to Catholicism. El Shakry speculates that Murad's experience of moving between religions made Ibn ʿArabi an attractive figure because the Sufi offered a well-developed belief in the fundamental unity of faiths (28). Moreover, she notes that Murad's religious conversion likely informed the unself-conscious universalism he shared with Ibn ʿArabi and his attraction to the Sufi concept of "oneness in multiplicity" (*aḥadiyyat al-kathra*).[13]

This work of translation underscores El Shakry's argument that we should not misunderstand the project of bringing psychoanalysis to the Arabophone world as one of dissemination or diffusion, wherein European concepts, alien and hegemonic, impose themselves upon a dominated Arabo-Islamic epistemology.[14] She writes instead that Murad's notion of the self, founded in Arabic's psychoanalytic

[11]Dagmar Glass, "Creating a Modern Standard Language from Medieval Tradition: The Nahḍa and the Arabic Academies," in Stefan Weninger, ed., *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook* (Berlin, 2012), 835–44. For a useful introduction to the Arabic language see Kristen Brustad, "The Question of Language," in Dwight F. Reynolds, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arab Culture* (Cambridge, 2015), 19–35.

[12]Ahmed Oulddali, *Raison et révélation en Islam: Les voies de la connaissance dans le commentaire coranique de Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (m. 606/1210)* (Leiden, 2019).

[13]Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 25.

[14]An argument made by Joseph A. Massad in *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago, 2007) and subsequent works. See below.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

concepts, was "dialogically constituted across the space of social and cultural difference and embodied in translations and borrowing from Europe while maintaining an irreducible heterogeneity" (25).

Translation is always a fraught project. For this reason, it serves as a rich site of criticism and understanding. Much previous theoretical writing on translation has stressed its disruptions. These disruptions might contribute to the critical unsettlement of language, as Paul de Man proposed when he noted that the "alienation [of translation] is at its strongest in our relation to our own original language" and that "the original was always already disarticulated" in his famous 1983 talk on Walter Benjamin.[15] Gayatri Spivak put forth "translation-as-violation" in her discussion of the politics of translation, or the "translation racket" of the postcolonial literary field, in which translated texts "are made to speak English," subject to appropriation and reprocessing according to norms generated within the Euro-American academic field. Thus it "turn[s] the other into something like the self."[16] By contrast, *The Arabic Freud* sees little in the way of disruption at work in the Arabization of psychoanalysis. Freud's Egyptian readers and translators did not feel themselves to be colonized subjects. They did not need to catch up with Europe, and they saw no essential incommensurability between European thought and that of their own society. In this sense, their project of rendering Freud in Arabic is not judged upon its faithfulness to some original language, but by the ways in which it joins fragments of a common human experience. In other words, this might be thought of as how Islam and psychoanalysis "complete each other," as Jacques Derrida wrote of translation in his discussion of Benjamin's metaphor of the broken amphora and the problem of reconstitution and reconciliation in translation, an example that nicely fits with an Arabic Freud.[17]

El Shakry's book is situated in several different historiographical fields. It makes a sharp departure from previous studies of colonial and postcolonial psychiatry which have dominated the field since the 1990s. In this scholarship, historians focus on psychiatry's role in the development of scientific racism and the psychiatric clinic's role in the political technology of oppression.[18] El Shakry's topic

[15]Paul de Man, "'Conclusions': Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'," in De Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis, 1986), 73–105, at 84.

[16]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Literature," chap. 2 of Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 112–97, at 162; and Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," chap. 9 of Spivak, *Outside the Teaching Machine* (New York, 1993), 179–200, at 182, 183.

[17]Jacques Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," in Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, eds., *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. 1. (Stanford, 2007), 191–225, at 213.

[18]Erik Linstrum, *Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2016); Nina Salouâ Studer, *The Hidden Patients: North African Women in French Colonial Psychiatry* (Cologne, 2016); Leonard Smith, *Insanity, Race and Colonialism: Managing Mental Disorder in the Post-emancipation British Caribbean, 1838–1914* (New York, 2014); Waltraud Ernst, *Colonialism and Transnational Psychiatry: The Development of an Indian Mental Hospital in British India, c.1925–1940* (London, 2013), Richard C. Keller, *Colonial Madness: Psychiatry in French North Africa* (Chicago, 2007); Julie Parle, *States of Mind: Searching for Mental Health in Natal and Zululand, 1868–1918* (Scottsville, 2007); Lynette A. Jackson, *Surfacing Up: Psychiatry and Social Order in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1908–1968* (Ithaca, 2005); Jonathan Sadowsky, *Imperial Bedlam: Institutions of Madness in Colonial Southwest Nigeria* (Berkeley, 1999); Jock McCulloch, *Colonial Psychiatry and "The African Mind"* (Cambridge, 1995); Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford, 1991).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

also engages studies of psychoanalysis outside Europe, such as Argentina, Mexico, and North Africa, a more open-ended body of work within which *The Arabic Freud* sits quite easily, to my mind.[19]

However, El Shakry's primary interest is the field of Middle Eastern studies and its long-standing questions of the self and the formation of a modern Arab subject. Colonialism has weighed heavily in understandings of this subject as it was initially approached in the postcolonial era. In 1981, Malek Alloula wrote famously in *The Colonial Harem* that the modern Arab subject was one who "does not speak … [but] *is spoken*."[20] In most accounts this was understood to be a problem of alienation, or a subject (and a society at large) split between (Islamic) tradition and (Western) modernity, a split investigated by scholars like Lahouari Addi and others.[21] More recent work questions this split, and it finds ample support in the historical record. In his book dealing with forensic medicine in nineteenth-century Egypt, Khaled Fahmy writes that nowhere in his sources "is it possible to detect a sense of contradiction between science and religion or modernity and the Islamic tradition."[22] These conclusions are also supported by the literary studies of Tarek El-Ariss, who has shown that the old framework of modernity (*ḥadātha*) versus authenticity (*aṣāla*) lacks substantive grounding, requiring that scholars not only take critical distance from the language of their sources but also thoroughly rethink modernity and how we study it.[23] El Shakry's book contributes nicely to this project. Murad provided "the contours of a postcolonial subjectivity for twentieth-century Egypt" (24). The Arabic self shaped in these texts is simultaneously imbricated in Islam and the West, and it acts as the "agent of synthesis," rather than the split subject which emerged in French theory and Lacan's writings at the time.

The Arabic Freud represents a major contribution to the field, one that has already been widely reviewed and praised. El Shakry has written this book in beautiful prose, providing tight arguments driven by a rare clarity of vision. This is, however, a concise book, consisting of only some 115 pages of text, exclusive of endnotes. While it makes for a compact read, such brevity comes with costs. Thus *The Arabic Freud* is not a full history of Freud in Arabic texts, nor even an intellectual biography of Murad, al-Taftazani, and their circle. The group is not fleshed out, and El Shakry shows herself to be relatively uninterested in

[19]Hugo Vizzetti, *Aventuras de Freud en el país de los argentinos: de José Ingenieros a Enrique Pichon-Rivière* (Buenos Aries, 1996); Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, NC, 2003); Christiane Hartnack, *Psychoanalysis in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 2001); Mariano Ben Plotkin, *Freud in the Pampas: The Emergence and Development of a Psychoanalytic Culture in Argentina* (Stanford, 2001); Joy Damousi, *Freud in the Antipodes: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in Australia* (Sydney, 2005); Jalili Bennani, *Psychanalyse en terre d'islam: Introduction à la psychanalyse au Maghreb*, new edn (Casablanca, 2008); Warwick Anderson, Deborah Jenson, and Richard C. Keller, eds., *Unconscious Dominions: Psychoanalysis, Colonial Trauma, and Global Sovereignties* (Durham, NC, 2011); José Velasco Garcia, *Génesis social de la institución psicoanalítica en México* (Mexico City, 2014).

[20]Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, 1986; first published in French 1981), 120, original emphasis.

[21]Lahouari Addi, *Les mutations de la société algérienne: Famille et lien social dans l'Algérie contemporaine* (Paris, 1999).

[22]Khaled Fahmy, *In Quest of Justice: Islamic Law and Forensic Medicine in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley, 2018), 276.

[23]Tarek El-Ariss, *The Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* (New York, 2013).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reconstructing the larger field of psychoanalysis in the Middle East. For example, the important Syrian philosopher Georges Tarabishi (d. 2016), who translated some twenty of Freud's works into Arabic in the 1970s, gets only one entry in the book's bibliography, and important contemporary people like Moustapha Safouan, also a translator of Freud and a student of Jacques Lacan, only appear in the book's epilogue. And with regard to the field in postwar Egypt, El Shakry demotes much of the reconstructive work of history to the endnotes. The reader seeking a fuller account of the context and the web of connections will need to spend significant time in these notes, or even on their own outside the book, to get a sense of the important personal and intellectual relationships. Along with the short attention given to reconstructing the intellectual field, El Shakry reads her sources with what may be for some readers a frustrating economy. While she states that she is "staging a dialogue," the reader should be prepared to have the feeling of coming into the middle of a conversation, with El Shakry playing the role of the bystander who whispers you up to speed on the topic at hand. Thus El Shakry provides her readers with few extended quotations from her Egyptian sources, which instead speak to the reader through her glosses and summarizations. Overall, this method of engaging the sources can be counterproductive to an intellectual history that self-consciously seeks to cultivate a dialogic relationship with the past, particularly when dealing with the task of translation. At the very least, it forecloses close readings of the type that might have revealed the story's counterintuitive twists and turns, along with the ambivalences, and ruptures that typically emerge in sources that cross linguistic and cultural fields.

* * *

Pandolfo's *Knot of the Soul* is a much different book in this respect, one that forgoes economy, concision, and a focused argument for a thoroughgoing engagement of diverse questions from multiple angles (which produce their own challenges for the reader). It is based on some fifteen years of ethnographic fieldwork in Morocco that began in the late 1990s. This research was split between the Ar Razi University Psychiatric Hospital in Rabat-Salé, one of Morocco's most important schools of psychiatry, and several different vernacular sites that Moroccans visit to treat mental illness. These vernacular sites have typically practiced various forms of exorcism, as well a diverse field called Islamic psychology. The latter research led Pandolfo to her most interesting interlocutor in the book, a religious scholar and therapist she calls "the Imam." This man practices *ʿilāj sharʿī*, an orthodox cure focused on spiritual well-being and reconnecting people with God. Pandolfo lays out many goals for this book. Some of these relate to specifically ethnographic/anthropological tasks that are difficult to render within the terms of modern intellectual history. However, her efforts to pursue questions of ethics, politics, and epistemology across *al-nafs* and the psyche, efforts framed by the specific context of contemporary Morocco, wherein life is experienced as a series of closed doors, resonate easily with historians.

Knot of the Soul does not lend itself to a summarization and synopsis beyond that given by the book's own structure and organization. Its seventeen chapters are divided into three sections, with the first focusing on the Razi hospital; the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

second, shorter section consisting of ethnographic studies of social and psychological despair (including the *harraga*/*ḥarraqa*, young people who attempt dangerous crossings of the Mediterranean to Europe); and the third section dealing with the Imam and sharia healing. Across the book's chapters the reader will find discussions of Moroccan health care, politics, and social conditions, along with an account of the fascinating debates now occurring across the Middle East and North Africa concerning the practice of the psychological sciences in Muslim societies (121–37). She also studies visual representations (paintings) of trauma made by Moroccan artists, a subject that takes her far afield to Abby Warburg's work on the Pueblo communities of New Mexico.

Ultimately, however, this wide-ranging book is an ethnography of madness in contemporary Morocco, from which come arguments that place Pandolfo in conversation with El Shakry's historical work, namely questions of translation, power, and subjectivity. Madness is colloquially known in Morocco as *ḥāla*, a word formed from the Arabic triliteral root *ḥ-w-l* meaning "condition" (155). This word forms part of a complex typology of competing understandings and terms for mental illness which range from the medio-scientific vocabularies that predominate in the clinic to vernacular words and etiologies. The book's title comes from one of these, a translated expression, *l-ʿuqda nafsiyya*, used by one of Pandolfo's interlocutors, the mother of an unemployed mathematician whom she has had committed for evaluation by psychiatrists at the Razi clinic (114–15). This woman's "knot" represents her understanding of how her son's suffering is joined to or continuous with (*ʿaqd* = to knit, knot, or tie together) her own wounds and pain, those typical to an illiterate woman trying to raise her family in conditions of harsh poverty. The reason this section becomes eponymous for the book, however, has little to do with transgenerational suffering but lies in the particular conversation that takes place between the mother and the psychiatrist. As part of the diagnosis of the son, the psychiatrist asks the mother to describe his condition. The terms and languages used are important because mother and psychiatrist engage in a revealing dialogue wherein they (along with the son in a separate conversation) seek a common vocabulary to talk about mental illness. The psychiatrist understood the man's symptoms as revealing a psychotic personality and the onset of schizophrenia (117), whereas the mother understood them as resulting from spirit (*jinn*) possession or sorcery (*siḥr*), the two most common popular understandings of the causes of mental illness. In the hospital, mother and psychiatrist engage in this conversation based on "double translation," wherein each side renders their views in terms that they think will be intelligible to the other party, even as they seek to maintain their own particular understanding (112–14). Translation here does not refer to the language of the conversation itself, which occurs in dialectical Arabic, but to the different concepts and epistemologies held by each party. Ultimately Pandolfo learns that there is no common ground, and that the mother must cede her own etiology so that she might enlist the clinician's help in treating the separate problem of her son's hashish addiction.

From this differend, however, Pandolfo does not write a simple story of the hegemony of alien (European) sciences imposing themselves on Muslim sensibilities, nor for that matter is it one of easy commensurability between the two. In an early 2008 article recounting the Razi hospital episode, Pandolfo framed her

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argument in terms of inequalities and the double bind experienced by laypeople confronted by the knowledge of the clinic. Thus, in as much as the Moroccan clinic produces its authority through the repression or delegitimation of vernacular medical practices, it forces those who seek its care and recognition to abandon or conceal their own understandings, understandings which, however, constituted them as troubled subjects in need of care in the first place. In this 2008 text, Pandolfo wrote that this double bind produces "a conundrum that dispossesses the subject of the capacity to invoke the authority of the reference from which it draws its identity, all the while being seized in its matrix."[24] At this point in her research, Pandolfo's argument was not so far from the more conventional ones mentioned above about the alienation of colonial modernity and the problems of translation as appropriation and violation. Pandolfo does not abandon these concerns in *Knot of the Soul*, and she keeps the violence of colonialism and postcolonial society front and center throughout its pages, but her work with the Imam, whom she first met only in 2003, opened new possibilities for her interpretation of the question.

The Imam is, as this name says, a practicing imam, an especially well-read and talented one to whom Moroccans living in his working-class, urban neighborhood turn for therapy, or for a "Qur'anic medicine of the soul." This type of mental health care is situated within a broad field of Islamic healing practices that include treatments for jinn possession and protections from sorcery as well as Islamic psychology (*'ilm al-nafs al-islāmī*) which connects Western and Islamic understandings of mental health. The Imam practices a Sharia-compliant cure, *'ilāj shar'ī*, that is related to Islamic psychology but distinguishes itself from it in as much as it is not self-consciously in dialogue with Western psychology and philosophy, as is more typically the case with Islamic psychology. It is also distinguished by its religious neo-orthodoxy, an understanding of the faith and its practice that has its historical origins in the modernist reform movements of Islam that took shape in the twentieth century. Thus the Imam expresses his opposition to Sufism, and Pandolfo parses carefully how his methods depart from those of the exorcist practicing the *ilāj al-jinn* or "cures of the jinn," one of the most popular, if controversial, treatments (261–3). The Imam heals based upon information available in the Qur'an, the Sunna ("habitual practice," based on the example of the Prophet), Arab medicine and Islamic science, and the canonical sources of Islamic law and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). He is therefore, as Pandolfo dubs him, a "jurist of the soul" (247). In practical terms, his cure proceeds through a form of Qur'anic recitation known as the *ruqya*. This practice seeks to reconnect people facing earthly crises with the guidance and succor offered by the revealed word of God and that which remains "external to the human world" (258).

In the Imam's view, the causes of the mental disorders afflicting the people that he treats lie in the poverty, unemployment, and violence of contemporary Moroccan society, a view that Pandolfo extends to include the country's postcolonial condition generally. These social conditions weigh on the popular classes provoking doubts in God and a crisis of faith, which in turn leads to madness. The

[24]Stefania Pandolfo, "The Knot of the Soul: Postcolonial Conundrums, Madness, and the Imagination," in Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good, Sandra Teresa Hyde, Sarah Pinto, and Byron J. Good, eds., *Postcolonial Disorders* (Berkeley, 2008), 329–58, at 331.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Imam calls this condition "soul choking" (*taḍyīq al-nafs*), which Pandolfo unpacks as

> a kind of medical–spiritual phenomenology of the soul, inspired by the Qur'anic depiction of the "constriction" and "expansion" of the *nafs* as an opening or sealing of the heart to the knowledge and the path of God. "Soul choking" describes … a crippling of the ethical faculty, a disablement of the soul fostered in existential and political trauma, in the confrontation with evil, and in the illness of melancholy as it leads to suicide. (8)

The cure, then, is to open oneself to God.

This is a God and a cure that Pandolfo reads not as "traditional therapy" but through a complex dialog between psychoanalysis and Islam. Her approach might be said to reverse the project of translation studied by El Shakry, in which the Egyptians translated psychoanalysis into Arabic and Islamic concepts. But Pandolfo does not translate Islam (i.e. the concepts of the Imam's therapeutic practices) into familiar psychoanalytic terms. This sort of translation would risk making the Imam "speak like Freud" (to borrow Spivak's framing mentioned earlier). Instead she passes back and forth between discursive and linguistic fields, using a series of interrelated but distinct concepts as points at which to make her crossings. Thus Pandolfo places together soul choking and melancholia (including the concept of the crypt) to consider subjugation,[25] *Nachträglichkeit* and the temporality of the Hereafter to weigh the possibility of dealing with illness and oppression (244–5),[26] and the *ruqya* recitation (the "fostering of a bond between two souls") and transference (268–9) to understand therapy. Pandolfo's approach is not analogical: it does not seek equivalences between the two fields of the sort found in the notebooks of the psychiatric hospital wherein the clinician converts lay terms and understandings into medico-scientific categories and epistemologies. In this sense, she does not wrest psychoanalysis and Islam from their original languages. Instead, she stages a series of meetings between them to consider common problems. This results in a fluid and, by my eye, a rich way to consider madness across languages and cultures. It might be said that Pandolfo lays the *'ilāj shar'ī* across psychoanalysis seeking a sharpened understanding of each text in the consistencies and differences that emerge. She writes, "it was by working though the ethnography with the Imam, and struggling to learn from it, that I could understand what change means in psychoanalysis" (226). But beyond that, Pandolfo figures her reading in the form of a bridge or passage "across incommensurable places, spaces, languages, or times, as well as the incommensurability of the spaces themselves" (23).[27]

Pandolfo's approach troubles the project of translation by maintaining a heightened sensitivity to power dynamics and the unassimilable remainders or impasses

[25]Pandolfo (241) cites Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago, 1994).

[26]Specifically, Pandolfo writes of the "leap to another time" (244).

[27]Characteristically, Pandolfo formulates these ideas based on the European *and* Islamic traditions: Ibn Khaldun on the one hand and Maurice Blanchot on the other (226). Pandolfo unpacks Ibn Khaldun's understanding of *'ibra* (crossing, traversing, beyond) through Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldûn's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* (Chicago, 1964), 63–73.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of language. She expresses this both historically (drawing links to North Africa's colonial history, its legacies and traumas) and in the terms of postcolonial critique. In this respect, Frantz Fanon's cultural alienation or cultural agony thesis—*déculturalisation*—occupies a central place for Pandolfo, who understands Fanon's historical-psychological problem as proximate to soul choking. Fanon's own answer to the problem came in the form of an affirmative leap such as occurs in revolution, but the hopes it generated, as Fanon himself recognized, came with their own dangers and the heavy burden of violence and trauma, frustration and betrayal.[28] However, the importance that Pandolfo accords Fanon also underscores the fact that the project of translation, even one where Islam occupies the privileged ground of the originary language, takes place in the shadow of colonialism, and it can never be untroubled by this history. So rather than the synthesis of Europe and Islam that El Shakry finds in Murad's and al-Taftazani's translations, Pandolfo keeps herself on what she calls the "border of translation" (3).

* * *

To conclude, Pandolfo has written a challenging book, one that strains the reader attempting to keep up with her extensive research, her ambitious theoretical goals, and her shifts in style and voice (which range from the conventional idioms of the social sciences, to a narrowly theoretical voice, to the informal language of research notes). But I stress the importance of this book. Together, the books by Pandolfo and El Shakry represent an especially exciting moment in the field. They offer a rich opening to rethink fundamental questions of religion, identity, and the post-colonial condition across North Africa and the Middle East. Their vision is quite different from that of scholars like Joseph Massad. Rather than a dialogic exchange between psychoanalyst and Islam, Massad stresses differend, failed translations, and even the false consciousness of "Europeanized Arabs," such as Benslama, who use psychoanalysis to read Islam.[29] Massad faults Benslama less for putting Islam on the couch, as do El Shakry and Pandolfo, than for doing the work of orientalism in which psychoanalysis serves as a "liberal epistemology whose aim is the assimilation of the world in its own image."[30] The possibilities for constructively rethinking colonial/postcolonial subjectivity, among other questions, are necessarily circumscribed by such reifications. Few intellectual fields have no internal fissures, and few intellectual encounters stage themselves as a Melian Dialogue with the epistemic imperialism of the strong neatly imposing itself on the weak.[31] By contrast,

[28]In addition to Pandolfo's discussion of Fanon's "leap" (8, 243–4, 389 n. 37) see David Marriott, "No Lords A-leaping: Fanon, C. L. R. James, and the Politics of Invention," *Humanities* 3 (2014), 517–45.

[29]Joseph A. Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago, 2015), comments on translation and incommensurability, 283; and Europeanized Arabs, 280.

[30]Ibid., 287.

[31]See Borossa's useful critique of Massad in which she states that "the very oppositional terms in which it is set [i.e. Massad's critique of psychoanalysis and liberalism] … makes [*sic*] insufficient allowance for the ways in which psychoanalysis is multiple in its permutations as theory, practice, and institution." Julia Borossa, "Connectedness and Dreams: Exploring the Possibilities of Communications across Interpretive Traditions," in Ian Parker and Sabah Siddiqui, eds., *Islamic Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Islam: Cultural and Clinical Dialogues* (New York, 2019), 118–29, at 120.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000086 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Pandolfo's and El Shakry's books offer rich models for reckoning proximate intellectual traditions and the problem of rendering them into mutually intelligible forms while maintaining their distinctions, what is proper to them, even keeping open the possibility of their self-same sovereignty. In this respect, framed under the sign of the *barzakh*, these works shed new light on the projects of translation, deconstruction, and decolonization, pushing them beyond questions of mutual imbrication, indistinction, or liminality to think about "how to enter into relation with an other … but at the same time to preserve the otherness of the other."[32]

[32]Roffe glossing Jacques Derrida's Babel argument in Jonathan Roffe, "Translation," in Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe, eds., *Understanding Derrida* (London, 2004), 103–12, at 108.

Cite this article: Brower BC (2022). An Isthmus of Modern Thought: Islam and Psychoanalysis in North Africa and the Middle East. *Modern Intellectual History* **19**, 297–308. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000086