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Reconstructing the Community, Reconstructing the Image: Refuge in Islam in Yemen and Lacan After Islam

Summary:

This article offers a new exploration of the relationship between religion and psychoanalysis. It focuses specifically on the clinical potential of both these approaches—and the encounter between them—to transform existing psychotherapeutic models informed by multiple traditions that impact individuals' psychic wellness and resilience in contexts of war and upheaval. It also examines the role of Islam in forms of refuge and repair. Recognizing the refuge that individuals seek and find in Islam (including Jacques Lacan's own engagement) during periods of adversity allows us to move away from reductive psychoanalytic approaches toward the study of Islam and Islamic movements. The article concludes by looking at a renewed interest among Yemeni youth in reconstructing the image of the Yemeni through innovation, art, and film to promote mental health while recognizing the refuge that Islam provides for invention. Throughout, the article meditates on people's dwelling within traditions in order to reconstruct the community to envision new models of psychotherapy necessary for addressing individual and collective *'afiya*—physical, psychic, and spiritual well-being. In turn, it calls for a thinking with religious traditions beyond their sublimatory practices.



Figure 1. Many people in Yemen have fled to camps to escape conflict. Photo by Alessio Romenzi UNICEF (UN News)

Introduction: Mental Health in the Margins of War [1]

The ongoing war in Yemen that began in 2015 has resulted in increased malnutrition, the destruction of civilian homes, hospitals, and historical landmarks, and the material and psychic dispossession of more than 10 million people. Surveys now report that one in five Yemenis suffer from mental health disorders (Alhariri, 2021). As of 2020, there are only 21 registered psychiatrists in Yemen and no trained clinical psychologists (though as of the time of publication of this article, there are some in training) (UNFPA, 2020). The assault against the Houthi rebels, promulgated by the current Yemeni government and done with the support of 10 allied Arab countries, has also called into question the affinity for the *umma* (Islamic community) (Iqbal, 2019): The provision of military aid by neighboring countries was followed by their closing their borders to Yemeni civilians seeking to flee the regular bombing campaigns. As one neighbor plunders the other, the political, economic, and social interests of Gulf states and of the West are pursued at a high price for Yemenis. Despite the collective trauma resulting from this turmoil, the contrasting images of Yemeni resilience and Yemeni implosion continue to circulate in global media (Kendall, 2020; Warby, 2021; UN News 2020). Yet the ways psychologists have begun to tackle and anticipate the mental health impacts of the conflict have obscured the lived experiences of Yemenis during the upheaval, particularly how many have found refuge within the Islamic tradition.

The copresence of biomedicine, prophetic medicine, and Islamic/Arabic medicine/ethico-medical practices in Yemen has recently been challenged due to the rise of what are seen as “modern” and “scientific” approaches to mental health concerns, especially in children, caused by the war. Yet the question of communal healing, of history, that occurs as part of efforts to bridge traditions of healing, is just as important as individual well-being in approaches to mental illness. Even though debates persist regarding whether an illness is physiological or psychosomatic in origin, in *ruqya* centers (Quranic therapies) and other venues where healthcare is provided in Yemen, physicians and sheikhs work side by side in attempting to alleviate a patient’s symptoms. In these contexts, psychic well-being is recognized as part of a

comprehensive *'afiya* (physical, psychic, and spiritual well-being), which ties various practitioners (political, religious, medicinal) together in addressing mental illness. For example, in my fieldwork I often observed biomedical physicians, often trained abroad, take seriously the enigmas of illnesses, considering the spiritual and psychic dimensions of illness in their approaches to patient care. These physicians explore the physical, spiritual, and mental causes of illness as much as its sociopolitical and structural ones. Reflecting this curiosity and holistic perspective, many are hesitant to lay claim to “the cure,” prescribing treatments instead and redirecting patients’ desire for transformation to God. Across settings of psychological distress, many of my interlocutors—Yemeni physicians, patients, medical personnel, artists, and journalists from the Yemeni diaspora (in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States)—tethered themselves to their Islamic faith and their belief in God’s coming judgment as a foundation for new ways of inhabiting their present.

Following my interlocutors’ efforts to secure *'afiya* through a refuge in Islam, I attempt to read Islamic revival movements in the Muslim world as providing Yemenis—and Muslims more broadly—a refuge amidst upheavals. This approach diverges from the ways the relationship between religion and psychoanalysis has been examined since Sigmund Freud, given how Jacques Lacan was influenced by Islamic philosophy and theology. To explore the analytical and therapeutic potential of religious traditions, this article begins by examining the antagonistic treatment of Islam by psychoanalysts who have attempted to think about the enigma of Islamic revival movements and call for reform toward securing individual and communal *'afiya*. In order to set the terms for examining the relationship between Islam and psychoanalysis, I draw from my ethnographic fieldwork with the Yemeni diaspora regarding their engagement with Islam as not simply offering sublimatory practices to cope with despair but also as a means through which to return to theories of the soul, desire, and psyche to understand the conditions for moving on the path toward *'afiya*. My interlocutors’ theoretical and philosophical exploration of the place of desire in psychic wellbeing and *'afiya* have informed my exploration of the possible reformulation of western psychotherapeutic models to attend to the singularity of the symptom. Throughout this article, I argue that the refuge that Yemenis find in Islamic traditions is both episodic and an isthmus for invention rather than a return to the past. I conclude this article by exploring how Yemenis themselves see the factors at play in their resilience and refuge since the onset of war in 2015 and how their turn to storytelling and art in their pursuit of *'afiya*, especially psychic wellbeing, both harkens back to and reformulates theories of the soul/self/psyche from within the Islamic tradition. My interlocutors’ view of Yemen as beyond history, as Yemen was named prior to the creation of nation-states as the place to the right of the *Ka’ba* in Mecca, led me to explore the question of reconstruction of community and psychotherapeutic models.

My approach in this article is in contrast to many studies of Yemen that fail to note the importance of social topography, whether during the rule of Imam Ahmed who controlled the north of the country from 1948-1962 (succeeding his father Imam Yahya who ruled 1918-1948), during the formation of the republic of North Yemen in 1962, during the decolonial struggle of South Yemen, or in the current state where there is minimal centralized authority. My research also recognizes that to understand Yemeni society, one must take seriously the ways genealogy and knowledge function as barometers of relational capacity, infusing ethico-psychic life. Much of how social relations, ethical dealings, and justice are maintained and applied in Yemen is through witnessing (*sum’a*) a person’s character, mediations, and communal hospitality (Caton, 2005). Across much of the Arab world, as well as in Yemen itself, Yemenis are perceived to be the ancestors (the original stock) of all Arabs and therefore believed to continue to embody the 4th-century Arab Soul: Put simply, Yemen is imagined by many other Muslims as a crystallization of 4th-century Arabia. This all points to illegibility of Yemenis’ potential despair, but also the dynamic shifts shown through an anthropology of community, social relations, mutual reciprocity, and exchange grounded in social witnessing, all of which extend beyond legal apparatuses and the philosophical and scientific developments within the Islamic traditions that inform them.

The question of psychic wellbeing is intimately bound to the question of both individual and collective wellbeing, or *'afiya*. Broadly, *'afiya* means physical, psychic, and spiritual wellbeing and is the first of a two-part supplication to God for wellbeing and pardon. My interlocutors understood wellbeing through the lens of *'afiya* within the nexus of the body-soul and individual-community relationships. Yet despite the

centrality of this concept to how Yemenis interpret their lived experiences, few scholars of Yemen have explored *'afiya* and the ways it informs the examination of illness, both its enigmas and alleviation. Rather, much of the academic literature on Yemen, whether historical or anthropological, has been fascinated by a country that has failed to adhere to a single form of popular sovereignty. Indeed, over the last century Yemen has been fragmented by post-World War I European imperial incursions, a blockade imposed by the ruling Imams in the north from 1919 till 1962 to curtail British activity in the south of the country, and a communist revolution in the south. Cold War politics (driven by US intervention in the north) then gave rise to a violent unification campaign from 1990 to 1994 (Dresch, 2000). The country is now home to myriad Islamic reform movements (e.g.: Brotherhood inspired *Islah*, modernist, and scripturalist) and is widely regarded as a 'failed nation-state'. The lack of centralized government, in part due to the strength of traditional methods of jurisprudence (Messick, 1992, 2019) and the presence of Islamic judges (*qadis*) in villages, has attracted the attention of political scientists. Current writing on Yemen highlights the complexity of the country's political system, the stagnation of its development, and the revolutionary Marxist movement in the south (Dresch, 2000; Stookey, 1982; Varisco, 2020; Wedeen, 2010). From a more anthropological perspective, some writing has noted the role of poetry in self-fashioning, pedagogy, and philosophical exploration in the country (Caton, 1990, 2004). Yet much of this already limited literature either takes the social and psychic "resilience" of Yemenis for granted or ignores it altogether.

The internationally approved antidote to socioeconomic, political, and now psychic instability in Yemen has been to centralize government and reduce (with the goal of eliminating) communalism and traditionalism. Recent fascination with the effects of destabilization and deterritorialization in Yemen has led many local psychologists and global health scholars to decouple the question of psychic wellbeing from the question of the law and communal health. Many of these approaches to mental health move away from tradition, history, and culture, focusing instead on individual self-realization that renounces tradition, local practices, and social norms as aiding and abetting violence (Lierde, 2021). For instance, a panel of Yemeni clinical psychologists addressing the mental health effects of the war recently claimed that Islamic psychological approaches (which they view as reducing mental illness to a spiritual malaise, attributed to a decline in faith and the presence of witchcraft and possession by *jinns*) were an obstacle to patient clinical diagnosis and recovery (Al-Ammar et al., 2021). However, the study of mental illnesses was expanded and transformed by Muslim scholars, physicians, philosophers, and theologians throughout the 8th to 16th century (Hauter, 2020b). Omitting such contributions to the history of science produces a de-scientification of Muslim psychology. Such de-scientification of Muslim psychology fuels fascination about why Muslims turn to cultural, ethico-medical, and psychic therapeutic models of treatment, with literature citing the incommensurability between clinical diagnosis and what is perceived as religious approaches to treating illnesses (Mitha, 2020).

In the widely popular practice of "prophetic medicine" in Yemen, for instance, the forms of malaise that disrupt psychic wellbeing are understood to be illnesses of the heart. The alleviation of psychic malaise, whether physically or psychologically induced (producing doubt, uncertainty, and melancholia, among other symptoms of trauma), is achieved by following God's prescriptions and strengthening the heart's capacity to deal with despair. The tranquility and strength of the heart/soul is seen as dependent on the individual's relationship to God and divine law (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1998). This focus on a relationship with God as central to combating illness is reflected in the ubiquity of *ruqya* (Quranic) centers in Yemen. As I observed during my fieldwork, and as other scholars have explored in other Muslim communities (Pandolfo, 2018), patients invest in *ruqya* centers as spaces in which to seek refuge from despair through the mediation of an Imam. This long standing approach to healing was in part fostered by medieval medical writings on melancholia, loss, grief, paranoia, and *qareen* (extimacy) produced by Muslim theologians, physicians, and philosophers (Hauter, 2020a; Awaad, 2019). Viewing health and healing holistically, this body of work includes treatments for mental disturbances that range from physiological and spiritual to psychosocial, and which even today in *ruqya* centers are not seen by local physicians as unscientific. This perceived relationship between mental illness and religiosity is not a superficial one in Yemen. Rather, it is rooted in a history of the soul within its ontological, structural, psychic, and material conditions.

My interest in how people address their psychic wellbeing under the rubric of *'afiya* during times of war diverges from scholars who wish to understand whether a renewed attention to mental health in Muslim societies Islamicizes cultural models of mental health or draws on psychological theories from within the Islamic ethico-medical tradition. More importantly, the question of who or what makes possible a therapeutic transference must be taken seriously. Who are the healers and others around the patient who are necessary to channel treatment, which they attest ultimately emanates from God? Mental health is increasingly a concern for those experiencing civil conflict, upheavals, dispossessions, and wars—but how to engage these issues from within their respective traditions in order to expand the parameters of psychoanalysis? What practices have allowed people periods of refuge where despair is kept at bay?

Refuge in Islam: Lacan After Islam

Psychoanalytic approaches to Islamic movements (for instance, the Islamic revolution in Iran, the creation of Pakistan, and Islamist politics more broadly) are frequently reductive. The reprisal of an Islamic cosmology that coordinates affinity, social relations, and divine forms of witness and justice is often confused for an Islamic version of popular sovereignty or Islamists desiring a return to an original form of Islam. Yet the centralization of law in a nation-state was and is also a response to colonial and postcolonial formations of knowledge and power. The sociopolitical ideals and conceptions of the early Muslim community continue to retain a different promise: namely, the realization of Divine Law as expressed in the Prophetic tradition, which is open to contestation, affirmation, and authority (Asad, 1989). Psychoanalysts wishing to understand Islamic revival movements as a response to post-coloniality over the last century must equally take into consideration the cuts—the disruptions in the transmission of the tradition—that have fueled a reengagement with Islam (their own included) within the psychoanalytic community today. The turn to Islamic social, economic, political, and ethico-medical practices should not be read as a search for exile from the present, but rather as refuge in the path of repair. For instance, in the sites of my own fieldwork, where physicians and patients attempt to secure *'afiya*, drawing on Islamic ethico-medical traditions is not an effort to return to a glorious past; rather, it marks a renewed relation to a past that makes it possible to re-inhabit the present and its shifting material conditions.

The idea that Islamists wish to return to an origin point obscures the diverging modes of how people access Islamic traditions. People's own revival, reform, and return to Islamic tradition is in part due to the democratization of knowledge, expanded access to the archives of Islam, and proximity felt due to the authentication of chain of transmission of the Prophet's sayings and doings (Brown, 2007). That accessibility is resonant of how community members had access to the Prophet, but is not of course a doubling of the prophetic time. (There must be an analytic differentiation between those who believe that they are vessels for divine law, projecting their desire as the desire of the other, and those who want to reproduce the conditions for a transnational Muslim community [*umma*] to flourish by coming together to attend to the community's concerns outside of a capitalist liberal nation-state structure). Opposing the institutionalization of Islam (in state governance or civil institutions) while lauding the heterogeneity of Muslims practicing Islam misrecognizes the effects of the imposed mechanisms of the nation-state upon Muslim polities and attempts to codify Muslim law (Asad, 2003; Esmeir, 2012) for a return of the repressed. This is not to romanticize the current state of the Muslim polities against the ruptures of the past two centuries. Currently, the ways social relations are produced and evaluated no longer correspond to institutions built to facilitate communal and individual wellbeing. Many Muslims across the Middle East and North Africa now turn to Islam for "counterpublic" spaces, seeking therapeutics in order to keep despair at bay (Hamdy, 2008; Hirschkind, 2006; Mahmood, 2011; Pandolfo, 2018).

Muslims articulating religious claims in public are often portrayed as attempting to return to the origins of Islam, and their entreaties as signs of backwardness and stultification rather than evidence of wrestling with the impositions of modern logics. These include my interlocutors whose engagement with Islamic traditions promises a reform of medicine and the logics that underpin it (Hauter, 2020a). These interlocutors are

returning to Islam to rectify a disjuncture between the formation of social relations and the institutions that subvert them. Their attempt to produce a relationship to the past can be seen as an effort to extend the parameters of their present instead of foreclosing it. What is often overlooked in this context is not the question of pathological motivation (why would anyone want to flee their present?), but rather a grappling with the cuts and shifting material conditions that in fact mark the present. How might other attempts to mitigate these cuts, in the language of Abraham and Torok (1994), envelop and encrypt the wound, rather than expand psychic parameters? How are populations suffering from systematic erasures of language, memories, and rituals? Is there still a future when one's present is so often marked by a repudiation of one's past? The central question that binds these and other questions together, I believe, is how are people seeking refuge in a tradition that accounts for shifting material conditions in order to make possible a leap into an unknown future? In what ways do people invoke a transnational (theologically territorialized) conception of a Muslim community through ritualization, willful acts, and personal convictions (Iqbal, 2021) that is resonant of the early Muslim community (Anjum, 2012)?

Nuanced analyses of Islamic movements need to differentiate those who seek refuge within the Islamic tradition as a form of resistance from those who perversely want to reproduce the violence of the moral law's claim to the common good (Lacan, 2013) (i.e. instrumentalizing God's desire itself). To lay claim to knowing God's will, meanwhile, borders on heresy in Islam; to claim to share God's knowledge transgresses the fundamental principle of the nature of God's unknowability and the gap that persists between knowledge in the *dunya* (the lower life) and the divine knowledge of the unseen/unknowledge (*al-ghayb*), which serves as the limit of human knowledge. Understanding one's limit with respect to knowing God allows for a relationship of uncertainty and a recognition of the inevitable gap in understanding, producing a space to encounter one's desire, but also its limitations. A religious person's relationship to unknowledge (*al-ghayb*), as a question that is part of an inquiry into truth, distinguishes them from individuals who leave "the responsibility of the cause to God, exhibiting the mechanisms of obsessive neurosis" (Lacan, 2006: p. 741). The question of the foreclosure and barring of truth is important not simply for understanding clinical structures but also for paving the way to a new science as Jacques Lacan intended.

This antagonism toward Islamic movements and Islam from psychoanalysts stands in contrast to how the profession has generally shifted away from Sigmund Freud's designation of religion as an illusion toward a more reconciliatory orientation that sees religion as helping to advance the goals of analysis. Analysts have written about the importance of religion and religious institutions to mental health (Plante & Sharma, 2001), identity (Tummala-Narra, 2009), subjectivity (Rubin, 1997), reality and truth (Blass, 2004), and resistance to and endurance of various forms of oppression (Tummala-Narra, 2009). My concern here is not to treat Islam within these terms, but to try to think about religious tradition beyond its attendant sublimatory practices, focusing on the analytical and therapeutic potential of religious traditions themselves.

Rachel Blass (2004), writing on the potential relationship between psychoanalysis and religion, finds that treating religion as a repository for spiritual, cultural, and moral development begins to mythicize psychoanalysis and relegates religion to personal expression, moving away from Freud's epistemological concerns regarding religion's impact on truth and the reality of the individual. Her call for a dialogue between psychoanalysis and religion involves considering the "sincere search for truth, that new possibilities are sought and opened up for the respectful and meaningful recognition both of the other and of reality, internal and external" (p. 631). Throughout Blass's writing, and that of the other scholars who she meticulously examines, gaging the proper relationship between psychoanalysis and religion requires exploring the foundational goal(s) of psychoanalysis. Within this body of scholarship, psychoanalytical work emerges as a particular relation to self, other, desire, love, community, reality, and truth that is necessary in order to attend to a patient's psychic life. Some psychoanalysts find the goals of psychoanalysis—including resolving transference neurosis, relating to one's desires and their limits, realizing the demands of the superego, and enhancing the function of the ego—as commensurable with religious life. Others are concerned with the impact of religious belief on the assessment of reality, otherness, and the productive function of desire. While each of these concerns around the presence of religion in clinical settings are valid, I ask, given Western influence in and modulation of these concepts, what about analysands and analysts who

occupy multiple traditions that inform the structures of the psychotherapeutic models they employ?

In my work with my interlocutors, particularly those in the Yemeni diaspora, many spoke about their displacement from Yemen and their psychic-spiritual malaise in multiple registers. I traced concepts and theories they used to speak about their mental illnesses and psychic wellbeing to contemporary psychology, Prophetic tradition, and Muslim medieval philosophy, psychology, and theology. For example, the question of desire was often raised as a necessary function of sustaining relationships to others and to their anticipated reception by others abroad, which they claimed as central to their psychic wellbeing. Desire was explored as a function of an immaterial soul by some, and by others as a generator of a material soul that informed their conceptions of a psychic structure and its relation to the imagination, world, nature, God, and the afterlife.

Desire (i.e. to want) within Islamic philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, and the mystical Sufi tradition is expressed by a constellation of concepts in Arabic. These include *shahwa* (appetence), *shawq* (longing), *nafs* (self/soul), and *hawa* (lust). Within Sufi traditions and theories of love, desire is marked as an effect of love. The term *hub* (love) relates to a set of terms, which include *'ishq* (eros), *muhaba* (love), and *munsaba* (affinity) (Bell, 1979). Within the Quran, the *nafs* is not simply a desiring soul, but emerges in three states that are conceptualized and expanded upon by the 10th-century Imam Al-Ghazali (2010): demanding, reproaching, and reassured (p. 8). The reproaching soul is not innate: It may be inculcated or spontaneous, but its potentiality and cessation is present-absent. The *nafs*'s desire and potential is not simply to follow a path toward the good, enjoyment, transgression, or evil, but rather is constantly modulating the individual to what I consider a *jouissanic* desire even in its reassured state, as Lacan's (2013) theory of transgression itself presupposes the position of the law. This means that a form of pleasure can become a drive toward death as opposed to how Lacan and Freud frame pleasure as the deferral of its pursuit. It also means that desire is not necessarily born out of transgression, which is different than what we find in Lacan's unique formulation of the law generating desire through interdiction that at times feels very Catholic.

What is more striking in love theories from the Islamic world from the 7th century onward is the variegated scholarship on the proper relation of love to desire and desire to the law. Questions regarding whether eros is divine or spiritual, and whether desire is relegated to necessity and procreation or if union fuels desire, have coursed through all schools of thought (Bell, 1979). The potentiality of union with the beloved object or God was often marked by theological categories of *alghayb* (unknowledge) and God's knowledge, which was infinite. Desiring an object was less about possession and more about a relation of knowing marked by an infinite unknowability, which tied lack to infinitude rather than negativity.

My interlocutor's polysemous conceptions of desire parallel its exploration and amalgamation in Al-Ghazali's work in two ways. First, in its transformation amidst an isthmus within Islamic orthodoxy. Second, as an ethico-political response to the proper relationship between desire and the law amidst corruption. As Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali emerged as a major philosopher, theologian, and mystic reviving the Islamic sciences in the twelfth century, an era marked by significant ruptures within the Islamic tradition, he dedicated entire sections of his magnum opus *Revival of the Religious Sciences* to discussing the proper way to cultivate one's desire in relation one's soul and the law (Winters, 1995: xv-xxii). For centuries, Imam Al-Ghazali was one of the most influential Muslim scholars in the fields of jurisprudence, mysticism, and even Islamic psycho-spirituality and ethics. In the introduction to Al-Ghazali's text *On Disciplining the Soul* (books xxii and xxiii of the revival of the religious sciences) Timothy Winters (1995) writes that Al-Ghazali's work was produced during a *barzakh* (an isthmus, an in-between space, a period before emerging legal and mystical traditions coalesced into Islamic orthodoxy) (xv). Al-Ghazali (1995) built his work on developments in forms of Islamic piety "inspired by the rejection of Ummayyad rule (661–750 CE) and the advent of a sophisticate legal theory" (pp. xv, xxii-xxiii). In the period immediately following Ummayyad rule in the late 700s, writings on the soul, desire, and love proliferated; some scholars speculate that influences on Muslim ascetic practices came from traditions such as Christianity and Neoplatonism, while others argue that they emerged from internal debates within the Islamic tradition itself (pp. xxii-xxiii). Either way, the shift in the relationship between desire and the law emerged out of fissures in the transference of the Islamic tradition and socioeconomic political configurations and questions of

justice and inventions, as various schools of thought varied in their orientations toward the path of desire and the law. I pause here to reflect on Al-Ghazali in the context of this article principally because the conditions of Imam Al-Ghazali's time are in many ways similar to those faced by my interlocutors. Specifically, like Al-Ghazali, my interlocutors seek to return to the function of desire through new forms of Islamic piety while surrounded by injustice and corruption, where practitioners' access to traditions has transformed entirely. Islamic piety, through this lens, ignites the productive function of desire.

My own access to elaborations of the concept of desire in both psychoanalysis and Islam has allowed me to begin to understand the overlaps, departures, and function of desire in the life of the soul within the different psychic apparatuses and frameworks articulated by my interlocutors. I have also benefited from being able to follow the work of scholars who have laid the groundwork to think through the encounter between psychoanalysis and Islam (e.g. Copjec, 2009; El Shakry, 2017; Ewing, 1997; Pandolfo, 2018). I am particularly drawn to Jacques Lacan's work, as his writings on desire as hidden and ambivalent mirrors much of the writings in Islamic philosophy and psychology. Importantly, I find that his concept of desire shifted over time, given its history within Greek philosophy and medicine, theological developments, exegetical scholarship, and clinical work. More importantly, Lacan's own later work, in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (2013) and *Seminar XX (Limits of Love and Knowledge)* (1999), was informed by Islamic philosophy, likely through his contemporary and colleague Henry Corbin (Benslama, 2009; Chubss, 2022; Copjec; 2016; Lacan 2011). If Lacan himself found momentary refuge from within the Islamic tradition, how can psychoanalysis itself possess the capacity to expand through its engagements and encounters with other religions and traditions, thinking of religious traditions beyond their sublimatory and prohibitive practices?

I have also found myself intrigued by the questions and ideas psychoanalysts developed after their engagements with Islamic traditions and movements. As other research has demonstrated, the psychoanalytic frameworks offered by both Freud and Lacan have resonance with Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas of the soul, psyche, and the unconscious (Bettelheim, 1984), which are inflected by Islam's translation movement from the eighth century onward (Fancy, 2013; Gutas, 2012). The field of psychoanalysis has interrogated Islam both before and after Lacan (Benslama, 2009; Gana, 2018). Then what of Lacan after Islam?

A curious blind spot for many of us who read, theorize, think, and reflect with psychoanalysis is the inflection of concepts such as soul, desire, need, demand, and love.

What is more interesting than psychoanalysis's tolerance of religion is the discipline's amnesia towards its own relation to inflections of its concepts and its stances on questions related to moral law, freedom, and desire. More importantly, the lack of distinction between traditions, their multiplicity, and practitioners' particular sociohistorical instantiations leads to dismissals of entire traditions. What psychoanalysis has been able to do is not to generate new ideas of soul, desire, and love, but rather to return to earlier formations of these concepts and expand them (Lacan, 2013). For psychoanalysis to invent—not necessarily to become exported or modified, in order to promote methods of decoloniality, but to become the new science Lacan envisioned—it is essential to maintain the capacity to expand its parameters. As a first step, practitioners may discover the contours of the soul, desire, and love that already inhere (either consciously or unconsciously) in individuals and collectivities.

Resilience or Reconstruction

The question of refuge, resilience, and despair in Yemen has led me to re-read discussions around intergenerational trauma, introjection, incorporation, mourning, and melancholia in Freud, Lacan, Abraham, and Torok. However divergent the approaches of these thinkers are toward trauma and its transmission and encryption and encounter, they each interrogate imagination, memory, play, and fantasy as integral to

people's investment in the practices that allow them refuge from a cruel world in order to reengage the knots of their life. Then there are the forms of melancholia that patients insist upon as forms of protest and resistance (Dufourmantelle, 2019). I am interested in the ways that the life of these concepts can shape and reshape responses to collective and socio-psychic, economic, religious, and political activity in the process of self-realization. I am likewise engaged in asking how theories of the psyche involve concepts that have particular histories within a community, each nestled within a globe of communities.

During interviews, my interlocutors spoke profoundly regarding the roots of their despair and afflictions, linking theories of the soul/self to an image of the individual Yemeni and the Yemeni collective. These connections underscore their ambivalence to their own resilience amidst the war, which they claim overlooks the many ways they are also oscillating between refuge and despair. They attributed the rise in mental health crises within the Yemeni population to a lack of cohesion within the Arab/Muslim world, as following the onset of fighting they were banned from traveling to many neighboring countries and refused the status of refugees, signifying their expulsion from the Islamic community. Whether due to sentiments of regionalism within Yemen or increasing nationalism and xenophobia (and an end of a supposed pan-Arab solidarity) throughout the Arab/Muslim world, my interlocutors linked their sense of wellbeing to a collective Muslim identity and being recognized as persons by their *umma*. They argued that affinity within a transnational Muslim collectivity should provide the foundation for justice, mutual aid, hospitality, and reciprocity. Yet many Yemenis fleeing to Jordan, Egypt, and Gulf countries found themselves unable to secure housing, temporary work, or even renew their visitor visas. My interlocutors described the estrangement they felt in neighboring countries as a constriction of their soul and expressed an inability to enter receptive exchanges with others, regardless of their political differences or views on the war in Yemen. The widespread image of the Yemeni as a beggar, migrant, villager, laborer, or enlisted soldier in these host countries led many of my interlocutors to return to Yemen, and many others to withhold demanding basic necessities in the foreign countries to which they fled. Yemenis traveling outside of Yemen felt a constriction in their *nafs*, in their ability to desire and their ability to reproduce the space of desire. Given that making a demand depends on a person's expectation that they will be heard by others, the instability of the image of the Yemeni in the eyes of the other means that the act of making demands risks barring individuals from desire. The constriction of their *nafs* that my interlocutors feared therefore represents the crushing of desire, the engine of their soul. Yet, the image Yemenis have of themselves of their history does not correspond to this impoverished image.

The relationship between desire, the law, and the image crystalized when I continued further work with Yemeni women psychologists and activists. Namely, I found that many of these women have turned to art, storytelling, and filmmaking to address the crisis of mental health in Yemen and in the diaspora. When I began to interview artists and filmmakers, many explained that they had participated in the Arab Spring protests as teenagers and later turned to *hiw'yat* outside of the study of medicine, engineering, science, and technology. *Hiw'yat*, which translates to both passion and hobby, comes from the root *hawa*, meaning air, fan, and ventilator. By using this term to claim their *hiw'yat* as careers, my interlocutors were noting the necessity to resuscitate desire in their labor practices. Further, they noted that a number of cultural centers have emerged in Yemen since the war began that tend to post-traumatic disorders through art and music; such centers were not popular prior to the war. In turn, these artists are looking inward within their communities to what they tellingly described as that which is already circulating within.

The image of the impoverished Yemeni has led aspiring filmmakers, artists, and musicians (in part inspired by the 2011 Arab uprisings) to work on media that memorializes Yemeni folklore, poetry, architecture, theater, and oral history (Baabbad, 2016). A number of these artists, many returning to Yemen after time abroad, are producing work that documents life in Yemen and the ongoing effects of the war. These projects tackle the erasure of oral traditions and memory, the reimagining of Yemen in both the Arab/Muslim world and in the Western gaze, and the obliteration of historical landmarks. Whereas the arts and theatre flourished in the 1970s and 1980s where it was heavily influenced by Arab nationalism, the country's unification and civil war in the 1990s, in conjunction with the rise in the Islamist movements (*Islah*), led to a diminishment of the arts in the public sphere until the recent renaissance.

An artistic and cinematic focus on the Yemeni and the place of Yemen in the Islamic world and within the history of the Southern Arabian Peninsula became increasingly common during the Arab Spring and the current conflict. The Arab Spring protests in Yemen, for example, saw plays, concerts, and poetry performed at rallies to a public ready to receive them. An aspiring Yemeni filmmaker recently reflected on the rise of the neorealist film movement during the Islamic revolution in Iran and the rise in cinematic production in Yemen amidst the 2015 war (Assabahi, 2021). He noted certain lessons that Yemeni filmmakers could learn from their Iranian counterparts in order to chart a distinct future for cinema in Yemen, capturing the realism of everyday mundane scenes, rural landscapes, and use of non-scripted actors seen in the films of Abbas Kiarostami. This movement toward art and film is viewed by my interlocutors as a response to the numbness and sterility of everyday life and the lack of conditions and material resources to make films, even to desire (Assabahi, 2021). They note that Islam plays a role in people's ability to momentarily inhabit spaces of refuge within the wider context of the ongoing war, curbing their looming despair. Further, the turn to art and film is a way to spark self-reflection around what they understand as a problem of recollection and meaning. My interlocutors' insights into the role of desire in animating the soul, the image of the Yemeni, and psychic wellbeing led me to consider the very psychic framework which knits together desire, the law, and its reproduction.

More importantly, my interlocutors explicitly note this importance of the Islamic faith and the intervention of the Divine to their theories of the soul/self/psyche and illnesses of the heart, including depression, melancholia, paranoia, and depersonalization. Within much of the Muslim world, a person's evaluation for moral-legal competence includes an assessment of their physical and mental capacity to perform religious and social obligations. My interlocutors cite how the jurisprudential function of absolving mentally ill persons of individual responsibility (*taklif*) places the patient outside of the symbolic order with respect to both positive and divine law (Alaghrabi, 2020, pp. 179-192). Although other interlocutors, many of them clinical psychologists, view the reduction of mental illness to spiritual malaise as backward, traditional, and unscientific, there remains a symbolic function to this relationship between desire and the law. Most saliently, it opens up a space of refuge that invites invention.

Conclusion— Toward a New Science: Psychoanalysis and Islam

Over the course of my fieldwork, my conversations with my Yemeni interlocutors in the diaspora were echoed in those with physicians and patients in the hospitals in which I conducted fieldwork in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, guiding my thinking around the potentiality of thinking within and across traditions. I found Muslim physicians cultivating and modulating affinity within the patient-doctor relationship, what I trace as the transference within the clinic, in order to guide treatment plans and redirect patients' desire in order to avoid arrogating power to the physician. Arrogating power to western medicine, western models of psychoanalysis, physicians, and/or analysts remains, as Freud (1910/2002) reminds us, a resistance to recovery by binding patients further to the institution (p. 27).

Many laypersons dealing with psychic and physical ailments utilized theoretical frameworks of the soul and psyche to speak about their conditions. Many practitioners conceived of mental health challenges in a similar way, reflected in the beginning of clinical trials of prophetic medical regimes in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; these practitioners often noted that Ibn al-Qaayim, author of Prophetic medicine and one of the compilers of the Prophet's sayings and doings regarding health and illness, himself utilized Greco-Arabic medical frameworks to speak about the psyche, body, and physiology. The potentiality in Islam's legal, mystical (Sufi), philosophical, and medical traditions, including Prophetic medicine and Quranic cures, provide physicians and patients with the tools to navigate the otherwise fragmented sociopolitical and economic landscapes they occupy. This is not to romanticize Islam, but to address the limits of practices aimed at securing *'afiya* given the ways that many contemporary practitioners position healing and mental wellness in opposition to traditional practices. If borrowing tools across traditions—Islamic, psychoanalytic, and prophetic—can help to better address mental health challenges within Muslim communities, then may they

be acknowledged and pursued further.

My own critical reflection on the encounter between psychoanalysis and Islam, its productivity and limits, is rooted in a specific perspective. Namely, the examples that have shaped my thinking about what I consider refuge in Islam are not sublimatory religious practices, but rather are derived from analytical practices of relationality and the encounters of my interlocutors with theories of the soul/psyche/self. My work with both physicians and patients in Yemen and the Yemeni diaspora alike has revealed inflections of Islamic ethics on medical practice, the dissemination of biomedical treatments, and the use of theories of the soul/self in order to guide treatment and focus on relationality within clinical settings. The physicians I have worked with emphasize the necessity of engaging with others to cultivate various modes of knowing beyond the biomedical.

My argument here is that psychoanalysis's relation to religions, traditions, and religious practices cannot simply be limited to the registers of sublimation or identity politics. Rather, these relationships need to take seriously the histories at play for both analysts and analysands. In turn, psychoanalysis's encounter with traditions/religions can generate waves for inventions, reformulating models of psychotherapy that not only enable both analyst and analysand to address the singularity of an individual's symptoms, but also to transform thought within traditions.

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