

A Critique of Islāmic Liberation Psychology

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The colonisation and globalisation of psychological knowledge has been increasingly criticised for their ‘Orientalist’ and ‘Eurocentric’ perspectives and biases. In relation to the effects of globalisation on psychology, one can identify its effects on the individual Muslim psychologists’ world view and identify, the shaping and dissemination of both psychological knowledge and clinical practice. There has been a propagation of the literature focusing on the de-colonisation of psychological science. Globalisation has now replaced colonialism, like ‘old wine in a new bottle’! Contemporary scholars have expressed increasing interest in psychology’s development in third-world contexts, and Martín-Baró’s liberation psychology is an example of one such psychology. This approach to psychology is an indigenous approach bridging the gap between the personal and the political and championing the cause of social justice and equality. There are also those who advocated a liberation psychology from an Islāmic perspective. This paper critically examines the meta-theoretical propositions made by Mohr on liberation psychology from an Islāmic perspective.

Keywords: Colonisation; Globalisation; Islamic; Liberal; Psychology

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Introduction

Islamic scholars have produced a very rich scholarly legacy on human psychology since the rise of the Islāmic civilization and for more than fourteen centuries. During the past four decades or more there has been an Islāmic awakening (*as-Ṣaḥwah l-’Islāmiyyah*) motivated by a desire to return to the fundamental of Islāmic teaching and practices based on the Qur’ān and Sunnah, and the work of Islāmic scholars (Rassool & Luqman, 2022). Rassool (2021) maintained that “The emergence, current conceptualisations and the status of Islāmic psychology should be viewed in their broader context, namely, the Islamisation of Knowledge (IOK) movement.” (p.4). The colonisation and globalisation of psychological knowledge has been increasingly criticised for their ‘Orientalist’ and ‘Eurocentric’ perspectives and biases. There has been a propagation of the literature focusing on the de-colonisation of psychological science (Adams et al., 2015; Bulhan, 2015; Dudgeon & Walker, 2015; Lacerda, 2015; Adams et al., 2018; Gómez-Ordóñez *et al.*, 2021; Seedat, 2020).

Globalisation has now replaced colonialism, like ‘old wine in a new bottle’! In relation to the effects of globalisation on psychology, one can identify its effects on the individual Muslim psychologists’ world view and identify, the shaping and dissemination of both psychological knowledge and clinical practice. This is not dissimilar to the effects of globalisation on mental health (Kirmayer & Minas, 2000). Contemporary scholars have expressed increasing interest in psychology’s development in third-world contexts, and Martín-Baró’s (1986) liberation psychology is an example of one such psychology. This approach to psychology is an indigenous approach bridging the gap between the personal and the political and championing the cause of social justice and equality. For a liberation psychology from an Islāmic perspective (see Ali-Faisal, 2020; Mohr, 2019). This paper critically examines the meta-theoretical propositions made by Mohr on liberation psychology from an Islāmic perspective.

Context

Mohr (2019) suggested that “Liberation psychology is an emerging field of psychological theory with an orientation towards justice as the telos

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of psychology. Rejecting the traditional European psychological practices which have based psychological work on the isolated individual, liberation psychology theorizes that individual wellness is inextricably connected to societal forces of oppression.” (p.1). The notion of liberation psychology from an Islamic Perspective, according to Mohr (2019) “could start from Islamic principles, particularly tawhid as the overarching metaphysical principle, and justice as the practical implementation, including the importance of using approaches that draw from our own tradition...suggesting that an Islamic liberation psychology approach would involve practicing tawhid in affirming all persons’ full humanity, and cultivating a personal and community approach to wellness that prioritizes right relationship to the environment. Finally, a liberation psychology approach could entail consciously advocating for violence to be framed and addressed in relationship to our community in ways that take seriously colonialism, imperialism, and racism.” (p.2). Mohr also suggested that liberation psychology is highly relevant for Muslim mental health and can be used as a theoretical framework that are consistent with Islāmic assumptions in rejecting oppression, and it also addresses the impact of violence on individuals and communities.

There are several challenges within the field of liberation psychology in its application to ‘Islam and Psychology’ movement. The critiques will be levelled at liberation psychology by utilising sources from an Islāmic perspective derived from the Qur’ān, Sunnah, and classical scholars.

Critique of Liberation psychology from an Islamic perspective

One of the main criticisms is the view that liberal psychology bases its work around Latin-America’s geo-socio-political dimension focusing of social issues. These socio-political issues include oppression, poverty, war, forced relocation, genocide, political repression, gender, and race. The liberation psychology movement (Martín-Baró, 1994) was inspired by liberation theology (Gutierrez, 1988), and the critical pedagogy of Freire (1993). However what Martín-Baró was arguing is having a paradigm shift in psychology, but his conceptualisation was focused upon the practice of psychology in Latin America. Whether liberation psychology applies equally to different regions and countries on a global scale is debatable, especially in Muslim majority countries, with different political, psychosocial, and religious identities. In addition, liberation psychology is based on liberation theology which is Jesuit-Christian based theology. Although

there are some common grounds between Christian theology and Islāmic theology in an attempt to address the problems of poverty and social injustice, there exists still a wide diversity in approaches between the two theologies about how best to serve a wide range of individuals and communities.

One of the claims of liberation psychology is the application of ‘conscientization’ as the process through which “individuals develop a greater capacity to reflect, interpret, and act for the promotion of positive change.” (Dykstra, 2020, p.9). This statement is quite welcoming as it is no surprise that reflection, contemplation, and action are much-emphasised theme in the Qur’ān. In fact, Allāh, the Almighty, encourages us to frequently engage in this type of contemplation so that, as individuals, we can promote positive change. In the Qur’ān, The Almighty, “repeatedly exhorts us to reflect, ponder, give thought, reason, consider, and discern. It simply consists of thinking about our present world and beyond and striving to attain deeper faith and self-improvement through it” (Awais, 2021). Allāh says in the Qur’ān:

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muḥammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded. (Sad 38:29-interpretation of the meaning).

Dykstra (2020) also viewed psychology as “an ethical-political endeavour. Its practices are influenced by and influence our societies.” (p.9). This ethical-political dimension is echoed in the work of the late Fazlur Rahman, a scholar of Islāmic thought. Rahman (1980) argued that in its initial phase Islam was moved by a deep rational and moral concern for reforming society. Islāmic ethics differ from the Western concept as the sources of ethical and moral values from the Qur’ān, and from the practices of Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ). The Qur’ān is abounding with clear messages pertaining to ethical values (*akhlaq*), which transcend the limitations of time, place, and tradition. The best example of ethics is in the life of the Prophet (ﷺ) himself. When Aisha (May Allāh be pleased with her), Mother of the believers, was asked about the character of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), Aisha said, “Have you not read the Qur’ān?” I said, “Of course.” Aisha said,

“Verily, the character of the Prophet of Allāh was the Qur’ān.” (An-Nasa’i (a)).

The point of reference for the moral good and for distinguishing right from wrong is exemplified in the contents in one of the chapters of the Qur’ān, entitled The Criterion (Furqan: 25). Thus, “Islam’s beginnings are thus rooted in the idea of the divine command as a basis for establishing moral order through human endeavour (Nanji, 1991, p.2.) The Qur’ān affirms the ethical dimensions of human and social life by redressing injustice in economic and social life. This is encouraged at both individual and community level through the process of *Zakat* (compulsory almsgiving. 2.5% of their wealth must then be given) and *Sadaqah* (charity). Nanji (1991) maintained that “Ethical criteria that can govern issues of economic and social justice and moral strategies for dealing with questions of poverty and imbalance have taken up the greater share of Muslim attention in ethical matters.” (p.11).

Justice has an important position in Islam and is one of the important principles of Islam’s ethical system. The whole concept of justice in Islam is rooted in God’s Divine nature. According to Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, “Justice means equality. The fair treatment of people, the quality of being fair or reasonable and the legal system used to punish people who have committed crimes. (p.236). Allah says in the Qur’ān:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ

Verily, God does not do even an atom’s weight of injustice” (An-Nisa 4:40-interpretation of the meaning).

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) narrated that Allah, the Exalted, and Glorious, said; ‘O My slaves, I have prohibited Myself injustice; and have made oppression unlawful for you, so do not oppress one another (Riyad as-Salihin). In relation to justice, it is narrated by Abu Sa’id al-Khudri that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said: The best fighting (*jihad*) in the path of Allāh is (to speak) a word of justice to an oppressive ruler (Abu Dawud (a)). In another Hadith about justice, it is narrated by Abu Hurairah that Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) said, "There is a *Sadaqah* [charity] to be given for every joint of the human body; and for every day on which the sun rises there is a reward of a *Sadaqa* (i.e., charitable gift) for the one who establishes justice among people." (Bukhārī (a)) The need to overcome oppression is also found in a hadith of

Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ). It is narrated by Ali ibn Abu Talib that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: If only one day of this time (world) remained, Allāh would raise up a man from my family who would fill this earth with justice as it has been filled with oppression (Abu Dawud (b)).

Mohr (2019) stated that “Liberation psychology from an Islāmic perspective, then, involves working from psychological approaches and paradigms that are informed by indigenous cultural values and concepts.” (p.6). How can this be applicable in practice is beyond conception? Does this mean that a liberation psychology from an Islāmic perspective is based on indigenous cultural values and concepts? Muslims are not a homogeneous group of communities. They are heterogeneous communities with a diversity of ethnic, race and cultural values and are bonded together by Islāmic beliefs and practices. Indigenous cultural habits and patterns of behaviour have nothing to do with Islāmic beliefs and practices. Islam is a global religion and thus promotes a universal Islāmic culture rather than the monogenesis culture. The claim by Mohr that “Islāmic psychological approaches need to take seriously the concept of *Tawhid* and work to be aligned with this basic principle,” (p.7) is pure resemblance to tautology. Most approaches of Islāmic psychology are based on the *Tawhid* paradigm, and this is well documented in the literature.

However, there are many controversial and unsubstantiated statements made by Mohr which needed further critical examinations and refutations. Mohr argued that the implications of Tawhidic principles should be based on human rights and ecological justice. Mohr proposed that “For an authentically Islāmic approach to liberation psychology, the overall conception of the human person needs to be consistent with Islāmic values and with the goal of justice. Explicitly affirming and embracing the full humanity of Liberation Psychology from an Islāmic Perspective women, the poor, people of colour, and the LGBTQ community is a core piece of an Islāmicly informed liberation psychology.” (p.7-8).

The importance of Tawhid for women’s rights is the central point for many Muslim women writing on the topic of gender justice (Wadud 1999, 2006.) Amina Wadud, an American Muslim theologian, and Professor Emeritus of Islāmic Studies made international headlines in 2005 when she led Friday prayers at a mixed congregation in New York, which caused controversy in some spheres of the Islāmic world. Mohr is supportive of Amina Wadud’s (1999, 2006)

hermeneutic interpretation of the Qur'ān with the identification of justice as a central principle of God's relationship to creation. She maintained that "The idea that there are hermeneutical principles which can guide the reading of the Qur'ān and open up possibilities for feminisms which differ from traditional and more patriarchal readings of the tradition is almost universal among Muslim women writing on gender justice." (p.8). She went on to suggest that "there is currently a huge movement globally for a progressive interpretation of Islam, for a world where the views of progressive Muslims are valued and set the standard for the way that Muslims and Muslim-majority states view major social issues." (p.9). She also suggested that "applying *Tawhid*, working from a liberation psychology orientation, means honouring the experiences of women, LGBTQ people, and all people," and "for an Islāmic psychology to be a liberation psychology, it must include an emphasis on human rights." (p. 9).

Ali-Faisal (2020) has also proposed Islāmic anti-patriarchal liberation psychology framework "to guide psychological knowledge production and application within contexts in which some or most people identify as Muslim." The author recommended three essential tasks of liberation psychology; "The first task requires the privileging of Muslim voices, with Muslims being conceptualised as diverse, racialised peoples. The second task involves challenging the internalisation of colonial ways of thinking among Muslims. The final task asks researchers and practitioners to recover Islāmic histories of scholarship, Muslims' sense of community, and queer and feminine ways of being. Together, these tasks can provide an adaptable guide for psychological knowledge production and application for Muslims in a wide variety of contexts." (p.343). Ali-Faisal (2020) argues that Islāmic anti-patriarchal psychology begins by challenging the "patriarchal interpretations of Islam through re-reading the Islāmic texts" (p. 351). This is the genre of Islāmic "liberated" psychology as espoused by both Mohr (2019) and Ali-Faisal (2020).

Does Islāmic psychology need a theoretical framework based on a liberation psychology from an Islāmic perspective? To answer this question, we need to revert back to the Qur'ān and Sunnah. Allāh says in the Qur'ān:

الْيَوْمَ يَنْسُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ دِينِكُمْ فَلَا تَحْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِ الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islām as religion. (Al-Ma'idah 5:3-interpretation of the meaning).

According to the Tafisr of ibn Kathir, (This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.) " This, indeed, is the biggest favour from Allāh to this Ummah, for He has completed their religion for them, and they, thus, do not need any other religion or any other Prophet except Muhammad. This is why Allāh made Muhammad the Final Prophet and sent him to all humans and Jinn. Therefore, the permissible is what he allows, the impermissible is what he prohibits, the Law is what he legislates and everything that he conveys is true and authentic and does not contain lies or contradictions." There is also an authentic Hadith echoing what Allāh, the Almighty, has said: It is narrated by Tariq bin Shibab that Some Jews said, "Had this verse been revealed to us, we would have taken that day as `Id (festival)." `Umar said, "What verse?" They said: "This day I have Perfected your religion for you, Completed My Favor upon you And have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (Al-Ma'idah 5.3) `Umar said, "I know the place where it was revealed; It was revealed while Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) was staying at `Arafat." (Bukhārī (b)).

These sources of knowledge confirmed that the religion of Islam has been completed and there is no need to add new narrative. Shaykh Salih Fawzan stated that this verse "contains a testimony from Allāh, the Perfect and Most High, that this religion is complete and that it covers everything of benefit to the servants and that it contains a solution for all of their issues and problems until the Establishment of the Hour. And that is suitable for every time and place; they do not need any other legislation after it or any other book to come down or any other messenger to be sent after the Messenger (ﷺ). Why the need to include human rights, environmental justice, fighting the effects of oppression or liberating the 'oppressed' Muslim women when both the Qur'ān and hadiths confirmed the completion of the religion of Islam.

In relation to human rights, it is worth noting that the first written Constitution of Medina (also known as The Medina Charter or the Charter of Medina) was drafted and declared by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)

in the year 622 AD. This remarkable political-constitutional document and the first written constitution of democracy in human history, was meant for the ten thousand-strong multi religious citizens of the state of Medina, including Jews and other non-Muslims and their non-Muslim allied tribes.

The Constitution guaranteed the protection of human rights, the protection of women rights, social rights, cultural rights, religious freedom, and the rights of minorities living in the state. It declared Medina a State of peace and security, free from every kind of violence and terrorism. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) subsequently established the first Islāmic state (Tahir-ul-Qadri, 2012, p.5).

In relation to the oppression of women, at the social level, the Qur'ān and Sunnah emphasise equity and parity between men and women, their functions in marriage, family, and society, and include a concern for ameliorating the status of women. This was achieved through the “abolition of pre-Islāmic practices such as female infanticide, and women new rights. Among these were the rights of ownership of property, inheritance, the right to contract marriage and to initiate divorce, if necessary, and to maintain one's own dowry. Polygyny, the plurality of wives, was regulated and restricted, so that a male was permitted to have up to four wives, but only if he could treat them with equity. “(Nanji, 1991, p.4). It has been suggested that there is no textual ruling in the Qur'ān and in the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) and in the consensus of scholars to deprive women of public and political rights as well (Abd al-Ḥakīm Ḥasan, 1983, p.296); and that women were not excluded from public life (Kamali, 2002, p.72).

In fact, there is no need to have a liberation psychology from an Islāmic perspective as proposed by Mohr. With the advent of Islam, humankind was liberated from oppression, violence, injustice, infanticide, and exploitation of women etc. Abdu-Rahman & Sultan (2018) suggested that Islāmic liberation theology emerged when the Qur'ān started to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). The Qur'ān seeks to liberate people from all kinds of sufferings and in different ways (socioeconomic and theological). Islam denounced injustice and oppression and condemned the prevailing social system of Makkah. With the message of the Qur'ān, Islam proclaimed liberation, freedom, justice, and equality. It was stated that all

people are equal before God and there is no entity that deserves to be worshiped but He (God) (Al-Baqarah, 2:255).” In many ways, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) liberated humankind from oppression and strive for the construction of a just society that impart collectivistic, holistic orientations and include human rights, equity, fairness, equality, fraternity, and justice. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) “worked for the liberation of the oppressed, the poor, the needy and the ignorant. In his project of liberation, he was not just a prophet, teacher, and philosopher, but also an activist who sacrificed his life for justice and equality.” (Abdu-Rahman & Sultan, 2018).

Conclusion

The adoption of a liberation psychology from an Islamic perspective proposed by Mohr does not fit in the creed of followers of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā'ah* because of its extensive overtones and nuances of that opposed the Shar'iah, the teaching in the Qur'ān and Sunnah. As Muslims we generally seek to overcome oppression, social injustice, social exclusion, Islamophobia, microaggression and both physical and verbal abuse. This mandates are applicable to ‘cultural’ Muslims and non-Muslims and they should enjoy fair rights as well. Safwan b. Sulaim quoted the authority of a number of the sons of the Companions of God’s Messenger who told on the authority of their fathers that God’s Messenger (ﷺ) said, “If anyone wrongs a man with whom a covenant has been made, or curtails any right of his, or imposes on him more than he can bear, or takes anything from him without his ready agreement, I shall be his adversary on the day of resurrection.”(Abu Dawud (c)). Islam does not need to be liberated by the shackles of liberation psychology in whatever forms or approaches. Allah says in the Qur'ān; “Today I have completed your religion for you, perfected My favor upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion. (Al-Ma'idah 5:3, interpretation of the meaning). There is absolutely no need to apply hermeneutical principles to guide the reading of the Qur'ān and open up possibilities for inauthentic exegeses of the Qur'ān from the lens of Orientalist Muslims and feminisms. Besides, there is no room whatsoever for amending anything from it, whether it be a simple or a trivial thing being amended. On the authority of Abu Najeeh al-'Irbaad ibn Saariyah (may Allah be pleased with him) who

said that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) stated that "Beware of newly invented matters [in the religion], for verily every *bidah* (innovation) is misguidance (Abu Dawud (d)). In another Hadith, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said that "Every misguidance is (a cause to enter) the Fire." (An-Nasa'I (b)). Imam Malik said, "Whosoever introduces into Islam an innovation, which he deems is good, then he has claimed that Muhammad (ﷺ) has betrayed (the trust of conveying) the Message. Read the saying of Allah, the Mighty and Majestic – 'This day I have completed your Religion for you, and I have perfected My favour upon you, and I am pleased with Islam as a Religion for you.' ; so, whatever was not (part of) the Religion on that day, is not (part of) the Religion on this day. And the last part of this Ummah will not be rectified, except by that which its first part was rectified by." (Imam ash-Shatibi). Above all, we are mandated as Muslims to embrace the diversity and heterogeneity of the Muslim community, and to listen and act on behalf of the silent majority but this has to be undertaken in accordance with the Qur'ān and Sunnah. Allah knows best.

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