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Contextualizing Al-nafs: A Critique of Badri's Historical Account of Islamic Psychology

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Abstract

The movement toward indigenizing psychology within an Islamic context has ignited controversies among historians of psychology regarding the discipline's purported origins in the Islamic Golden Age. Malik Badri, a prominent figure in the Islamic Psychology subfield, claims that Persian Muslim polymath Abu Zayd Al-Balkhi pioneered CBT in the 9th century. However, Badri neglects to contextualize a key concept within Al-Balkhi's manuscript and Islamic Psychology at large, al-nafs, by equating it with the terms "psyche and "mind." In the current study, I explore the historical narratives of mental health paradigms from the Islamic Golden Age in order to contextualize the meaning of al-nafs, differentiating it from the mind and psyche. This historical analysis forms the foundation for addressing historiographical disputes and evaluating the most valuable approach when conducting a history of Islamic Psychology. The study also aims to contextualize Badri's inclination for making priority claims by establishing a conceptual framework for his approach to Islamizing psychology. The findings reveal the continuity of al-nafs from medieval Muslim philosophy, particularly Al-Ghazali's typology of the Islamic soul, to present-day mental health explanatory models among Muslim scholars and spiritual practitioners. Given this intellectual lineage, I suggest that future studies adopt a two-pronged approach: a social historiography to deepen understanding of the meaning behind al-nafs as it was conceived by early Muslim scholars like Al-Balkhi and Al-Ghazali, alongside a philosophical and intellectual history of Islamic Psychology that contextualizes the development of al-nafs and the emergence of an Islamic epistemological psychology paradigm.

Keywords: Al-nafs, Malik Badri, Islamic Psychology, historiography of psychology, Islamic Golden Age

Contextualizing *Al-nafs*: A Critique of Badri's Historical Account of Islamic Psychology

Sudanese-born Muslim psychologist Malik Babikir Badri believes the problem with secular North American and Northwestern European practical psychology is that it neglects the spiritual dimension (2018). Trained and educated in clinical psychology at the University of London during the 1960s, he taught psychology from an Islamic perspective at many universities in Muslim countries including Saudi Arabia and Malaysia (Rothma, et al., 2022). In his book, *The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists*, Badri urges and guides Muslim psychologists to abandon "Western" influences in their practice (1979). In 2017, Badri established The International Association of Islamic Psychology, which encapsulated his vision for an institution that teaches, publishes, trains, and certifies in the field of Islamic Psychology (Rothman et al., 2022). The association's website credits Badri's 1979 book as having "revolutionized and defined the [Islamic Psychology] field," labeling him "the founder of the modern field of Islamic Psychology" (Advisory Board | Islamicpsychology, n.d.).

Since the book's release, considerable effort has been made to indigenize psychology within an Islamic context. As a growing field, disagreement over the definition and parameters of what constitutes Islamic Psychology (Al-Karam, 2018) is ever-present. Many argue that Islamic Psychology has its origins in the Islamic Golden Age (c. 8-14th century C.E.) and that psychological concepts from this period form the bedrock of developments that emerged in the "West" nearly a millennia later (Badri, 2018; 2013; Mitha, 2020; Rassool & Luqman, 2022b; Haque, 2004; Awaad & Ali, 2015; 2016; Awaad et. al, 2018).

Translation of *Al-nafs*

In his critical translation of a medieval Arabic medical treatise, *Sustenance of the Soul* (مصالح الأنفس), Badri (2013) proposed that a contemporary psychotherapeutic approach, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), was in fact pioneered in the eighth century by Persian Muslim physician and polymath Abu Zayd Al-Balkhi (850-934). Badri bases this argument on his examination of Al-Balkhi's manuscript, which mirrors contemporary classifications of anxiety disorders and resembles CBT treatment techniques (2013). Similarly, Awaad and Ali argue that Al-Balkhi should be credited with differentiating obsessions as a distinct disorder and that his classification system is almost identical to the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and Specific Phobias (2015; 2016)

In the introduction to *Sustenance of the Soul*, Badri writes that Al-Balkhi stresses "the importance of sustaining the health of the *nafs* or soul, a synonym to the modern conception of the psyche or mind, but with an Islamic spiritual dimension" (2013, p.11). There is an undeniable lack of a clear distinction between the soul and the psyche in the Arabic language. In certain contexts, "psyche" is the translation for "*nafs*," and in others, "*nafs*" can mean "soul," "self," "spirit," "ego," and "mind."[1] What would once have been translated and understood as "knowledge of the soul" (*'ilm al-nafs*) is now read straightforwardly as "psychology" (Rothman & Coyle, 2018, p.1738). This partially reflects the fact that the term "*al-nafs*" has varying interpretations and meanings in the Qur'ān[2] (The Quranic Arabic Corpus - Quran Dictionary, n.d.). However, Badri is not reflexive about his methodology for translation, nor does he provide

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[1] On Google Translate, "self" is the first result as the English translation for النفس (*al-nafs*).

[2] Transliterations of Arabic words followed the "Instructions for Authors" in the Encyclopedia of Islamic (3rd ed). Words in quotes or in direct reference to sources did not follow rules for transliteration.

a definition for either the psyche[3] or the mind[4], despite co-authoring a 120-page dictionary of "psychiatric and psychological terms" in Arabic, English, and French.

Additionally, the ontological differences between the *nafs* and the psyche or the mind have implications for how each is understood, studied, and applied in practice, which highlights the need for clear conceptual and categorical distinction. Does the Islamic concept of the *nafs* have meaningful moral underpinnings that differentiates it from the psyche and mind? What are the reasons and implications for Badri's equivalence? What is *al-nafs* in medieval Islamic medicine and philosophy? The aim of this study is to investigate its meaning, which is otherwise dismissed by Badri.

In order to grasp the Islamic conception of the soul and Badri's correlation of the *nafs* with the psyche or mind, I focus on establishing a conceptual framework through an exploration of existing scholarly literature regarding the etiology of the *nafs*, its significance within early Islamic philosophy, and its impact on contemporary conceptions. This is especially important since conceptions of the soul born out of Islamic philosophy from the Middle Ages are still relevant to contemporary Muslims and Islamic scholars other than Badri (Fakhry, 2004; Rothman & Coyle, 2018). Moreover, the spiritual dimension that the concept of the *nafs* offers arguably has greater therapeutic utility among Muslim communities than other forms of clinical

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[3] The APA defines psyche as "*n*. in psychology, the mind in its totality, as distinguished from the physical organism. The term, which historically had come to refer to the soul or the very essence of life, derives from the character of Psyche in Greek mythology, a beautiful princess who, at the behest of her divine lover, Eros, son of Aphrodite, is made immortal by Zeus." (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, n.d.)

[4] The APA defines mind as *"n.* broadly, all intellectual and psychological phenomena of an organism, encompassing motivational, affective, behavioral, perceptual, and cognitive systems; that is, the organized totality of an organism's mental and psychic processes and the structural and functional cognitive components on which they depend. The term, however, is also used more narrowly to denote only cognitive activities and functions, such as perceiving, attending, thinking, problem solving, language, learning, and memory. The nature of the relationship between the mind and the body, including the brain and its mechanisms or activities, has been, and continues to be, the subject of much debate. See mind–body problem; philosophy of mind." (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, n.d.)

approaches accepted and practiced by medical professionals today (Al-Issa, 2000; Mitha, 2020; Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

Debates in the Historiography of Psychology

Some historians of science argue that appeals to priority, like Badri's assertion about Al-Balkhi being the first cognitive-behavioral therapist in history, are guilty of "presentism" – imposing contemporary categories on the past (2015, p.373). Adrian Brock draws attention to an epistemological threat in the history of psychology, specifically the decontextualizing of antique texts. He also warns that priority discourse may be a vehicle for nationalism under the guise of efforts to be more inclusive. The disagreement over priority claims reveals controversy within the field of the history of psychology, with two opposing camps: those who claim that the history of modern psychology began in the Islamic Golden Age and those who argue it began in the 19th century because there was no such subject beforehand (Brock, 2015; Green, 2008).

This controversy falls under the larger umbrella of scholarship surrounding universalism, indigenization, polycentrism, social constructivism, and reflexivity in the past forty years or so[5] (Backhouse & Fontaine, 2014). Sometimes referred to as the "social turn" in the history of psychology (Araujo, 2017, p.89), this shift followed epistemological trends in the field of history of science at the time. The new approach to historiography was notably advanced by American and British historians of psychology, including Kurt Danziger (1994, 2006), Roger Smith (2005, 2007), Wade E. Pickren (2009, 2010), and numerous others.[6] They typically argue against claims

[5] There are inconsistencies in the literature regarding the precise date when this shift in the historiography of psychology began. While some scholars claim it happened in the latter half of the 1960s (Araujo, 2017; Watrin, 2017), others have stated that significant developments occurred after the 1970s.

[6] Pickren (2009) and Danziger (1994, 2006) were very influential in advocating for a polycentric history of modern psychology, which aims to provide a global perspective that highlights power dynamics and knowledge exchanges resulting from the process of globalization. The local conditions of scholars from diverse national backgrounds play a crucial role in the development and diversification of sub-disciplines in psychology. Additionally, they assert that

of the universal validity of psychological concepts and practices, emphasizing that scientific knowledge is intricately tied to the political, economic, institutional, and social context from which it emerges, and is also a product of the researcher's knowledge interests and choices of methodology (Rutherford, 2014).

The social approach gained popularity as a promising new frontier in the historiography of psychology, offering a critical, contextual, and comprehensive outlook that underscores the historically situated, culturally bound, and "locally grounded" (Danziger, 2006, p.220) production of psychological knowledge (Brock, 2016; Araujo, 2016; 2017).[7] Despite these trends shaping what appears to be a historically accurate narrative, philosopher and historian of psychology Saulo de Freitas Araujo (2016, 2017) argues that consensus on a methodology in the historiography of psychology has yet to be reached. He contends that historians' chosen approach "seems to be guided by the subject matter and the questions raised" (p.12).

The current fashion of the new history of psychology has brought about much-contested scholarship.[8] A prominent example is the debate between Danziger (2013), and philosopher and psychologist Daniel N. Robinson (2013a, 2013b), in the December issue of the Theory &

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the indigenization of "Western"-centric, i.e., American and German, psychologies within other cultural contexts is an inherent and necessary quality of the discipline. See also Marsella (2013) – "All Psychologies Are Indigenous Psychologies."

[7] Danziger claims psychological knowledge production emerges from interactions among working psychologists and various influencing factors. These factors include their professional status, institutionalized practices, access to resources such as funding and training, specific knowledge interests and areas of specialization, affiliations with academic departments and individuals from diverse disciplinary fields, ideological inclinations or political engagements, and also the phenomenon of "intellectual migration" (2006, p. 221). This migration, he claims, involves the "unidirectional" transfer of psychological categories, objects, concepts, research methods, and practices from the discipline's centers – Germany in the 19th century and America in the 20th century – to the geographic and academic peripheries.

[8] Among its supporters and pioneers, Ian Hacking (1985; 1998; 2007) and Jeff Sugarman (2009, 2015) contribute to the understanding of historical ontology and the evolving nature of psychological categories. Some of Hacking's most important work emphasizes how unique experiences of being are shaped by socio-historical conditions, explaining that medical classifications create new *kinds of people* through dynamic interactions between language, institutions, experts, and patient-clinician relationships.

Psychology journal, which focused on the problem of continuity in the history of psychology. Their exchange is emblematic of the enduring tensions between the new wave of historians of psychology, led by figures like Danziger, who advocated for a social history of psychology that “can be traced back as far as the late 19th and early 20th century” (2013, p.830), and the traditionalists represented by scholars such as Robinson, who asserted that psychology’s intellectual roots date back to classical Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle. This variety of historiography has been dubbed “ahistorical,” “asocial,” “whiggish,” “presentist,” or “idealistic” from a contemporary vantage point by Danziger and his associates.[9]

Similar to Robinson’s intellectual history, Araujo (2016, 2017) proposes a philosophical history of psychology, which he claims addresses what social histories neglect. Specifically, he argues that the categories of a social constructivist approach (e.g., social, cultural, and discursive practices) fall short of capturing the profound meanings inherent in certain psychological undertakings that are fundamentally tied to "philosophical system[s]...and motivation[s]" (2017, p.11).[10] Although the field has progressed beyond Danziger's era, and in current times, Pickren would be more associated with work on the indigenization of psychology[11], the divergent approaches in the historiography of psychology, as highlighted in the 2013 debate, are particularly relevant to the current study due to the issue of conceptual continuity.

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[9] See Brock, 2014 – *Psychology in the modern sense.*

[10] De Freitas Araujo (2016) also highlights Lovett's (2006) observation concerning the uncritical adoption of theoretical assumptions, like “Kuhn's philosophy of science,” by the new generation of historians, drawing parallels with the mistakes associated with older forms of whiggism (p.13). Despite claims of reduced ideological bias, this style of history writing can still be as self-aggrandizing and riddled with preconceived notions as previous approaches. Robinson also remarks on the adherence of guild members to scientific orthodoxies, and that studying their behavior is likely to unveil issues within research methods in the history of science. Furthermore, De Freitas Araujo points out the necessity of acknowledging substantial differences in the conceptual and methodological approaches of sociological analyses, which consequently result in varying interpretations of historical data. Other scholars have highlighted historians' methodological choices lacking reflexivity (Smith, 2007; Brock, 2016; Rutherford, 2014). Danziger, for example, exclusively concentrates on the intellectual and geographical centers (German and American relations and psychologies) within the same texts where he advocates for a reflexive approach to investigate the international development of psychology.

[11] Although Pickren might have popularized it, he did not invent the term “indigenization.”

I do not intend to resolve historiographical disputes or propose a category to position early Muslim scholars in psychology's history. Instead, my aim is to critically examine Badri's historical analysis and representation of Islamic concepts like *al-nafs*. To achieve this, I will first arrive at a conceptual framework for Badri's influential approach to indigenizing psychology within an Islamic context. Gaining insight into Badri's perspective will help identify and contextualize the social, institutional, and political forces that motivated his translation of *Sustenance of the Soul* and appeals to priority. To provide sufficient context for understanding the meaning of *al-nafs*, I will establish a historical background of mental health paradigms during the Islamic Golden Age.

Concerning the problem of conceptual continuity, Robinson (2013) argued that psychology as a discipline is unified by *foundational* issues and contributions concerning human nature, which remain relevant to the field and have their origins in Aristotle's monumental works. He contended that historical discontinuity, i.e., a lack of clear causal links, does not necessarily entail conceptual discontinuity, nor does conceptual continuity imply "close similitude" (2013a, p.221). Instead, it demonstrates the persistent recurrence of ideas systematically studied, though not experimentally, by philosophers in ancient Greece until the present day.

According to Danziger's (2013) historical analysis, the evolution of the meaning of Aristotle's "psyche" (interchangeable with "soul") during 17th-century European metaphysical discourse represented a significant shift in psychology's focus. He contended that only in the 18th century did German universities establish a novel object of study, namely "the interior of a specifically human mind," which contrasted with an un-localized essence such as that of a psyche (ibid., p.832). This shift also brought about a new methodology, "the evidence of

self-observation" (ibid., p. 832). Furthermore, the language used to describe the "science of human nature" in 18th-century Northwestern Europe subsequently influenced the term "psychology" in the 19th century (ibid., p.834). As an experimental discipline, however, psychology possessed a fresh focus that deviated from the psyche or human nature. These changes further demarcated Aristotle's psychology from modern empirical psychology, the latter characterized by multiple objects of study that lacked a "soul in the Aristotelian sense" (2013, p. 832).[12]

However, the soul in the Islamic sense (*al-nafs*) is a central concept within Islamic Psychology (Rothman & Coyle, 2018). Although the *nafs* might not be the primary subject of research in Islamic Psychology, it remains a *foundational* psychological concept deeply rooted in Islamic philosophy from the Islamic Golden Age (Rothman & Coyle, 2018; Rasool & Luqman, 2022a; Mitha, 2020; Awaad et al., 2018; Haque, 2004). Furthermore, for Badri, the spiritual dimension offered by the *nafs* and the ontological assumptions about human nature within Islam constitute the precise boundary distinguishing American-British psychology from his paradigm of Islamic psychology (Khan, 2015; Rothman et al., 2022; Rassool & Luqman, 2022a). If the medieval Islamic conception of the *nafs* aligns with its present meaning, what implications does this hold for the issue of presentism in the process of indigenizing psychology within an Islamic context?

I aim to investigate whether there is a conceptual continuity of *al-nafs* in the history of Islamic Psychology, a concept systematically studied and medicalized by early Muslim scholars during the Islamic Golden Age. Additionally, this concept was theoretically developed through

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[12] Danziger continues, "[Robinson's] understanding of psychology's history has always relied on the belief that the concept of 'human nature' represents some historically unchanging essence guaranteeing continuity, no matter how great the gulf that appears to separate the present from the remote past. In this usage, 'human nature' is usually something located within the individual mind…the history of psychology now has a unifying object, but it is one whose boundaries are set only by assumptions about 'human nature.'" (2013, p.835)

an integration of ancient Greek philosophy and Islamic philosophy. As a result, one of the goals of this research is to determine the value and appropriateness of Danziger's or Robinson's historiographical approach to the history of Islamic Psychology.

Thesis Structure.

In the first section, I will establish Badri's conceptual framework and his definition of Islamic Psychology through his biography. He is, after all, the "father of modern Islamic Psychology" according to multiple sources (Rassool & Luqman, 2022a; Rothman et al., 2022; Sabreen, 2022; The Cognate; 2021; Oyelami, 2023; Awaad, 2021; IIIT, 2021). This analysis aims to identify the motivations behind his historical approach, enabling us to contextualize his central claims and perspective. Thus, it is necessary to initially address Badri's historical narrative regarding early Muslim scholars' presumed psychological contributions, in order to disentangle and distinguish it from other sources and knowledge about mental health paradigms during the Islamic Golden Age.

In the second section, I will provide context for both Badri's historical analysis and the concept of *al-nafs* through a brief overview of medical systems and notions of madness during the Islamic Golden Age. Relying on secondary sources, I will explore the existing scholarly literature on mental health paradigms from that era. This investigation is not an exhaustive examination of the local and discursive networks within which Al-Balkhi and his contemporaries were situated. More accurately it represents a loose genealogy of the development of Islamic philosophy and scholarship, the incorporation of ancient Greek medical theories and philosophy into medieval Islamic sciences, and their consequential impact on treatment modalities for mental illnesses and conceptions of mental health during that period.

In the third section, I will conduct a conceptual analysis of *al-nafs* and its meaning. Notably, conceptions of the Islamic soul and perspectives on human nature do not appear to have changed dramatically (Fakhry, 2004; Rothman & Coyle, 2018). Through an examination of conceptions of the *nafs* from the perspectives of both early and contemporary Muslims, I attempt to determine whether there is a clear continuous thread of conceptions of *al-nafs* from the Islamic Golden Age to the present day. In a similar vein, as part of my effort to question Badri's claims of equivalence, one of my research aims involves distinguishing the *nafs* from the terms "psyche" and "mind." By the end of this section, I will be able to answer the two research questions of this study: What is *al-nafs* and what are the reasons and implications for Badri's translation of *al-nafs*? In concluding this study, I aim to determine whether a social and/or intellectual, philosophical history of Islamic Psychology fulfills the requirements for answering the research questions.

1. Malik Badri's Project: Shifting the Paradigm Towards an Islamic Psychology

Malik Badri's work and his integral role in developing Islamic Psychology as a social movement and discipline must be understood within the larger, complex historical relationship between religion, the demarcation of psychology as a legitimate science, and resistance against American-European domination of the field.

During Badri's undergraduate education in the 1950s, Freudian psychoanalysis dominated psychological thought (Khan, 2015; Rothman et al., 2022; Rassool & Luqman, 2022a). In a 2015 interview, Badri explains how Freud's theories, which inherently rejected religion, sparked his interest in formulating a psychology that acknowledges the ubiquitous presence of religion in the lived experience of Muslims (Khan, 2015). It is within this context that Badri began to question whether secular "Western" psychology can be applied to Muslim populations, given the incongruence in their understanding of human nature.

He expresses particular dissatisfaction with the Darwinism that underlies Freud's approach, which assumes that man evolved from apes and is primarily driven by "unconscious sexual and also aggressive impulses which will direct him from birth to grave" (Rassool & Luqman, 2022a, p.160). From his faith-centered perspective, Badri argues that man was created by Allah, who instills in each individual a soul, and a pure and innate disposition (*fitrah*) inclined towards His worship. For Badri, it is this contradiction in ontological assumptions about human nature that distinguishes the Muslim psychologist from the "Western" psychologist (Khan, 2015; Rasool & Luqman, 2022a).

While Badri was undergoing his residency for his postdoctoral degree in clinical psychology at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School in the U.K. during the 1960s, he faced pushback and even ridicule from senior psychiatrists when suggesting that a patient's negative

religious experience might be a source of their affliction (Khan, 2015). He also proposed a solution to address religious trauma by involving a priest as part of their treatment program, which proved to help alleviate the patient's symptoms. He explains that this occurred during a time when integrating religion and spirituality into psychotherapy had no place in the clinical setting (Khan, 2015). In his first lecture about psychology from an Islamic perspective at the University of Jordan in 1963, Badri claims that he encountered significant resistance from Arab psychologists who were utilizing the psychoanalytic approach and wished to maintain a distinction between the pure sciences and religious dogma (Rassool & Luqman, 2022a).

Indigenizing and Islamizing Psychology

At this point, Badri's academic focus leaned towards the indigenization of American-British psychology within the Sudanese local context (Rothman et al., 2022). His first published article was a criticism of psychometric science and its disregard for cultural variance in IQ test measures, which skewed higher for those from a Western-educated background (Rothman et al., 2022). In the coming years, Badri addressed this discrepancy by modifying questions in various psychological tests to make them relevant to the sentiments of the Sudanese people.

The movement toward behaviorism in psychology during the early 1960s was a refreshing alternative to psychoanalysis for Badri (Khan, 2015; Rothman et al., 2022; Rassool & Luqman, 2022a). However, he felt that the classical conditioning and stimulus-response paradigm, influenced by the likes of Skinner and Ellis, was formulaic and akin to Freud's secular understanding of human nature, which portrayed it as driven by animalistic urges that can be mechanistically altered "as though patients were Pavlovian dogs" (Rassool & Luqman, 2022a,

p.156). He explains that while the philosophical underpinnings of behavioral therapy are anti-Islamic due to its neglect of human nature and mechanistic explanation of human motivation, its application can be useful when humanized, taking into consideration the patient's belief system (Khan, 2015; Rassool & Luqman, 2022a).

In 1966, Badri went on to innovate a therapeutic technique after treating a Muslim Moroccan patient who presented with anxiety and phobia (Rothman et al., 2022). His new technique combined Joseph Wolpe's systematic desensitization therapy with “cognitive therapy, behavior rehearsal, and spiritual [Islamic] therapy” (Badri, 2014). This innovation resulted in a significant contribution to the mainstream field. Badri claims to have spearheaded the evolution of the field towards CBT, which incorporates the patient's beliefs (Khan, 2015).

Rothman et al. (2022) claim that “[in the 1960s] developments in the field of Western psychology—with the decline of Freudian analysis and the advent of cognitive therapies—included a return to the acceptance of belief and philosophy in psychology. This paved the way for Professor Badri’s message of a unique paradigm of Islamic Psychology to be appreciated…” (p.204). Similarly, among Muslim psychologists, who had already overcome multiple barriers to entry into Western academic circles, there was less hesitation to compromise their intellectual authority by integrating Islamic perspectives with the rise of CBT (Rothman et al., 2022; Khan, 2015).

Badri’s work is said to have not only globalized the practice of indigenizing psychology within Arab and/or Muslim cultural contexts but also Islamized the field of psychology (Rothman et al., 2022). The latter, described as “the crux of his life's work” by Rothman et al. (2022, p.200) refers to an epistemological paradigm of psychotherapy that is informed by Islamic

values, traditions, and conceptions. Upon moving to Saudi Arabia and establishing the first psychiatric clinic at the University of Riyadh in 1971, Badri's work shifted towards the Islamization of psychology, as he witnessed the benefit of applying Islamic principles when treating the orthodox Muslim Saudi clientele (Khan, 2015; Rassool & Luqman, 2022a; Rothman et al., 2022). Additionally, he wrote and taught a curriculum for psychology students that encompassed both Islamic and Western perspectives (Rothman et al., 2022). He also published texts addressing the unique psychological problems and methods of intervention in Muslim societies, such as "Customs, Traditions, and Psychopathology" and "Islam and Alcoholism" (Rothman et al., 2022). It was during this time that he began exploring the contributions of early Muslim scholars and the significant existing knowledge of psychology in Islamic history. In an interview, Badri says,

> "The original contributions of Muslim scholars and physicians during the Middle Ages are largely ignored by modern Western historians of psychology and science. In writing the history of these disciplines, they start by honouring prominent early Greek philosophers, such as Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Euclid who lived from the sixth century B.C. to the early fourth century B.C. and then they leap centuries to the Renaissance and the European Enlightenment…I was astonished to find that our early scholars and healers had already mastered cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and used it in treating the emotionally disordered. I realised that, had the modern Muslim psychologists read into the works of Al-Ghazâlî, Al-Balkhī, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawzīyah, Ibn Sīnā, Al-Rāzī and similar great scholars; they would have come up with these so-called modern technologies many years before Europe. They could have been the pioneers and teachers instead of being the blind followers" (Khan, 2015, p. 167-169).

Traversing the Lizard's Hole

In 1976, Badri was invited to present a keynote address at a conference for the Association of Muslim Social Scientists held in Indianapolis, U.S., which catapulted him into global fame (Khan, 2015; Rassool & Luqmana, 2022a; Rothman et al., 2022). In his speech titled "Muslim Psychologists in the Lizard's Hole" (Rothman et al., 2022, p.204), Badri issued a warning to Muslim psychologists by drawing an analogy between blindly emulating "Western" psychologists, learning their language and ways while neglecting their religious beliefs, and the warning given to Prophet Muhammad about following Christians and Jews 'into the lizard's hole.'[13] In response to the positive reception and capturing global attention, he proceeded to expand on the speech by writing his magnum opus, *The Dilemma of Muslim Psychologists* (1979).

The book published in 1979 outlines three stages that Muslim psychologists enter the metaphorical "lizard's hole," and provides guidance on navigating the process of getting out. The initial stage is characterized by "infatuation," during which Muslim psychologists embrace a secular perspective in psychology, regarding it as a legitimate scientific discipline detached from theological influences (Badri, 1979; Rothman et al., 2022). In the subsequent stage of "reconciliation," they attempt to alleviate their "cognitive dissonance" by seeking a middle ground between religious beliefs and the psychological principles they acquired through Western education (Badri, 1979; Rothman et al., 2022). Finally, in the third and desired stage of "emancipation," they inevitably arrive at the conclusion that Islam and modern psychology are fundamentally incompatible (Badri, 1979; Rothman et al., 2022). Upon reaching this realization,

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[13]By "lizard's hole," Badri is referring to the mouth "of a mastigure (lizard)" as it was depicted in a story from "the famous Ḥadīth [teachings and traditions] of the Prophet" (Rassool & Luqman, 2022a, p.150).

Badri urges all Muslim psychologists to pursue the adoption of a distinctive Islamic framework for psychology, mostly based on the Qur'ān and Sunnah, the teachings of Islam.

Within his book, Badri's rhetoric conveys his deep concern about the dissemination and uncritical acceptance of contemporary "Western" psychology among Muslims. He contends that this phenomenon perpetuates the "colonization of the mind" and strips individuals of essential human needs like spirituality and religion, which imbue life with purpose and meaning (Rothman et al., 2022, p.204). However, Badri remained optimistic, asserting that liberation from the 'lizard's hole' is possible through devout faith and a sustained commitment to rewriting the narrative and shifting the paradigm of human psychology away from the current materialistic orientation of the "Western" world and towards a traditional, Islamic framework that offers a more holistic understanding of human nature (Badri, 1979; Rothman et al., 2022).

According to Rothman et al. (2022), the book has had a profound impact on a generation of Muslims from various cultures and nationalities engaged in psychology. Many of them were inspired and empowered by its content, leading them to challenge the dominant secular "Western" scientific paradigm and confidently express their intuitive belief that "modern Western psychology had lost its soul" (ibid., p.205). It is not surprising, given this significant influence, that there are accounts of Badri allegedly accompanying the radical and revolutionary figure Malcolm X during his travels "to the continent of Africa" (ibid., p.192). It is said that Badri played a notable role in nurturing Malcolm X's curiosity about Islamic traditions. These events are consistent with Badri's reputation as a catalyst for a broader movement among Muslim scholars, encouraging them to embrace the Islamization of knowledge in the modern world.

AIDS and Islamizing Knowledge.

As part of Badri’s resistance to incorporating secular “Western” principles in the realm of the human sciences, he has made controversial and problematic remarks regarding the AIDS epidemic and the affected American homosexual community. Throughout an extensive period of 13 years, Badri published various chapters, books, and articles that propose an alternative outlook diverging from the safe-sex practices and harm-reduction strategies promoted within “Western” prevention campaigns. He draws heavily upon Islamic doctrines that strictly condemn acts like “homosexuality, adultery, anal intercourse... vaginal sex during menstruation... [and] the intake of alcohol and drugs” (Badri, 1997, p. 221). Badri argues that countries adhering to Shari’ah law in the Middle East and North Africa exhibit lower rates of HIV infection compared to secular nations, reinforcing his belief that anti-gay Islamic laws serve as superior preventive measures (Badri, 1997; Badri, 2000).

These comments faced some criticism from certain Muslim scholars, like Muhammed Haron (2010), and received praise from other Muslim scholars, including Abdullah Rothamn, Alisha Ahmed, and Rania Awaad. They claim that Badri's work on the AIDS crisis resonated with non-Muslim medical communities worldwide, providing valuable insights into mitigating the spread using an Islamic approach instead of “condoms” and “clean needles” (Rothman et al., 2022, p.206). On the other hand, critiques of Badri's arguments from Norwegian social anthropologist Sindre Bangstad (2009) raise salient concerns about Badri's credibility as a social scientist. This aspect is relevant to Badri's conceptual framework and his approach to Islamizing psychological knowledge, as it proves to be influenced by his professional goals and political motivations.

For example, Badri argues that the rising rates of HIV infection directly result from divine intervention as a repercussion of the sexual revolution, which he claims fostered a permissive attitude towards “immoral” sexual behaviors (Badri, 2000, p.193). In his book titled *The AIDS Crisis: A Natural Product of Modernity's Sexual Revolution*, Badri states, “AIDS is, in fact, the wrath of God over the promiscuous sexual revolution sustained by the loose and liberal mores of Western civilization” (ibid., p.193). He holds “Western” homosexuals primarily responsible for the outbreak, while also placing blame on various modern thinkers and psychologists, including Freud, Skinner, and Ellis, for their contributions to the sexual liberation movement that Badri believes established the conditions for AIDS to evolve into a global health crisis (Badri, 2000).

Murad Hofmann, a German diplomat and Muslim convert, wrote in his review of Badri's book, *The AIDS Crisis: An Islamic Sociocultural Perspective*, that Badri does a “marvelous job” of Islamizing knowledge and offers a holistic approach (Watanabe, 1998, p.129). The holistic approach he refers to involves moral reform by way of punitive laws in the vein of Muslim-nation states that practice Shari’ah, including increased censorship of “Western” media. In his holistic approach, Badri also guides Muslim psychiatrists in assisting those affected by AIDS to unlearn their homosexual behavior using Islamic CBT and aversion therapies, such as administering electric shocks while displaying images of homosexuals (Badri, 1997, p.290). Ultimately, his model for HIV prevention relies on compelling Muslims to strengthen their faith by implementing restrictive Islamic laws. Badri concludes the book by saying,

> “...to believe that the gene mutation of HIV took place from green monkeys to Africans and from Africans to Haitians, and from Haitians to Americans in order to avoid the obvious fact that the mutation might have taken place in the insulted, germ ridden

rectums of San Francisco homosexuals, is indeed an extremely farfetched, racist, and unfair way to ward off stigmatism and ease cognitive dissonance." (1997, p. 128-29)

Bangstad (2009) dismisses Badri's arguments due to his homophobia and Occidentalism[14]. Additionally, Bangstad highlights that Badri spreads misinformation by distorting statistical evidence in his favor and lacks a scientific foundation for his claims. Furthermore, Bangstad asserts that while Badri does have a point that certain explanations for the emergence of HIV in the "West" are racially motivated, his Islamic prevention model is ideologically and financially motivated. By exteriorizing the epidemic, and placing blame exclusively on the "sexually deviant" values of "Western" modernity for its existence (as if the entire "Western" world is a singular homogenous entity) along with the Muslims who adopt those "immoral" values as a result of "colonization of the mind," Badri invokes a kind of West versus East or "clash of civilization" sentimentality that flattens any nuanced understanding of history or the way globalization works (Bangstad, 2009, p. 51).

Bangstad remarks that Badri conveniently overlooks the history of diverse sexual behaviors from antiquity such as in Greco-Roman societies (2009). Also, Badri fails to acknowledge that Muslims and "Westerners" have been a part of each other's worlds and influencing one another for centuries. This criticism links importantly to Badri's priority claims, as it demonstrates his selective approach in giving priority to early Muslim scholars but neglects to acknowledge the invaluable intellectual and cultural impact of the "Western" world on the advancement of Islamic thought and philosophy for the same medieval Muslims, as evidenced by the translation movement of Greek texts during the Islamic Golden Age.

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[14]Bangstad explains Occidentalism as the Orientalism of the "West," wherein negative stereotypes and conspiracy theories about the "Western" world are perpetuated (2009).

According to Bangstad, Badri operates within the context of decolonizing knowledge using a Saidian Orientalism framework and seems to attempt to recreate an idealized distant past (one that didn't exist in the way he imagines) where there are clear opposing sides. But what are the underlying interests served by his polemics? One of them appears to be aspirations for commercial success. Bangstad explains that as a result of publishing in multiple languages to reach a broader audience, Badri oversimplifies Islamic attitudes through his "selective application of Shari'ah," leading to Badri contradicting his own stance on multiple occasions (2009, p. 53).

For example, Badri attempts to present a unified Islamic viewpoint, which ironically aligns more with the type of moralizations associated with fundamentalist forms of Christianity, such as Christian evangelicals and Catholics living in the "West," rather than the diverse interpretations found within Islam based on various denominations and cultural backgrounds (Bangstad, 2009). Additionally, he holds both an anti-Western and anti-modernist stance while simultaneously incorporating modern "Western" sciences to support his Islamically informed arguments, instead of relying solely on "his knowledge and mastery of Qur'ān and Ḥadīth sciences" as some other scholars claim him to do (Rothman et al., 2022, p.207).

This contradiction, according to Bangstad, is precisely the problem with Badri's efforts toward the Islamization of knowledge. He claims that it often involves adopting outdated scientific ideas from the "West" and presenting them as inherently Islamic, which is often not the case. For instance, Badri's views seem to align with "Western" diagnostic categories that once considered homosexuality a disorder, as well as treatment methods like conversion therapy, which became obsolete in the latter half of the 20th century (Badri, 2000, p.296; Bangstad, 2009, p.47). Bangstad concludes that such knowledge, or conceptions about human nature and morality

have intellectual origins in both the “West” and the “East.”

It is important to acknowledge the ways in which Badri has moralized and politicized intellectual discourse, extending beyond the boundaries of psychology, in order to comprehend the role his ideological and professional motivations play in shaping his conceptual framework. What initially began as valid criticism concerning the absence of religio-cultural competence in American-British psychology early in his career, which led to a commendable effort to indigenize psychology within an Islamic context, evolved into a significant distortion of Islamic beliefs. This distortion supports fundamentalist ideals, including divine retribution against marginalized communities within both the “Western” and “Eastern” world, such as Muslim and American homosexuals and individuals living with AIDS. Badri goes to the extent of promoting and offering guidance for the utilization of harmful and ineffective conversion therapies through CBT-based techniques as a treatment method for his scripturally informed diagnosis (Badri, 1997).

Furthermore, Bangstad's critiques, particularly concerning the challenge of translating Islamic perspectives for non-Arabic speaking audiences without sacrificing nuance, and the convergence of Eastern and Western conceptions throughout history, are valuable to the goals of this thesis. Regarding the former, the lack of contextualization and reflexivity in Badri’s translations of Islamic concepts caused him to reduce the approach of Islamizing knowledge into a simplified, fundamentalist framework that hinders wider public understanding of the pluralistic nature of Islamic schools of thought. Concerning the latter, Badri fails to recognize the impact of the intellectual migration of “Western” knowledge into the Muslim world, appearing solely concerned with accrediting contributions made by medieval Muslim physicians in the history of psychology. Both of these oversights further underscore the need for a thorough investigation

into the intellectual and philosophical history of Islamic psychology.

I argue that Islamic psychologists, such as Badri, need to be more reflexive about their theological assumptions. Specifically, it is necessary to disclose the specific interpretation and school of thought that the Islamic psychologist adheres to. Badri acknowledges that certain “Western” applications, such as CBT, can benefit Muslim communities as long as they are aligned with an Islamic value system (Khan, 2015; Rasool & Luqman, 2022a). However, some sources claim that Badri's Islamic paradigm of psychology does not necessarily advocate for “the integration of Islamic principles within an otherwise secular paradigm of psychology” (Rothman et al., 2022, p. 206). So, what does this mean for Badri's definition of Islamic Psychology? Which practical applications emerging outside of an Islamic context are deemed valid or not within the Islamic paradigm of psychology? And which specific Islamic values guide this approach?

Defining Malik Badri’s Framework.

Carrie York Al-Karam (2018) raises similar questions in pursuit of a definition and conceptual framework of Islamic Psychology as a disciplinary field. She argues that due to the vast fragmentation of research, there is yet to be scholarship that provides a viable definition, and each scholar's own understanding, based on their work, offers a unique conceptual framework. Being a prominent figure in the field, she references Badri’s definition, which is “essentially sound empirical psychology used morally” (ibid., p.100). Meanwhile, Al-Karam’s definition of Islamic Psychology is: “an interdisciplinary science where psychology subdisciplines and/or related disciplines engage scientifically about a particular topic and at a particular level with various Islamic sects, sources, sciences, and/or schools of thought using a variety of methodological tools” (ibid., p.101-102).

Following Al-Karam's definition, which uses the Multilevel Interdisciplinary Paradigm (MIP) concept to provide the methodology for establishing a conceptual framework of Islamic Psychology, Badri's unique and influential Islamic paradigm of psychology is firstly defined by his Sunni religious orientation. The source of Islamic knowledge is his interpretations of the Qur'ān and Sunnah but without an explicit adherence to a school of thought. The topic of interest is reflected by his clinical expertise as a cognitive-behavioral therapist, which seeks to address issues at the individual (micro) and societal (macro) level, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, such as ethnographic studies and randomized controlled trials.

It is through his expertise in CBT that Badri became interested in the insights of Abu Zayd Al-Balkhi and felt inclined to translate his manuscript. He spoke about an Islamic-oriented CBT approach in many of his works and drew connections between CBT techniques with teachings from Islamic traditions. For instance, in his book titled *Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospiritual Study* (2000), Badri argues that Qur'ānic injunctions about contemplating God's attributes and creation have similar positive psychological effects as meditation. In an interview, he mentions that the "third wave" of modern CBT, which focuses on Buddhist mindfulness concepts like meditation, commitment, and acceptance, lends itself well to Islamic-oriented psychotherapy (Khan, 2015, p.169). He explains,

> "Acceptance and commitment simply means that one should accept what is not within his control and commit himself to do what can improve and enrich his life. Doesn't this look like the advice that a Muslim cleric gives to a young stressed man? Don't we as Muslims carry out these spiritual activities in our spiritual contemplation and *tasbeeh* (praise)? And doesn't our belief in predestination and the overpowering command of Allah (SWT) help us to accept what we have no control over and pray for what we can do to help

ourselves?" (Khan, 2015, p.169-170)

Al-Karam is concerned with offering nuanced, interdisciplinary, non-monolithic descriptions of Islamic psychologies. Her epistemology not only assists in achieving the goal of this section—providing a methodology for defining Badri's approach through MIP—but also aligns with concerns raised by historians like Danziger and Pickren, regarding contextualizing the international history of psychology through categorical and conceptual distinctions of subdisciplines, which Badri does not undertake. In the next section, I will follow Al-Karam's approach to briefly explore the historical context of mental health paradigms during the Islamic Golden Age. The goal is to see how contemporary Islamic psychological concepts are connected to their ancient sources, including medical theories and Islamic schools of thought. I synthesize literature from Muslim and Islamic psychologists who each offer a historical account of psychology from medieval Muslim societies.

2. A Brief Overview: Medical Systems and Madness in the Islamic Golden Age

In pre-Islamic Arabia (before the death of the Prophet Muhammed, c. 632 AD), medical explanatory models were confined to folklore on supernatural phenomena, "such as magic, evil eye, talismans and charms, shamans, spirits, etc" (Mitha, 2020, p.765). The notion of madness and its manifestation in socially deviant behavior was largely attributed to punishment from God for committing sin, demonic possession, or a "divine gift," in line with stories in the Old Testament (Awaad et al., 2018, p.5). Likewise, healing from madness and other ailments was believed to be within the domain of God's will, but could be intervened in the form of exorcisms, which were commonplace at the time (Mitha, 2020; Awaad et al., 2018). This was also the case in many European cities during the centuries that overlapped with the Islamic Golden Age, an era now popularly referred to as the Dark Ages (Awaad & Ali, 2016).

The Islamic Golden Age, also known as the "Renaissance of Islam," (Awaad et al., 2018, p.7) is generally considered by historians as a period of booming scientific and medical inquiry, advancement, and innovation, especially in the territories under the rule of the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 C.E.). The geographical span of the Abbasid empire stretched from Central Asia to most present-day countries in the SWANA (Southwest Asian and North African) region, all the way to Sicily (Awaad et al., 2018). Many early Muslim scholars were polymaths and theologians who mastered numerous natural and social sciences during their lifetimes (Haque, 2004; Awaad et al., 2018; Rassool & Luqman, 2022b; Awaad & Ali, 2016). This is likely due to the indiscriminate approach to knowledge acquisition under the wide disciplinary umbrella of Philosophy (*falsafa*), or "the knowledge of all things, both divine and human" (Haque, 2004, p.358). Myriad factors contributed to the emphasis on scientific knowledge production and the

growing interest in philosophy during this flourishing period in Islamic history, including political, legal, socioeconomic, and religious aspects.

Advancements from the Translation Movement

Awaad and Ali (2015) explain that Abbasid rulers were dedicated to the collecting of ancient Greco-Roman medical and philosophical treatises, which they later made accessible to Muslim scholars, including works from Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Theophrastus, Mnesitheus, Galen, Plotinus, and more. A Caliph named Al-Mamun (786-833) inaugurated the opening of *Bayt al-Hikmah* (House of Wisdom), a multicultural academic institution and grand public library in the dynastic capital of Baghdad, where a major translation movement of classical knowledge to Arabic, Persian, Syriac, and later Turkish took place (c. 8-10th C.E.) (Haque, 2004, Rassool & Luqman, 2022b; Awaad et al., 2018). The Latin translations of Arabic manuscripts inspired by Hellenistic traditions are said to be how ancient scientific knowledge was transmitted to Europe during the Middle Ages (e.g., Ibn ‘Imran’s treatise on Melancholia c. 900) (Al-Issa, 2000; Fakhry, 2004). Under this presumption, Haque (2004) argues that Western Europeans absorbed Islamic thought more than they did Greek.

Abbasid caliphs recruited doctors trained in the Hippocratic and Galenic medical traditions to translate Greek manuscripts and teach local physicians about the physiological etiology of disease. These doctors were also given positions in government (Awaad et al., 2018). Haque (2004)explains that “the initial efforts of Muslims to reason in order to understand the nature of things was called Kalam that led to the two major schools, i.e., Muta’zilites (rationalists) and Asharites (traditionalists or the orthodox)...” (p.359). The preference for the rationalist epistemological approach within the Muslim ruling class is likely a significant factor

in the intellectual movements, as highlighted by Haque (2004), who notes that Al-Mamun belonged to the Mu'tazilite (rationalists) theological school of Islamic studies.

Awaad and Ali (2015) suggest that a contributing factor in expanding medical knowledge within Muslim society stems from Islamic law. For example, the injunction to seek remedies for any affliction follows the Prophet's saying in the Ḥadīth that God created a cure for every disease (Awaad et al., 2018). Other legal avenues, such as *ijtihad* (free interpretation or independent reasoning), paved the way for Muslim scholars who sought to combine and reconcile theology with reason, seeding more tolerance for the integration of Greek philosophy into the Islamic sciences (Haque, 2004).

The importance of maintaining bodily hygiene as instructed in the Qur'ān and its requirement for performing daily obligations, such as ablution before prayer, is suggested as a religious factor (Awaad et al., 208). Additionally, proverbs in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth emphasizing the value of education and the virtue of pursuing knowledge about God and His creation, seen as "an act of divine worship," might be another reason early Muslims were inspired to expand their philosophical knowledge (Rassool & Luqman, 2022b, p.19). Rassool & Luqman (2022b) assert that the Abbasids' commitment to synthesizing contributions from experts with diverse disciplinary, religious, and ethnic backgrounds was made possible by the kind of tolerance preached in Islamic scripture.

Medieval Muslim scholars not only inherited ancient medical theories from the Greek tradition, but further developed them through experimentation, clinical observations in Islamic hospitals, and subsequent treatments and interventions (Awaad & Ali, 2015; 2016). The original texts were also modified to better integrate them with the different cultural backgrounds that existed throughout the conquered states of the Caliphate (Al-Issa, 2000). Centuries' worth of

traditions, rituals, and customs were consolidated under the Abbasid regime, including supernatural practices and beliefs, such as “miraculous healing” by Christian saints, which were carried over and spread across the sprawling Islamic empire (Awaad et al. 2018, p.6). Lay beliefs about supernatural entities such as djinn[15] causing illness were also present at the time. However, this hypothesis was rejected by Muslim practitioners such as Al-Balkhi, Ibn Sina (980-1037), and Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Zakariyyah al-Razi (865-925), who upheld Galen’s model (Mitha, 2020).

Galen’s Humoral Theory And Mental Health

The most predominant and widely accepted system in medieval Islamic medicine was borrowed from Galen’s humoral theory (translated c.873):

> “...the body is comprised of four humours: black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm [which] correspond to the four elements of: earth, fire, air, and water; and the four qualities of: dry-cold, dry-hot, moist-warm, and wet-cold. To be in proper health, it was believed that the four humours ought to be in equilibrium, and, subsequently, poor health was due to an imbalance” (Mitha, 2020, p.756)

The same prevailing framework of maintaining physical health, informed by humoral and temperamental symmetry, was applied to the dimension of spiritual health (Al-Issa, 2000). For example, an accumulation of black bile in the body was thought to be the etiology for many mental disorders, such as melancholia and phobia (Awaad & Ali, 2016; Al-Issa, 2000). Medieval Muslim physicians understood spiritual and physical health to be inseparable and contingent upon each other. This holistic approach to wellbeing can be found in Qur’ānic representations of the physical body (*jism*) and spirit (*rūḥ*) as different but symbiotic elements of the human

[15] Spirits capable of human possession mentioned in the Qur’ān.

condition, a concept termed *ishtibak* (interconnectedness) (Mitha, 2020; Rassool & Luqman, 2022b). The optimization of both physical and spiritual states meant Muslims could meet religious obligations, such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage, among others. Aside from Islamic duties, spiritual health was deemed necessary for leading a meaningful and successful life and maintaining vitality (Awaad et al., 2018).

It is important to note that spiritual health, and its relation to mental health, were not limited to the concept of *al-nafs* alone. The renowned philosopher Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) developed arguably the most influential model for an Islamic conception of the human soul which is applied in the Sufi paradigm of psychology (El Shakry, 2017). Being that Al-Balkhi preceded Al-Ghazali's time, Al-Ghazali's complex model of the soul likely conceptually differed from Al-Balkhi's. According to Al-Ghazali, the soul is comprised of "the heart (*qalb*), spirit (*rūḥ*), intellect (*'aql*), and self (*nafs*)" (Mitha, 2022, p.766). An imbalance of any of the four elements of the soul would lead to disconnectivity from God and thus result in aberration. The notion of madness (*al-junun),* which manifested as behaviors that deviated from social norms, was attributed to this kind of imbalance within the soul (Dols, 1992).

However, Al-Issa (2000) claims that medieval Muslim society differentiated between popular and medical understanding of madness. He explains that while the former relied heavily on Galen's humoral model, the latter was considered less of an illness and more of a condition or a problematic personality, encompassing concepts such as "the wise fool," "the holy fool," and "the romantic fool" (ibid., p.50) These descriptions were created for those who showed ambivalence towards meeting social norms and yet were not pathologized; in fact, the opposite, they were admired for embodying ideals such as "passionate chaste love, piety, and intelligence" (ibid., 50).

It seems that much of what is now understood to be mental or psychological illness was conceived by early Muslim scholars as somatic or tangential to an imbalance of spiritual and bodily health. Awaad et al. (2018) explain, “when the body undergoes illness, it impacts the mental capacities of the soul, and when the soul is afflicted, it prevents the body from experiencing joy and may also manifest as physical illness in the body” (p.5). Mitha (2020) says that some scholars suggest using the appropriate categories and terms used by physicians of the era that represent their conceptions of mental health, including “*al-Tibb al–Ruhani* (spiritual/psychological medicine) and *al-Tibb al-Qalbi* (mental medicine)” (p.766), but does not expand on their differences. *Rūḥ* (spirit) and *Qalb* (heart) are only two of the four components of the soul, each with its own function and characteristics. But what about the *nafs*?

Why was the *nafs* selected as the modern translation for psychology (*'ilm al-nafs*) and the psyche or mind in Badri's translation of *Sustenance of the Soul*, constituting, as it does, just one of four elements of the soul in Al-Ghazali's typology? It is worth noting that the differences and similarities between Al-Balkhi’s conception of the soul and Al-Ghazali’s conception of the soul remain unclear. Investigating Al-Balkhi’s influence on Al-Ghazali’s philosophy goes beyond the scope of this research. More importantly, Al-Ghazali's idea of the *nafs* remains relevant to the question of conceptual continuity. In the subsequent section, I differentiate *al-nafs* from the other components of the soul, elucidating its description and characterization in the Qur’ān, in Al-Ghazali’s philosophy, and in contemporary conceptions.

3. *Al-Nafs* and its Meanings

The different Islamic conceptions of the soul split into four categories: traditional, theological, philosophical, and mystical (Sufi) (Aafreedi et al., 2018). Most theories were developed in medieval Muslim societies by renowned scholars, of whom the philosophers (*falasifah*) integrated ancient Greek philosophy, including virtue ethics, and Stoic attitudes – especially Aristotelian, Platonic, and Neoplatonic conceptions of the soul (Macdonald, 1932). Almost all relied on the exegesis and hermeneutics of the Qur'ān, alongside the Ḥadīth, in their explanatory models of the human soul.

Haque (2004) argues the importance of distinguishing between Muslim and Islamic philosophy. He explains that Muslim philosophy comprises an area of convergence between Greek and Islamic thought from different schools and traditions. This development made way for mystical interpretations of Islamic doctrines, such as Sufism. Islamic philosophy, in contrast, mostly draws from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth and was associated with the Ash'arites (traditionalists) and theological sciences (Haque, 2004). Therefore, Al-Ghazali should be considered a Muslim philosopher, since his model of the Islamic soul integrated the Aristotelian theory of the soul with a Qur'ānic interpretation of *al-nafs* (Macdonald, 1932).

The etymology of the word *nafs* can be traced back to its Arabo-Persian root *nafas* or *nafasa,* meaning "breathing" and "breath" (Aafreedi et al., 2018). In pre-Islamic Arabic literature, *nafs* was used to refer to human blood or the physical body (Macdonald, 1932). Additionally, it was, and still is, used reflexively to mean "self" and more generally, "person." The trilateral root of the word *nafs* (N-F-S) shows up 298 times in the Qur'ān but with varying lexical uses and meanings, according to the online dictionary of the Qur'ān corpus (The Quranic Arabic Corpus - Quran Dictionary, n.d.). The dictionary states that *nafs* can be defined

differently depending on the context or lexical category. As a proper noun, *nafs* can mean the self, soul, person, or mind. Reflexively, it is used as the pronouns “myself,” “yourselves,” “ourselves,” “themselves,” etc. In different verb forms, it can mean “to breathe” or “to aspire.” Mitha (2020) explains that the use of the term *al-nafs* in the Qur’ān to signify both “the soul” and “the self” implies an Islamic understanding in which these concepts are interconnected. Haque (2004) claims that when early Muslims wrote or used the term *nafs*, they were referring to “individual personalities” (p.358).

The Nafs in the Qur’ān

The concept of the *nafs* in the Qur’ān often refers to the human soul, which is similar to the *rūḥ*. There is much confusion around their differences, and since they are both elements of Al-Ghazali’s model of the soul, it’s important to distinguish between them. While *rūḥ* can mean physical “breath” or “wind,” it holds a distinct metaphysical meaning as the “spirit” emanating from God (Aafreedi et al., 2018). In different contexts, the *rūḥ* can also mean “the command of God,” “life principle,” or “divine creative breath” (Aafreedi et al., 2018; Macdonald, 1932). The Qur’ān tells the story of Adam’s clay body becoming animated when the *rūḥ* (spirit) is blown into him from God’s divine breath (El Shakry, 2017). In other Qur’ānic lore, God breathes *Issa* (Jesus) into *Maryam* (Mary) (El Shakry, 2017; Aafreedi et al., 2018). The *rūḥ* is differentiated from the *nafs* in that the former precedes life on earth, although many Muslim philosophers have debated over whether the *nafs* is material or immaterial in its form, concerned with its immortal status and the implication of bodily resurrection in the afterlife (Macdonald, 1932).

In Islamic theology, the *nafs* is given moral attributes as it provides human beings with free will (*irāda*), but it is not inherently good or evil (Haque, 2004). While the *fitrah* (human nature or disposition that possesses primordial knowledge of God) is described in the Qur’ān as

being innately good, the *nafs* is susceptible to temptation by the *shaytan* (devil) and weakness in the face of *dunya* (temporal material world) distractions (Rothman and Coyle, 2018; Mitha, 2020). When succumbed to, these distractions can be interpreted as a sign of moral and spiritual failure.

Since Al-Ghazali's theory of the soul draws heavily on Islamic theology, I will explain the three characterizations of the *nafs* in the Qur'ān: including, *al-nafs al-ammarah*, *al-nafs al-lawwamah*, and *al-nafs al-mutma'innah* (Mitha, 2020; El Shakry, 2017; Aafreedi et al., 2018; Rothman and Coyle, 2018). *Al-nafs al-ammarah* inclines towards evil and sin, driven by base desires, and is considered the libidinal soul. *Al-nafs al-lawwamah* constantly reproaches itself in the pursuit of goodness, engages in self-reflection, and upholds reason. *Al-nafs al-mutma'innah* is the tranquil and self-actualized soul that undergoes a deep devotion to worship and is destined to return to God. *Al-nafs al-ammarah* can be illuminated and influenced by the *'aql* (intellect) and *qalb* (heart). These faculties guide individuals away from the darkness of their innate animalistic impulses, transitioning into the enactment of *al-nafs al-lawwamah*. Consequently, this process can eventually lead to the desired spiritual state of *al-nafs al-mutma'innah*. Conversely, the *qalb* and *'aql* can also exert a negative influence on the *nafs*, maintaining it at its lowest an unrefined state (Aafreedi et al., 2018).

Because of the fluctuating nature of the *nafs*, the task of the Muslim individual is to develop an ability to self-regulate and enforce discipline on the *nafs* to attain closeness to God and "moral perfection" (El Shakry, 2017, p.48). These three characterizations of *al-nafs* in the Qur'ān provide the basis for the three stages of self-development associated with Sufi (mystic) philosophical teachings and psychology, guiding individuals toward self-awareness, accountability, and spiritual growth. In Sufi philosophy, the three fundamental stages are

extended to seven. In the second chapter, “The Soul and the Self,” of El Shakry’s book *The Arabic Freud* (2017), she argues that Sufism offers a topography involving the three characteristics of *al-nafs* that resembles Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of the Self: that is, the id corresponds to *al-nafs al-ammarah*, the super-ego corresponds to *al-nafs al-lawwamah*, and the ego corresponds to the *‘aql/qalb*.

The Contemporary Conception of Al-nafs

Faced with diverse interpretations of the Islamic soul, Rothman and Coyle (2018) sought to establish a unified theoretical foundation for the contemporary understanding of what constitutes the soul. They conducted interviews with eighteen “key informants,” including religious scholars, spiritual practitioners, and academic experts in “Islamic conceptions of human psychology” (ibid., p.1731). The goal was to generate a grounded theory and an Islamic model encompassing conceptions of the soul that underlie notions of human nature, behavior, and motivation within the Islamic epistemological paradigm of psychology. The authors intended for this model to guide approaches in the clinical practice of Islamic Psychology. Despite variations in scriptural interpretations and areas of knowledge, the authors assert that they successfully reached a consensus regarding the nature, structure, stages, and development of the Islamic soul.

One of the most enlightening findings related to my inquiry about conceptual continuity is that there was agreement among the participants that the soul’s structure encompasses the *rūḥ*, the *nafs*, the ‘*aql*, and the *qalb*, consistent with Al-Ghazali's perspective. Therefore, as perceived by the participants, the *nafs* constitutes only a component or part within the cosmology of the human soul. However, when describing the structure of the soul, they did not differentiate between the three characterizations of the *nafs* as represented in the Qur’ān. Instead, they depicted the *nafs* as a force of evil and labeled it as the lower self, aligning with descriptions of

al-nafs al-ammarah in the Qur'ān. They attribute moral shortcomings and poor mental health to the *nafs* in its entirety. Yet, the mastery of the *nafs* and progression along an upward trajectory from the first to the third stage of the tripartite *nafs*—an ongoing journey throughout a lifetime—appears to be an essential facet of the soul's development, leading to a state of harmony and alignment.

Ultimately, succumbing to the desires of the *nafs* "can lead to tremendous moral problems" (ibid., p.1740) and is believed to be a significant contributing factor to the development of psychological disorders. This is likely the reason for the predominance of *al-nafs* in the Islamic paradigm of psychology, often equated with contemporary concepts such as the psyche and mind. It is understood to be the source of psychological distress in Muslim philosophy, and Al-Ghazali, along with the participants, believed it can be treated with three methods: the practices of *jihad an nafs* (struggle of the soul – involving self-reflection), *tazkiyat an nafs* (purification of the soul – specifically, cleansing of the *nafs*), and *tahdhib al akhlaq* (refinement of character – moral reform).

Striving towards *al-nafs al-mutma'innah* through these approaches, which brings one closer to alignment with their *fitrah* (pure human nature) and *rūḥ* (God's spirit), stands as the primary focus for attaining positive attributes indicative of good mental health within the Islamic paradigm of psychology. As expressed by Yayha, an Islamic philosophy scholar, "your psychological state has to be harmonious, your psyche, your mind … has to be harmonious with your fitrah" (ibid., p.1736).

Moral-Spiritual-Ethical Psychological Sciences.

Awaad et al. (2018) explain that the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) conducted a comprehensive project in 2008, surveying over 200 psychological manuscripts by

Muslim scholars from the 8th to 20th centuries. The resulting publication, “Psychological Sciences in the Islamic Heritage” categorizes these treatises into philosophical, medical, and moral-spiritual-ethical domains (ibid., p.7). Al-Balkhi’s and Al-Ghazali's writings were categorized within the third domain, addressing topics such as training desires, anger management, grief processing, and anxiety, holding significance both historically and in contemporary Islamic psychology. Moreover, Awaad et al. (2018) claim that “moral illnesses, such as self-centeredness, lust, avarice, etc.” (p.17) were treated under one of the major branches of medieval “Islamic psychotherapy,” which they term “moral development” (p.15).

Here, Badri’s interpretation of the *nafs* as synonymous with the psyche or mind becomes clear when contextualized within Al-Ghazali’s characterization of the *nafs* and his treatment methods of self-reflection, character development, and moral refinement. This aligns with current conceptions of mental health and treatment among Muslim scholars and practitioners, as evidenced by Rothman & Coyle (2018). As previously mentioned, this study cannot assert whether Al-Balkhi and Al-Ghazali conceived of the *nafs* similarly. It is important to note that Badri’s understanding of the *nafs* is more likely influenced by Al-Ghazali than by Al-Balkhi.

However, Al-Balkhi’s work also fits within the same category as Al-Ghazali’s, both focusing on the moral-spiritual-ethical domain within early Islamic psychological science. Their contributions are considered Islamic psychotherapeutic approaches by the IIT, which published Badri’s translation of *Sustenance of the Soul*. Moreover, the meaningful moral underpinnings of the *nafs* is particularly relevant to Badri, who defines his approach to Islamic Psychology as “essentially sound empirical psychology used morally” (Al-Karam, 2018, p.100). Under this logic, given Badri's expertise in CBT, it's understandable why he would analogize mastering the

nafs with CBT. However, this doesn't necessarily explain Badri's inclination to claim Al-Balkhi as the first cognitive-behavioral therapist in history.

Conclusion

In this study, I critically examined Malik Badri's historical account of Islamic Psychology by investigating the key concept of *al-nafs* therein. Therefore, I established a conceptual framework for his approach to the Islamization of psychology and a conceptual framework for *al-nafs*. I contextualized *al-nafs* through a historical analysis of mental health paradigms in the Islamic Golden Age. The following research questions were addressed: What is *al-nafs* and what are the reasons and implications behind Badri's equivalence of *al-nafs* with the psyche and mind? Another goal was to evaluate whether a specific historiographical approach serves best for doing a history of Islamic Psychology, and how future studies concerned with similar objectives might benefit from each.

In the first section, I discussed how Badri's pivotal role in shaping Islamic Psychology as both a social movement and emerging sub-discipline must be understood within the complex historical relationship between religion, the establishment of psychology as a scientific field, and resistance against the dominance of the American-British model. Specifically, his dissatisfaction with the latter's assumptions about human nature led him to develop a distinctive Islamic framework of psychology. Although Badri may be seen as the father of modern Islamic Psychology, his problematic and harmful remarks regarding the AIDS epidemic, and the marginalized groups it affected, point to reasons why I believe he should no longer serve as a role model.

The criticism raised by Bangstad revealed that Badri's approach to Islamizing knowledge is influenced by his ideological, political, and professional motivations which led to the distortion of Islamic attitudes and beliefs and the propagation of misinformation. Consequently, I advocate for greater reflexivity in theological assumptions by Islamic psychologists, including

the disclosure of their approach to interpreting Islamic doctrines and/or their school of thought. This is necessary to establish their methodology within the MIP and also to highlight their incongruities in knowledge interests. In Badri's case, one of his knowledge interests appears to be validating the internal scientific consistency within the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth and applying those assumptions within the realm of psychotherapy.

In the second section, I discussed factors that contributed to the scientific and philosophical advancements in the Islamic Golden Age. I emphasized how the translation movement at the House of Wisdom facilitated the amalgamation of ancient Greek thought with Islamic thought. This integration resulted in the development of organic and physiological explanatory models for both physical and spiritual health, exemplified by Galen's humoral theory. The subsequent therapeutic approaches utilized Islamic theology with Greek medical theories. Badri argues that this is precisely what makes Al-Balkhi's treatise "modern:" Al-Balkhi presented a rational and psychosomatic therapeutic approach grounded in observations of desired behavioral outcomes, rather than offering religious prescriptions for treatment (2013, p.11).

The research conducted for this historical background was also relevant to the Danziger and Robinson debate due to the well-documented assimilation of Aristotelian and Islamic philosophy during the Islamic Golden Age. This assimilation significantly influenced Islamic conceptions of the soul, which in turn shaped the current Islamic paradigm of psychology. This implies that the intellectual history of Islamic Psychology traces back to ancient Greece. Specifically, contemporary mental health explanatory models and treatment methods are informed by the synthesis of Aristotle's theory of the soul and virtue ethics within Al-Ghazali's systematic framework and therapeutic approach (Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

It is also important to acknowledge that modern "Western" science owes much to early Muslim scholars, as Muslim scholars owe Greek medical theories (Awaad et al., 2018). The interchange of scientific knowledge and ideas between the "Eastern" and "Western" worlds thus has roots dating back to antiquity. To explore this further, the present study could have placed more emphasis on the history of the translation movement during the Islamic Golden Age, highlighting "the influence of Arabic philosophy on Western, especially Latin, scholastic thought" (2004, p.10)

Examining the implications of the translation movement on the global knowledge economy might address what Brock neglects in his analysis of priority claims such as Badri's. While Brock proposes that these claims might be motivated by nationalism and superficial diversity efforts, I take the view that Badri's priority claims are driven by professional resentment towards the dominance of scientific authority by the American-European intellectual centers and the provincialization of psychological science inherent in the indigenization movement.

In section three, I discussed Al-Ghazali's influential model of the nature of the human soul on contemporary Muslim conceptions, particularly focusing on the *nafs*. The reason for the centrality of *al-nafs* in both medieval and contemporary mental health paradigms, as well as its translation to psyche and psychology (*'ilm al-nafs*), despite being only one of four elements constituting the Islamic soul, is plausibly attributed to Muslim understandings of mental health as being linked to spiritual and/or bodily imbalances. Specifically, the *nafs* is linked to worldly matters (*dunya*) in contrast to the purity and divinity associated with the *fitrah* and *rūḥ*(spirit). Those who are misaligned with their *fitrah* succumb to the temptations of *al-nafs al-ammarah*, or of their worldly, corporeal desires, hence the interchangeability of "the soul" and "the self" for "*al-nafs*." El Shakry clarifies, "...in [the *naf's*] earthly manifestation it was trapped in the prison

house of the body, a source of evil" (2017, p.47) Contemporary Muslim scholars and spiritual practitioners deem this source of evil as a target for therapeutic intervention.

There is a clear conceptual lineage from Al-Ghazali's notion of the *nafs* to today's conceptions. This lineage is likely due to the relevance of the spiritual dimension of the *nafs* in medieval Muslim philosophy for contemporary Muslims who align their worldview with their faith, leading them to integrate it into their paradigm of psychology. In contrast, other secular psychologies, particularly in North America and Northwestern Europe, sideline the inclination to incorporate medieval or ancient philosophy into psychotherapeutic practices. As Fakhry notes, "Islamic philosophy is and continues to be, even in the twentieth century, fundamentally medieval in spirit and outlook" (2004, p.9). The philosophical underpinnings of Islamic Psychology are substantially shaped by its development in the Islamic Golden Age, with a particular emphasis on the concept of the *nafs*. Nevertheless, there are several limitations to claiming a conceptual continuity.

It is problematic to assume that the meaning behind the *nafs* has not evolved in the 1,000 years since Al-Ghazali – words are contextually bound. Danziger argues that the psychological language used within a particular local context to describe, identify, and categorize concepts and objects form "semantic networks" that establish the parameters of their meanings: "the categorical, object-constituting, language of disciplinary communities is, like all language, historical in character" (2013, p.836). The evolution of specialized language renders the concepts and categories of the old mutable to changes in their meanings and definitions.

If I were to further develop this research, I would align with Smith's reflexive historiographical approach, which emphasizes contextual meaning evolution (2005). Smith's methodology involves empirical research into the communicative world of the local context from

which concepts of the past emerged to uncover their meanings. This would involve analyzing primary sources such as Al-Ghazali's manuscripts and archival material within his cultural context, followed by a comparative analysis of his interpretation of *al-nafs* with contemporary understandings, rather than relying on a single secondary article addressing the contemporary conceptual framework of the Islamic soul. This approach could provide insights into the meaning of *al-nafs* across different historical periods.

Therefore, in order to grasp the meaning of the *nafs* in medieval Muslim society, I suggest that future studies adopt a social approach, following the historiographical methods outlined by Smith (2005) and Danziger (2006, 2013). However, to contextualize the development and centrality of *al-nafs* within Islamic Psychology, I suggest investigating the philosophical history of Islamic Psychology, following Araujo's approach, or an intellectual history of Islamic Psychology, in the style of Robinson. When conducting a philosophical and intellectual history of *al-nafs*, one would come to recognize Aristotle as a central figure in its conception and development. Without this significant heritage, the trajectory and scope of Islamic Psychology would likely have been quite different. Converging these approaches would facilitate a deeper understanding of the meaningful, conceptual, and philosophical underpinnings of Islamic Psychology.

As a citizen of Saudi Arabia and a student of psychology in the United States and the Netherlands, I have a vested interest in assessing the compatibility of secular psychotherapeutic applications with a society that orients many facets of private and public life around faith. Furthermore, given the absence of a homogenous Muslim culture, my research interests involve the applicability of approaches from the Islamic Golden Age in contemporary contexts. Islam's divergence into various denominations shaped by historical, geopolitical, and sociocultural

factors highlights the importance of The Islamic Golden Age as a unifying historical narrative of Islamic thought and values that transcend the cultural boundaries among contemporary Muslims, serving as a source of pride and heritage.

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