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## **Arab Psychology and the Emerging Global Psychology Movement: A Modest Proposal**

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### **Abstract**

Throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century psychology remained embedded in European and North American patterns of thought. In recent decades, however, global trends in psychology and its diffusion to most nonwestern regions of the world have intensified. This paper briefly traces these developments and then asks where Arab psychology fits into the global picture. It is proposed that in order to strengthen Arab psychology, an Institute of Arab Psychology be established. Some of the tasks of the envisaged institute are outlined.

*Think Globally,  
Act Locally.*

How can Arab psychology strengthen its presence in the emerging global psychology movement while being of service to society? In order to answer this question I briefly review the history of modern scientific psychology from its early beginnings in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and the United States to its global diffusion today. The tasks of global psychology, I claim, are simultaneously scientific, moral, and practical in nature. Unlike psychology in some of the East Asian and Latin American countries, psychology in the Arab world has not yet become sufficiently visible both at home and in the global arena. As one small but significant step toward the emergence of Arab psychology, I propose that an Institute of Arab Psychology be established – perhaps at Kuwait University. Finally, I outline some of the tasks that the members of such an institute might wish to consider.

### **A Brief History of International Psychology**

From its beginnings in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, scientific psychology has been an international science. For instance, at the “First International Congress of Physiological Psychology” in Paris, France, in the year 1889, 203 psychologists and other interested persons from 20 countries were in attendance. Similarly, the founding father of experimental psychology, Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) supervised approximately 190 doctoral students from at least 10 countries at the University of Leipzig, Germany (Lamberti, 1995). Nevertheless, psychology remained a predominantly European and North American science and field of practice until World War II, apart from a few

scientific outposts in places such as Buenos Aires (Argentina), Tokyo (Japan), and Calcutta (India).

Following World War II, American psychology grew in strength and soon assumed the status of the only “scientific superpower” in the field. However, it steadily grew more monocultural in character and began to ignore developments occurring elsewhere, even when those took place in countries such as Austria and Germany, where psychology had been born. In the course of these developments and supported by the global American economic, military, scientific, and mass media presence, English became the language of communication among most international psychologists and successfully displaced other languages such as German, French, and Russian. By the late 1950s probably more psychologists taught and practiced in the United States than in all other countries combined (Hogan & Vaccaro, 2007; Rosenzweig, 1984).

During the last few decades, however, this situation has begun to change. Although we do not have precise estimates of the number of psychologists teaching, researching, and practicing around the world, it is likely that their number has now surpassed one million (Stevens & Gielen, 2007). According to American Census figures, 277,000 psychologists were employed in the United States at the beginning of the new millennium (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). However, the number of psychologists in Europe (including Russia and eastern Europe) is now far above 300,000 (Tikkanen, 2005). Thus, as was true in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there exist again two global centers of psychology: Europe and the United States. Furthermore, the number of European psychologists is growing faster than the number of American psychologists. In addition, the European Federation of Psychologists’ Associations (EFPA), which

represents psychology associations in 31 European countries, has supported the institutionalization of comparable university training programs and professional licensing requirements in all of its member states. This ongoing process is slowly unifying European psychology while helping to strengthen its voice in the global arena. Consequently, the unique and stark predominance of American psychology in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is now weakening although the American Psychological Association will remain the most influential national psychology association for years to come.

One might conclude from the preceding remarks that psychology remains a predominantly North American and European enterprise. However, this is not the case. Psychology has also been highly successful in some South American countries such as Argentina and Brazil, and it is becoming increasingly visible in some Asian countries. In the year 2003, for instance, Buenos Aires could boast of 32,976 psychologists. This constitutes by far the largest number of psychologists in any city of the world, New York not excepted (Klappenbach, 2004). In the same year, more than 140,000 licensed psychologists practiced in Brazil although only about 900 of them held a doctoral degree (Hutz, McCarthy, & Gomes, 2004). Thus, Brazil can claim far more licensed psychologists than any European country and on a worldwide basis, it ranks second only to the United States. However, because the scientific and academic base of Brazilian psychology still remains relatively weak—as may be seen, for instance, in the very low percentage of psychologists holding a doctoral degree—its worldwide impact has so far remained limited. Moreover, Argentinean psychology has largely remained wedded to psychoanalytic paradigms that are now widely regarded as possessing limited scientific

value. Consequently, the very large number of South American psychologists does not correspond to the fairly modest impact they have had in the international arena until now. This is so because the worldwide impact of psychologists of a given country or region depends on their involvement in research oriented academic institutions, their theoretical and research creativity and productivity, and their ability to publish (in English) their ideas and research results in the major American and international professional journals. Perhaps things will be different one day, but at present this is the road to worldwide visibility in the area of psychology.

Psychology is also becoming increasingly successful in several East and Southeast Asian countries such as Japan, China, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. Although the number of psychologists in Japan (20,000), China (10,000), and Taiwan lags far behind the number of psychologists in Brazil and Argentina, Japanese and Chinese psychologists have – at least in my opinion – surpassed South American psychologists in terms of rigorous scientific productivity. The growing scientific influence of China has been recognized in international psychological circles as well. For the first time in 2004, the quadrennial International Congress of Psychologists took place in Beijing, with more than 6,000 psychologists from all around the world in attendance. As a participant in this congress I can testify to its organizational and scientific excellence. Furthermore, the Chinese government has declared psychology as one of the 18 scientific disciplines that should receive special support in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Zhang & Xu, 2006). China is not only emerging rapidly as a global economic powerhouse but it will also play a central role in the realm of science as the 21<sup>st</sup> century proceeds.

## **Global Psychology**

Today, psychology is a worldwide enterprise although its influence varies widely across the various regions of the world. Economic factors have often influenced its emergence across the world: The richer a country is the more likely it is that psychology plays a significant role both at its universities and in the daily lives of many of its citizens (Leung & Zhang, 1995). Two additional sources of influence, partially intertwined with each other and with economic factors, are the educational level and the degree of cultural modernization predominating in a given country. This holds true especially for the upper strata of society. Whereas well educated citizens endorsing modern forms of consciousness are likely to resort at least partially to psychological explanations for their own behavior as well as that of others, traditional and uneducated persons from rural areas frequently present somatic rather than psychological symptoms in counseling, therapeutic, and everyday settings while attempting to understand their own behavior as well as that of others in terms of both religious-supernatural and physical categories. Others may become possessed and enter altered forms of consciousness as may be seen, for instance, in the Zar cults of Sudan, Egypt, Iraq, and elsewhere (Al-Issa & Subaie, 2004; Boddy, 1989).

Consequently, psychologists in emerging countries as varied as China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, and Turkey are most likely to live and practice in the urban areas, regardless of cultural differences between these countries. In contrast, psychology remains largely invisible in the poorer rural areas. There, people have to struggle for survival; are more likely to be illiterate, semi-literate, or poorly educated;

live in collectivistic family settings; endorse traditional belief systems; and are rarely, if ever, exposed to psychological practitioners or theories.

Political and cultural factors also play an important role in the emergence and subsequent diffusion of psychology. As an example we may cite Spain. When Spain was governed by the conservative, autocratic Franco Regime (1939-1975), psychology played only a fairly limited role in the country's culture and academic life. In contrast, when after Franco's death in 1975, Spanish political and cultural institutions began to model themselves after the liberal democratic traditions of Western Europe, psychology as a discipline began to expand at a rapid rate.

Extreme leftwing regimes also tend to limit, censor, or suppress psychology as a discipline. During China's "Cultural Revolution," (1966-1976), for instance, psychology was declared a reactionary, "bourgeois," ideology-driven pseudo-science, and was abolished altogether (Hsieh-Shih, 1995). Later, Chinese psychology reemerged and expanded after China introduced a semi-capitalist market economy, began to modernize at a rapid rate, and opened itself to outside cultural influences (Zhang & Xu, 2006). In a related vein, during Joseph Stalin's rule of the Soviet Union (1928-1953), psychology was subject to tight ideological state control and a university subject of limited scope and importance. Psychotherapeutic services were offered only rarely because the new "Soviet Man" lived in a supposedly progressive and harmonious society, and so he wouldn't need them. In today's Russia, however, psychology is taught at more than 100 universities, and counseling and clinical psychology are emerging rapidly (Karandashev, 2006).

In general, modern liberal democratic institutions and cultural belief systems tend to support the widespread adoption of psychology as a discipline whereas both right wing

and left wing totalitarian regimes and ideologies tend to constrain psychology as a profession and as a way of “being in the world.” At times, however, psychologists have adapted themselves to morally dubious authoritarian or totalitarian regimes as could be seen, for instance, in Nazi Germany, Apartheid South Africa, the (former) German Democratic Republic, and Communist Cuba.

While a melange of economic, political, historical, and cultural forces have contributed to the emergence of psychology in many parts of the world, it remains nevertheless true that in recent decades, psychology has prospered in a wide variety of economic, sociocultural, and political settings. Thus, we find widespread acceptance of psychology in several poor nonwestern countries such as the Philippines (Gines, 2006; Montiel & Teh, 2004), in present-day communist Cuba but also in the formerly communist nation of Russia, in the theocratic state of Iran (Alipour, 2006; Birashk, 2004) but also in the exceedingly liberal and mostly secular society of the Netherlands, and in culturally and “racially” heterogeneous Brazil with its Portuguese, general European, African, and indigenous South American roots. The broad acceptance of psychology in these culturally, politically, and economically highly varied countries points to a paradox: while psychology needs to develop theoretical frameworks, methodologies, research findings, and pedagogic strategies that can prove useful across the various cultural boundaries, it also needs to constantly modify and adjust its tools and theories in order to adequately take into account the world’s endless cultural diversity. This paradox is of considerable importance for the situation of psychology in the Arab world as well.

Although the impact of psychology varies by world region, together with the economic status of a nation, its cultural belief systems, political institutions, overall levels

of education, degree of modernization, and exposure to the forces of westernization, we urgently need a global psychology that attempts to integrate psychological developments throughout the world while being sensitive to cultural differences. We need a psychology that can contribute to a truly universal form of consciousness and sense of responsibility – in ourselves, in our colleagues both at home and abroad, and in our students who will create the future for us all. To create a sense of global awareness and responsibility constitutes simultaneously a cognitive-emotional, moral, and practical challenge. From a cognitive-emotional point of view it requires universal forms of empathy and “sociocultural role-taking,” that is, the ability to put oneself into the shoes of a broad variety of other persons, to feel like they do, and to see the world through their eyes. On a global scale such persons frequently include those of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, social class, gender, nationality, physical appearance, religion, political opinions, and ways of life. Moreover, according to my former teacher the moral psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg as well as the German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas, universal social role-taking and uncoerced dialogue based upon mutuality are the basis for the more advanced and universalistic forms of principled ethical reasoning needed to form moral consensus in the face of people’s diverse and conflicting perspectives, expectations, and moral values (Habermas, 1985; Kohlberg, 1981). In this sense, creating a global psychology may also be considered an ethical task. Furthermore, we need a global psychology and a universal psychological consciousness for pragmatic reasons. They are needed if humanity is to deal successfully with the difficult but inescapable global challenges laying ahead, such as: overpopulation, global warming, global pollution, worldwide shortages of and competition for raw materials, political

instability and strife, stark regional and national differences in wealth, income, and economic and natural resources, and the worldwide but potentially lethal competition of religious and political ideologies.

It is interesting to note in the context of this discussion of global psychology that psychologists from some developing nations such as China and Hong Kong, India, South Korea, Taiwan, and Turkey have so far had a broader global impact than most Arab psychologists. Some examples of internationally well-known psychologists from these nations include Fanny Cheung, David Y. F. Ho, Qicheng Jing, Kwok Leung, Zhong-Ming Wang, and Houcan Zhang from China and Hong Kong; Sudhir Kakar, Janek Pandey, T. S. Saraswathi, Durganand Sinha, and Jai B. P. Sinha from India; Uichol Kim from South Korea; Kuo-Shu Yang and Kwang-Kuo Hwang from Taiwan; and Çigdem Kagitçibasi from Turkey. In addition, various international psychology congresses have taken place in Beijing (International Congress of Psychology, 2004), Singapore (Conference of the International Association of Applied Psychology, 2002), and Istanbul (Conference of the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 1987). This indicates that psychology in the afore-mentioned places has not only made considerable progress but that this progress is also being recognized around the world. It also suggests that Arab psychology has so far not been as effectively presented to the international community as has been true for psychology in some other developing regions of the world.

### **The Role of Arab Psychology in the Global Arena**

In the foregoing I briefly reviewed the global diffusion of psychology, including its expansion to most nonwestern areas of the world. In this context one may ask: Where

does psychology in the Arab countries fit into the global picture? Is Arab psychology visible on the international stage? Has psychology assumed an important role as part of the modernization efforts of Arab nations? How much is psychology contributing to the welfare of Arab societies and its members?

While a satisfactory answer to these complex questions is beyond the purview of this brief paper, it may prove useful to review at least briefly the overall assessment of Arab psychology that distinguished scholars such as Abou-Hatab, Ahmed, Soueif, and others have given while attempting to answer them (e.g., Abou-Hatab, 1993, 1996, 1997; Ahmed, 2001, 2004; Ahmed & Gielen, 1998, in press; Khaleefa, 1997; Sayed, 2002; Soueif, 1998b, 2001; Soueif & Ahmed, 2001). Their conclusions are best understood in the context of some recent publication patterns in Arab and international psychology, efforts to improve communication between international psychologists and psychologists in the MENA region, and some limitations that Arab psychologists need to overcome in their theorizing and research practices.

### ***Publications***

On the positive side the Arab commentators find that a broad range of psychological studies have already been conducted in the Arab world. For instance, some eight years ago, Ahmed (1998) created a bibliography of some 2,500 publications on Arab psychology, many of which were reviewed by the contributors to Ahmed and Gielen's (1998) volume, *Psychology in the Arab Countries*. Today the number of relevant publications is certainly much larger. The studies cover a wide variety of topics especially in developmental, educational, social, cross-cultural, and abnormal-clinical psychology; in contrast, animal, physiological, and experimental psychology are less well

represented. This situation is not unlike that prevailing in other developing countries and regions including India and various African countries, where a lack of laboratory equipment and a preoccupation with the more applied areas of psychology can be commonly found (Leung & Zhang, 1995).

Ahmed's (1998) earlier bibliography of 2,500 studies may be compared to the results of a recent study by Sánchez-Sosa and Riveros (2007) who counted the number of published psychological research studies in 114 developing countries. Specifically, they summarized the frequencies of published literature (abstracts) for a 5-year period by relying on the PsycINFO database of the American Psychological Association. In October 2006, PsycINFO included psychologically relevant abstracts from 2,140 journals published in numerous countries around the world (APA Online, 2006).

It should be pointed out in this context that PsycINFO does not take into account numerous articles published in languages other than English—thus, the data contained in Tables 1 and 2 (see below) cannot be considered representative of psychological research activities in the Arab world (or in other developing regions and countries). The data may, however, be considered suggestive of the influence that Arab researchers and their home institutions have in the worldwide arena of psychology.

Table 1 lists the number of psychological articles and other materials contained in the PsycINFO database that were published over a period of 5 years in 19 Arab countries. The data reported in the table suggest that internationally visible research activity varies enormously from one Arab country to the next, with psychologists associated with institutions in Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Kuwait, and Lebanon being especially active. (Authors were identified by their institutional affiliation and not by their nationality.)

**Table 1**  
**Research Activity by Psychologists in 19 Countries of the Middle East and North  
 Africa**

| Country      | Number of Studies Listed in PsycINFO |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| Jordan       | 138                                  |
| Iraq         | 98                                   |
| Egypt        | 92                                   |
| UAE          | 78                                   |
| Kuwait       | 77                                   |
| Lebanon      | 73                                   |
| Saudi Arabia | 63                                   |
| Morocco      | 40                                   |
| Oman         | 25                                   |
| Sudan        | 19                                   |
| Bahrain      | 17                                   |
| Syria        | 15                                   |
| Algeria      | 13                                   |
| Somalia      | 13                                   |
| Tunisia      | 12                                   |
| Qatar        | 10                                   |
| Yemen        | 10                                   |
| Libya        | 3                                    |
| Djibouti     | 2                                    |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>798</b>                           |

*Note:* The information in this table is taken from Sánchez-Sosa and Riveros (2007, Table 4.5B).

It is instructive to compare the data published by Sánchez-Sosa and Riveros to those reported by Ahmed (1998) and Ahmed and Gielen (1998) who indicate that about 70% of the Arab psychological investigations published prior to 1998 were conducted by Egyptian psychologists. In contrast, Sánchez-Sosa and Riveros list Jordan and Iraq as leading Egypt in regards to the number of psychology research publications.

Furthermore, it needs to be understood that the PsycINFO database undercounts not only publications in Arabic but also those in French, a language that is sometimes used for purposes of scientific communication by psychologists in the Greater Maghreb. However, the authors list only 13 publications for Algeria and 12 for Tunisia, over a period of 5 years. These small numbers point to the omission of a very significant proportion of relevant articles.

It also proves instructive to compare the number of research publications in the Arab world to those associated with authors living in the most psychologically active developing nations around the world. Based again on Sánchez-Sosa and Riveros' publication as the basic source of information, Table 2 reports the number of psychological research publications in selected developing countries and also compares them to the corresponding number of publications in the Arab world.

The information contained in Table 2 suggests that psychologists in 6 developing nations (i.e., China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Mexico, and South Korea) are especially active in publishing internationally visible research, with China forging ahead of all the other countries. Moreover, the combined research publications of psychologists in the Arab world may be considered approximately comparable in frequency ( $N = 798$ ) to those of their colleagues respectively in India (835) and in Brazil (812).

**Table 2****Research Activity by Psychologists in 21 Developing Countries and the Arab World**

| Country/Region                    | Number of Studies Listed in PsycINFO |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| China                             | 1917                                 |
| India                             | 835                                  |
| Brazil                            | 812                                  |
| <b>19 Arab countries combined</b> | <b>798</b>                           |
| South Africa                      | 738                                  |
| Mexico                            | 733                                  |
| South Korea                       | 550                                  |
| Thailand                          | 222                                  |
| Nigeria                           | 214                                  |
| Argentina                         | 210                                  |
| Chile                             | 160                                  |
| Uganda                            | 156                                  |
| Kenya                             | 155                                  |
| <b>Jordan</b>                     | <b>138</b>                           |
| Malaysia                          | 136                                  |
| Philippines                       | 118                                  |
| Tanzania                          | 118                                  |
| Ghana                             | 114                                  |
| Indonesia                         | 112                                  |
| Pakistan                          | 109                                  |
| Colombia                          | 107                                  |
| Bangladesh                        | 103                                  |

*Note:* This table includes only those countries for which PsycINFO listed at least 100 studies for a 5-year period. All data reported are derived from Sánchez-Sosa and Riveros (2007, Tables 4.1-4.6C).

Of the Arab countries, Jordan (138) is listed as Number 13 in Table 2—an impressive result for such a small country. Furthermore, five predominantly Islamic countries appear in the table, and in this order: Jordan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. However, Sánchez-Sosa and Riveros did not include Turkey in their study,

although it is likely that Turkish publications surpass those of all other countries with predominately Muslim populations.

To sum up: Based on the information provided by Ahmed (1998), Ahmed and Gielen (1998, in prep.), Sánchez-Sosa and Riveros (2007), and others, we may conclude that a considerable amount of scientific psychological activity is taking place in the Arab world although there are large variations from one nation to the next. Psychologists associated with institutions located in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, several of the oil producing gulf countries, and Morocco are among the leaders in such endeavors. Few psychological activities, however, are presently taking place in some other Arab nations such as Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, and Somalia.

### *International Conferences*

Let us now continue the discussion of psychology in the Arab world by noting briefly that a number of international psychology and social science conferences have recently been held in countries such as Egypt, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. A good example is the First Middle East and North Africa Regional Conference of Psychology that took place from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2003 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Significantly, the conference was held under the auspices of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS), the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), and the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP). High attendance with participation from 35 countries including 17 of the neighboring countries, the presence of many leaders from national psychology associations, the involvement of three of the major international psychology organizations, and a prevailing spirit of goodwill suggest that psychology may well have

a promising future in the Arab world (Sabourin & Knowles, 2004). It should be added in this context that the Second Middle East and North Africa Regional Conference of Psychology (MENA RCP) is scheduled for April 29 to May 1, 2007, and is expected to take place in Amman, Jordan. This suggests that the communication density among psychologists from the MENA countries is increasing, and that links between MENA psychologists and the broader international community are growing stronger as well.

These developments are especially important because up till now the activities of national Arab psychology associations – especially those outside of Egypt – have often been limited in scope and effectiveness while varying considerably from one country to the next (R.A. Ahmed and J.M.A. Al-Khawajah, personal communication, October 2006; see Ahmed [2004] and Soueif and Ahmed [2001] for more information on national psychology organizations in Egypt and elsewhere). For instance, Kuwait does not yet have a national psychology association although over time, such an association could prove quite helpful in increasing the organizational cohesiveness, practical impact, and scientific standing of psychology in the country.

### ***Some Limitations of Arab Psychology***

In spite of the mostly positive developments noted above, commentators as varied as Ahmed, Khaleefa, Sayed, and Soueif have unanimously concluded that psychology in the Arab countries, as presently constituted, suffers from serious deficiencies that have kept it from having a broader impact both at home and abroad.

Moreover, they have suggested a number of reasons why psychology has so far exerted insufficient influence both in most regions of the Arab world as well as abroad. These include a complex array of economic, linguistic, cultural, and political factors that,

furthermore, vary from country to country. In the interest of brevity, let me mention here only four of the more immediate obstacles that have stood in the way of more rapid progress by Arab psychologists (for a broader analysis, see Ahmed & Gielen, in prep.).

- (1) Arab psychologists have only rarely pursued cumulative research programs that center on a limited number of research questions that are being investigated in depth over long periods of time. A good example of such a program is Soueif's long-term and large-scale investigation of drug abuse in Egypt (Soueif, 1998a). Other examples include Soliman's (1989) investigations of children's drawings, and Abdel-Khalek's research on topics such as death anxiety and certain personality dimensions (e.g., Abdel-Khalek, 1998). However, many Arab psychological studies are of a sporadic nature, pursued by one researcher at a time, imitative of studies conducted in the West, and tool-oriented rather than problem-centered (Soueif, 1998b). In my opinion, the use of a combination of qualitative, ethnographic, and quantitative methods by an interdisciplinary team of researchers would in many cases lead to more scientifically convincing and practically applicable results when compared to the present overuse of imported tests and scales.
- (2) Arab psychologists have not sufficiently indigenized their theories and research programs. In other words, they have frequently adopted the theories, research procedures, and general worldview of western psychologists without sufficiently modifying them and without creating a psychology sufficiently in tune with the cultural heritage of the Arab world. In this context it might be added that while certainly not all research efforts lend themselves to the process of indigenization,

most topics in areas such as developmental psychology, social psychology, counseling and psychotherapy, personality, and testing should be pursued at least partially within indigenous frameworks that derive from Arab cultural traditions or at least are compatible with them. In contrast to the situation in the Arab world, psychologists in some nonwestern countries such as Taiwan, Mexico, and the Philippines have already succeeded in creating viable indigenous psychology traditions (Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006).

Indigenization is a difficult but unavoidable major task for psychologists in the nonwestern countries since one cannot know in advance the degree to which psychological theories, findings, and practices originating in western countries are viable and appropriate in various nonwestern cultural settings. Furthermore, while the worldwide diffusion of psychology is part of the global modernization process, psychology in the nonwestern countries needs to be embedded in local traditions and belief systems so that a country does not lose its (nonwestern) soul. In other words, Arab psychology needs to grow deeper roots before it can “be regarded as a distinctive discipline dealing with the major issues that challenge practitioners in the Arab world today” (Sayed, 2002, p. 236).

Such roots are especially important in the Arab world where the old and the new may coexist in partially unreconciled form both at the societal and individual levels, thereby potentially creating conflicts within and between persons, and within and between societies. According to Gregg’s (2005) psychocultural analysis of MENA societies, for instance, frustration with broken promises of modernization as well as internal struggles between traditional values and modern

Western lifestyles especially among the younger generation are a major reason for the recent turmoil in the Arab world. (For some interesting, but not always uncontroversial examples of how one might conceptualize cultural influences on psychopathology and the development of psychiatric services in Islamic cultures, see Al-Issa's [1999] edited volume, *Al-Junun: Mental Illness in the Islamic World* as well as Al Issa & Al-Subaie's [2004] chapter, *Native Healing in Arab-Islamic Societies*.)

- (3) Arab psychologists need to develop original theoretical frameworks that are subsequently tested not only at home, but also with overseas populations such as immigrants of Arab origin in various western countries. In this way they can investigate the possible uniqueness or general validity of theories and hypotheses developed in an Arab cultural context. Additional psychological comparisons between Arab populations and respondents from both Muslim and non-Muslim populations in nonwestern countries would also be of great value. The principles and methods of cross-cultural psychology are bound to play an important role in research of this type especially if they are combined with the more qualitative methods favored by some proponents of cultural psychology (Stead & Young, 2007). Psychologists might, for instance, employ focus groups to elucidate the more collectivistic aspects of psychological functioning in Arab societies.
- (4) Arab psychologists are not sufficiently visible in the international arena including participating in international psychology conferences, publishing in the major internationally known journals, writing books that are frequently cited in the international literature, being elected to major positions in international

psychology organizations, participating in large scale, cooperative research projects, and so on. One important reason for this situation is that Arab research studies, theories, and interpretive papers are predominantly published in Arabic. This tends to inhibit the flow of communication between psychologists in the Arab and non-Arab worlds. Furthermore, psychologists in many Arab countries experience economic hardships, suffer from insufficient access to research grants and satisfactory laboratory equipment, and carry high teaching loads. These and other detrimental conditions make it difficult for them to participate more effectively in the international arena.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the time seems ripe for increased international participation by Arab psychologists both in the MENA region and on a worldwide basis.

### **A Modest Proposal**

While there are a variety of measures that could and should be taken to improve the societal usefulness, theoretical power, research excellence, interdisciplinary connectedness, and overall standing of Arab psychology, I would like to suggest here one practically feasible initiative that, if pursued in a creative, rigorous, and sustained fashion, would contribute not only to the goals of Arab psychology but also strengthen the academic excellence and presence of Kuwait University. Specifically, I would like to propose that an Institute of Arab Psychology be established at Kuwait University.

The members of such an institute might set themselves a variety of goals that, to me, appear to be realistic though difficult to achieve.

- (1) The Institute could serve as a center for *interdisciplinary cooperation in the context of joint research projects*. Experience shows that university departments

teaching different subject matters cooperate only rarely in order to offer joint degree programs integrating a variety of disciplines in a coherent and comprehensive manner. In contrast, scientific teams working on broad research questions (e.g., society-wide mental health programs, controlling delinquency and crime, issues associated with immigration and “guest workers,” the psychosocial situation of women, and neuropsychological problems) frequently include scientists from different disciplines that learn to cooperate fruitfully across disciplinary boundaries.

- (2) The Institute could serve as a model for establishing a *research culture* based on cooperation between researchers from different nations both within and outside the Arab world. There are a number of institutions in other parts of the world that have accomplished a similar purpose. For instance, the Academia Sinica in Beijing and the Academia Sinica in Taipei have made seminal contributions to various scientific pursuits respectively in China and in Taiwan, psychology included. In Germany, the prestigious Max Planck Institutes function as central places of research and scientific inspiration in a broad variety of scientific fields. Another model for some of the activities of the proposed Institute would be the Zentralstelle für Psychologische Information und Dokumentation, Universität Trier (Center for Psychological Information and Documentation, University of Trier, Germany).
- (3) The Institute could organize *conferences, workshops, and courses in psychology and overlapping areas of endeavor*. Over time, these would help not only to raise

- scientific and pedagogic standards in Kuwait but would also make Kuwait University attractive to academics and graduate students from other countries.
- (4) The proposed Institute of Psychology would need to be engaged in scientific work and training of *direct and indirect use to the surrounding society*. This might include scientific work directed at ameliorating social problems, publishing psychological materials and advice on topics such as childrearing and mental health that are suitable for the general public, training advanced students in scientific work, offering lectures to the public as well as the university community, offering continuing education workshops by Institute members and visiting scholars to professionals, and other related endeavors.
- (5) The Institute would include *a library* that contains books, articles, chapters, unpublished dissertations and master's theses, published and unpublished research reports, psychological tests, and other materials that are of relevance to Arab psychologists as well as scientists and practitioners in related fields. The publications should include those in Arabic, English, French, German, and other languages (see Gregg, 2005, 2006 for examples of studies of Arab populations published in Arabic, English, and French). When needed, relevant books and articles should be translated into Arabic. To the best of my knowledge such a central place for documentation and translation of Arab psychological research does not exist at present.

Faculty members, graduate students, and practitioners from the Arab world and elsewhere could then be invited to do some of their library and other research at the Institute. A central place of documentation could assist them in making better

use of the earlier contributions by Arab and non-Arab scholars that are otherwise difficult to trace because they appeared in numerous Arab and Western countries, exist only as unpublished dissertations and master's theses at local universities, are written in a variety of languages, and so on. Over time a central place would be helpful in increasing the cohesiveness and integration of the research and pedagogical efforts of Arab psychologists and induce an increasing number of them to contribute in a cumulative way to the science and practice of psychology.

(6) At periodic intervals the Institute could publish a *Survey of Arab Psychology*, taking into account both works published by Arab psychologists as well as psychological and related publications about Arab populations and immigrants of Arab origin appearing in the non-Arab world. Such surveys could focus on specific areas of research and practice as well as provide general overviews of the status of psychology in the Arab world in general as well as in specific countries. The surveys should also contain suggestions about problems and questions in need of further inquiry. As an example of a broadly conceived and valuable survey of this type we may cite Pandey (2000, 2001, 2004) who has coordinated several broadly conceived surveys of Indian psychology.

The Institute might also consider both commissioning and translating textbooks in some of the major areas of psychology, perhaps in cooperation with authors and publishing houses located both in the Arab world and abroad. Such efforts should prove conducive to improved instruction at the universities as well as a better understanding by students and others both of what psychology can offer, and what some of its limitations are.

(7) It would be of great importance that the Institute is fully *integrated into a university setting* while, at the same, conducting its work on a relatively *independent basis*. Anchoring the Institute in such an institutional framework would, in my opinion, make it more likely that its members would be able to pursue their studies in a creative and fruitful manner. Furthermore, the members of the Institute would be expected to establish other links, for instance, to various institutes and universities inside and outside the Arab world as well as regional and global psychology and social science organizations. In this context it would be very helpful if a *Kuwaiti Psychological Association* would be founded in the near future.

### **Conclusion**

During the preceding decades psychology has become a worldwide discipline. The International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) now includes 70 national psychology associations on all inhabited continents. This means, among other things, that psychology has prospered to various degrees in many nonwestern developing countries such as Brazil, China, India, Iran, Japan, Indonesia, Mexico, Philippines, and Turkey. In many of the poorest countries of Africa and the Islamic world, however, psychology still keeps a very low profile, in part because it is frequently seen as a kind of luxury in the face of the more urgent demands of economic survival, grinding poverty, and threats of political disintegration and civil war.

Although psychology in the Arab countries has steadily developed as well, it has nevertheless fallen behind in relation to some other economically, politically, and culturally emerging regions of the world, especially in East Asia and Latin America. As a

group Arab psychologists need to develop more theoretical models including indigenous perspectives; engage in sustained, socially useful research programs of an interdisciplinary character; employ more qualitative and collectivistic research methods; make better use of the already existing published and unpublished psychological, sociological, and anthropological literature on Arab persons, groups and institutions; and become more visible on the global stage. While there is no simple best way to achieve such ambitious goals, the establishment of a financially well endowed, creatively led, and university-connected yet partially independent Institute for Arab Psychology would constitute a significant step toward making Arab psychology a more significant force both within the Arab world and in the international area. Kuwait University is one place where such an institute could be established: It has the financial resources to do so; it aspires to be a major regional center of higher education; it already has two psychology as well as other departments in the social sciences; and it has followed a tradition of attracting faculty from other Arab nations, psychologists included.

In my opinion, an effective Institute for Arab psychology would certainly need the financial resources and institutional back-up necessary to fulfill its tasks, but what is needed above all is a powerful vision together with the determination to realize this vision in the course of time through teamwork in the service of higher scientific and social goals. Such an institute could do much to further the public good.

#### **Footnote**

<sup>1</sup> We (Ramadan A. Ahmed and Uwe P. Gielen) are at present preparing a paper tentatively entitled *Psychology in the Arab World*. It will analyze in more detail the history and present situation of psychology in the Arab countries.

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