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Book Review

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Theological and Clinical Issue

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BOOK REVIEW: *MUSLIM WOMEN, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND PSYCHOTHERAPY: THEOLOGICAL AND CLINICAL ISSUE*

Salih Yucel*

Isgandarova, Nazila. *Muslim Women, Domestic Violence, and Psychotherapy: Theological and Clinical Issues*. New York: Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group), 2019, pp. 217, USD 44.95, 978-1-138-59059-5.

Domestic violence, particularly against women, is an issue in every community. Multiple studies indicate that domestic violence against Muslim women is a significant issue in Muslim societies as well as those who live in the west. Responses to domestic violence and assistance to victims are diverse. To provide appropriate psychotherapy for Muslim women, psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors require a deeper understanding of Islamic theology and spirituality alongside the culture within which it arises. Although spiritual healing and psychological treatment are as old as Islam, academic works on modern Islamic psychotherapy have only recently emerged.

As an academic, registered psychotherapist, counsellor, social worker and woman activist in the Canadian Muslim community for many years, Nazila Isgandarova fills a gap in the academic field related to how to empower Muslim women, particularly domestic violence victims in light of practical Islamic spirituality, theology and jurisprudence. Her work, *Muslim Women, Domestic Violence, and Psychotherapy: Theological and Clinical Issues*, directly addresses this issue. Her book is intended to be a resource for professionals who assist Muslim women who are victims of domestic violence.

The book investigates the relationship between Islamic psychotherapy and other Islamic disciplines, particularly theology (*kalam*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), exegetical works of the Qur'an (*tafsir*) and the mystical dimension of Islam (*tasawwuf*) from earliest to present. By examining historical and religious figures such as Asiya, wife of Pharaoh, Mary, mother of Jesus, and Fatima, daughter of Prophet Muhammed, Isgandarova successfully connects past with present through the lens of the spiritual meaning of suffering women from Islamic perspective and how a Muslim woman can stand and cope against injustice and tyranny toward her.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of Islamic psychotherapy, drawing upon a unique set of theories and interventions that are underpinned by the sacred texts of Islam. These include the Qur'an, Sunnah and their scholarly

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interpretations from the classical to the modern period. The second chapter analyses key concepts related to domestic violence from Islamic theological, exegetical traditions and Canadian culture. Divine testing and suffering are examined from various scholarly points of views in chapter three. The chapter focuses on the domestic violence issue with a broader philosophical view, which includes this world and the next. Chapter four discusses satanic interferences from theological and cultural perspectives. It shows how culture is, at times, religionised. Chapter five focuses on correlations between spiritual diseases and spiritual distress. It elaborates the reflection of spiritual diseases in human behaviour, particularly regarding domestic violence. Honour and shame are two important topics that are treated in depth as causes of the suffering of women in Islamic society. Chapter six critically examines how honour and shame are misused by violent husbands against women. The last chapter explores recommendations for helping and empowering women against domestic violence.

After analysing Islamic sources, Isgandarova provides evidence from primary western sources related to psychotherapy to strengthen her arguments in each chapter. She also does not neglect Muslim feminists' views as well.

The author aims to develop a methodology that can help Muslim women who are victims of domestic violence to alleviate their distress and empower them by providing holistic psychotherapy in the light of religious, moral, spiritual sources from an Islamic perspective.

For achieving the aim, first, she tries to inject Islamic spirituality into modern psychotherapy to a certain extent.

Second, she argues that "Sufism provides an essential foundation for Islamic psychotherapy as it is recognized as Islam's life-giving core since the emergence of Islam" (Chapter 1). Thus, the Sufi way of holistic therapy can help the victims of domestic violence if it is applied by experienced and practicing experts.

Third, for helping female victims of domestic violence, Isgandarova as a registered Muslim psychotherapist, employs a five-step process called DEEDS to address the central issue in each stimulated case. The five steps in DEEDS are:

Describe the problem (assessing for spiritual distress);

Examine the influences from the Islamic tradition;

Explore the insights from the social sciences;

Develop a spiritual care plan that addresses the presenting issue and empowers the Muslim women to take appropriate action; and

Suggest specific Islamic psychotherapeutic interventions that focus on the "spiritual diagnosis" (Chapter 1)

Analysis of simulated cases by creating different hypothetical scenarios for each school of law in the classical period and well-known past and present scholars such as Imam Ghazali (d.1111) and Said Nursi (d.1960) is an approach that is unique to this work. Isgandarova is the

first to takes cases and analyses according to the different schools of theology in the field of psychotherapy.

Despite the book's many strengths, there are some weaknesses as well. For example, the simulated cases are similar to each other. That limits the author's analysis and precludes a broader examination of Islamic psychotherapy. The author's approach to Islamic feminists is not sufficiently critical. Many of them are not experts in the field of classical Islamic disciplines, but give Islamic legal rulings (*fatwas*) without being qualified. Furthermore, uncritical use of the category "Islamic feminists" is problematic. Whether feminism is Islamic or not is very controversial. Perhaps using Muslim feminists in the text instead of Islamic feminists would be more appropriate.

Sufism is described as a tradition in the book. Sufism is generally understood by scholars and Sufis to be the inner, mystical or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam and not a different tradition. Finally, the author does not explore some primary sources from the history of Islamic psychotherapy, such as Abu Zayd Ahmed ibn Sahl Balkhi's (d.934) *Masalih al-Abdan wal-Anfus*, (Sustenance for Body and Soul), Ibn Sina's (d.1037) *Kitab al-Shifa* (The Book of Healing) and *Kitab al-Najat* (The Book of Deliverance), and Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi's (d.925) *Kitab Tibb ar-Ruhani* (The Spiritual Physik of Rhazes). Al-Razi is considered the father of psychology and psychotherapy in Islamic history.

Overall, *Muslim Women, Domestic Violence, and Psychotherapy: Theological and Clinical Issues* provides personal experiences in the field and intellectual insights into Islamic psychotherapy. The book can be an educational resource for counsellors, psychologists and psychotherapists who treat Muslim clients. The book will contribute to a holistic therapeutic approach in psychotherapy. I believe it will trigger more similar works in the future.