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«Tarek Younis: *"The Muslim, State, and Mind: Psychology in Times of Islamophobia"*» - Book Review and Comments

Abstract

This reading note, presentation and comments focus us on how knowledge is built in the social sciences, taking into account both cognitive and social factors. Clinical psychology focuses on mental health disorders and problems affecting individuals and society. However, the sociopolitical context of these issues raises debates related to judicial, political, and social security matters, particularly concerning terrorism, Islamophobia, racism, and their political results in law and citizenship. Our choice of this book provides answers to some of our concerns. In the text that follows, we will explore and analyze the contents outlined in Tarek Younis's book, "The Muslim, State, and Mind: Psychology in Times of Islamophobia".

Keywords: *reading note, clinical psychology, Islamophobia, securitization, Younis Tarek*

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«Tarek Younis: "Müsəlman, dövlət və əql: İslamofobiya dövründə psixologiya" – kitab incələri və şərhlər

Xülasə

Bu oxu qeydi, təqdimat və şərh həm idrak, həm də sosial amilləri nəzərə alaraq sosial elmlərdə biliyin necə qurulduğuna diqqətimizi nümayiş etdirir. Klinik psixologiya psixi sağlamlıq pozğunluqlarına və fərdlərə və cəmiyyətə təsir edən problemlərə diqqət yetirir. Bununla belə, bu məsələlərin sosial-siyasi konteksti məhkəmə, siyasi və sosial təminat məsələləri, xüsusən də terrorizm, islamafobiya, irqçilik və onların hüquq və vətəndaşlıqdakı siyasi nəticələri ilə bağlı müzakirələri artırır. Bu kitabı seçməyimiz bəzi narahatlıqlarımıza cavab verir.

Sonrakı mətndə biz Tarek Yunisin "Müsəlman, Dövlət və Ağıl: İslamofobiya Zamanında Psikologiya" kitabında qeyd olunan məzmunu araşdırıb təhlil edəcəyik.

Açar sözlər: oxu qeydi, klinik psixologiya, İslamofobiya, sekuritizasiya, Yunis Tarek

Introduction

No researcher can ignore past and present historical contexts, and events today dictate a thorough discussion of how knowledge is constructed in the social sciences. The discourse of colonialism and post-colonialism, and the decolonization of knowledge, is still at the heart of epistemological events, and is called upon by the events and crises that human beings live through today.

With oppression, colonialism, occupation, and crimes against humanity, we question the role of social sciences and humanities. How do theories about human nature, the self and the other, contribute to security and remedial policies and legislation?. Researchers argue that the concept of *"'the Global South' has become a shorthand for the world of non-European, postcolonial peoples. Synonymous with uncertain development, unorthodox economies, failed states, and nations fraught with corruption, poverty, and strife, it is that half of the world about which the 'Global North' spins theories"* (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012). According to the dominant discourse and knowledge held by the owners (Western epistemologies), post-colonial societies have traditionally been labeled and characterized based on their cultural, social, political, economic, psychological, and cognitive traits. These societies have often been portrayed as lacking in the ability to produce theories and make meaningful contributions to the progression of history. It is the product of historicizing western narrative of subject-formation (Spivak, 1988).

Psychology as a field of knowledge in the social sciences, and as a professional practice rooted in various societies, is no longer just a profession, but has become at the center of the debate about what has happened and is happening today: the human being, the troubled, mental health, mental health policies, security, and the exploitation of knowledge to legitimize surveillance and security policies, among others. It about questioning the psychological sciences and practices within the framework of Eurocentric epistemologies (Comas-Díaz, Adames & Chavez-Dueñas, 2024).

In this text, we will have an important presentation by Tarek Younis, a researcher and clinical psychologist, who will provide us with a cognitive attempt that combines the "theoretical frameworks" of knowledge production in the West, clinical practices within the field of psychology, cases related to victims, clients, and immigrant communities, especially Muslims in Western countries. In the face of migration policies, counter-terrorism legislation, securitization, and the surveillance society, the relationship between the political and the scientific, and the state's use of science to regulate the social (Younis, 2023).

Research

We chose this book because it addresses many of our interests and concerns. Our presentation will begin by introducing the author and his project, followed by a summary of the book's content. We'll then provide a systematic overview of the book and conclude with a discussion and comments on the content and the author's project.

I. **About the author:**

Tarek Younis is a clinical psychologist and Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Middlesex University. Tarek's work focuses on the impact of racism, Islamophobia and security policies on the mental health of Muslim communities, particularly in the Global North.

The author describes himself as "a cultural and critical clinical psychologist". In regards to his reflections and work, he writes:

«Significantly, my articles should not be read as guides towards spiritual or psychological excellence, but rather an exercise in inquisitiveness in the hopes of attaining wisdom, insight and understanding. Note my understanding changes considerably over time, so there's a strong likelihood I may disagree with some things I have written/said in the past. Of course, that's the beauty of learning». (Official web site of the Author, *https://www.tarekyounis.org/about.html*)

Younis describes how he developed his expertise on Islamophobia through His doctoral thesis in psychology focused on Muslim identity in Western countries:

"My doctoral thesis in psychology was precisely on Islamophobia and was not directly related to mental health: I was interested in how Muslims in Canada, Montreal, Copenhagen and also Germany perceive and develop themselves as Muslims, how they develop their Muslim identity." (CCIE, 2022, p33)

His clinical experience working with refugees and migrants has given him a critical perspective, especially on the conceptual framework of mental health:

"My clinical training in mental health led me to work with refugees and migrants, particularly in Montreal, so I had to think a lot about whether the conceptual framework of mental health is really adapted to people from other than European cultures (not just Muslims but more generally). In other words, how is psychology, with its European foundations, adapted to people from other parts of the world? Of course, with a particular focus on Muslims." (CCIE, 2022, p. 33)

Here, Younis questions the appropriateness of Western concepts of mental health for other cultures, particularly for Muslims, given the European foundations of psychology.

As a practitioner and researcher, Younis explores how psychology and politics intertwine to racialize Muslims and influence their relationship with the state. His book The Muslim, State, and Mind (2023) seeks to expose the dynamics through which psychology, particularly in Western contexts, participates in the management of "Muslim subjectivity", a key concept in his analyses.

II. Book presentation and contents

The first chapter, "Introduction: Friendly Ears", opens with an anecdote in which Adam, a young Muslim, falls victim to Denmark's excessive security surveillance because of his family's association with the war in Syria. Younis uses this story to illustrate the central role of psychology in Muslim securitization practices, showing how Adam, even without actual trauma, attempts to manipulate psychology to denounce this violence. Younis argues that psychology is often used to make Muslim suffering visible, but it is also a tool of state control, a theme that will be explored throughout the book.

Entitled: "Islamophobia and the Problem of Muslim Thought", In this chapter, Younis analyzes how Islamophobia functions as a form of racism, a racialization of Muslims beyond their religious beliefs. He argue that this racialization is not simply the product of individual prejudice, but is deeply rooted in the political and economic structures of the modern West. Younis also criticizes the neoliberal approach to Islamophobia, which tends to reduce discrimination to individual problems, obscuring systemic power dynamics.

The third Chapter examines the role of psychology in the production of Muslim subjectivity. Younis draws on the theories of Frantz Fanon to show how Muslims must constantly reformulate their commitment to the state through a "psychological logic". He also discusses the expectations placed on Muslims to conform to psychological models of social acceptability, what he calls a "psychological contract" with the state.

Younis criticizes, In the chapter four: "The Politics of Muslim Mental Health: Legitimacy Through Suffering", attention to Muslim mental health in neoliberal societies, highlighting how psychological interventions can, in fact, legitimize structures of oppression by focusing on individual symptoms of distress rather than their structural causes. The concept of trauma is central to this chapter, as it shows how it is used to make Muslim suffering intelligible to liberal societies, while at the same time depoliticizing it.

"Security and Extremism: Securing the Muslim Mind", the fifth chapter, looks at how security and psychology come together to create a model of "pre-criminality" where Muslims are monitored and seen as potential risks because of their religious belief or affiliation. Younis explores the mechanisms by which psychology becomes a tool of control in the management of Muslims' political and religious thoughts, highlighting the impact of security policies on the formation of their subjectivity.

In Chapitre six, Younis analyzes how neoliberalism shapes contemporary psychology, particularly in its relationship with Muslim communities. He criticizes the emphasis on "resilience" and "self-care" as strategies for managing psychological suffering, pointing out that these approaches individualize problems that are in fact systemic.

The Conclusion of Younis's Book, explore "The Decolonial Somewhere Between Justice and Peace", In this final chapter, Younis calls for recognition of the role of the state in psychologizing social and political ills, and warns against attempts to "decolonize" Muslim mental health without first politicizing our understanding of these dynamics.

III. "The Muslim, state, and mind: psychology in times of Islamophobia": synthesis and dabts

The book project, show how Younis combines psychology, sociology, postcolonial studies and political theory. He draws on thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Michel Foucault to develop his analysis. Although critical of certain approaches claiming to be decolonial, Younis is committed to decolonizing the psychology and understanding of the Muslim experience.

1. Islamophobia as a Form of Racism

Younis posits Islamophobia within a wider colonial and imperialist history, considering that it is not just an issue of individual inequity but a structural phenomenon that impacts social and economic relations. He argues the use of psychological and medical language as tools for managing *"unwanted behaviors and thinking"* in Muslim communities, highlighting how Islamophobia affects access to employment, housing, and mental health services. Younis confirms the racialized nature of Islamophobia, particularly in the context of security policies like the Extremism Risk Guidance (ERG), which he describes as a *"racist, permeable membrane separating prison and public, made possible through the growth of 'pre-crime"* (Younis, 2023, p. 86). This approach, disproportionately targets Muslims, reinforcing their marginalization and monitoring. Younis stresses the importance of understanding Islamophobia beyond simple individual prejudices, by inscribing it in a colonial and imperialist history. According to Younis (2023, p. 37), *"Medical and psychological language and tools have long been employed in the liberal management of unwanted behaviours and thinking in the population."* This approach enables us to understand how Islamophobia structures social and economic relations, affecting Muslims' access to employment, housing, and mental health services.

2. The Role of Psychology in Racialization

Younis critically examines the role of psychology in keeping racist stereotypes and Islamophobia. He challenges the idea of psychology as a neutral and apolitical discipline, arguing that it has historically been used to individualize structural problems, particularly in the context of Islamophobia. In addition, he examines how psychological language is used in security and counterterrorism policies, such as the ERG, which classifies Islamist ideas and behaviors under the guise of preventing extremism. Younis also highlights how mental health professionals, particularly Muslims, often self-censor their critiques of such policies due to the moral and political pressures of counter-terrorism (Younis, 2021). He emphasizes the complicity of psychological disciplines in processes of racism, noting that *"the psy-disciplines are not simply innocent bystanders in Islamophobia, but as I have argued throughout this book, are integral to these processes of dragging, tearing, breaking, and killing"* (Younis, 2023, p. 152). He critiques how psychology is used to individualize structural problems, particularly in the context of Islamophobia. He challenges the idea of a neutral, apolitical psychology: *"Medical and psychological language and tools have long been employed in the liberal management of unwanted behaviours and thinking in the population."* (p. 37). He analyzes how psychology is used to individualize structural issues, particularly in the context of Islamophobia.

3. The Securitization of Muslim Communities

The securitization of Muslim communities is a central theme in Younis's analysis. He examines how psychological language and tools are mobilized in security and counter-terrorism policies to monitor and control Muslim populations. For example, Younis critiques the use of psychological surveillance in policies such as Prevent, which aim not only to identify potential violence but also to *"discipline their [Muslims'] relationship to the state"* (Younis, 2023, p. 110). Younis argues that such policies have a detrimental impact on the mental health of Muslims, especially young people, who feel constantly under suspicion and surveillance. He also highlights the international dimension of these practices, noting how security measures are shared across borders, further entrenching the global securitization of Muslims. Younis examines how psychological language is used in security and counter-terrorism policies: *"The Extremism Risk Guidance (ERG) is a significant example of the*

racist, permeable membrane separating prison and public, made possible through the growth of 'pre-crime'." (p. 86). Inspired by Fanon, Younis's sociogenic analysis focuses on the impact of the social and political environment on the individual psyche. He illustrates his arguments with concrete examples, such as that of Ibrahim mentioned in chapter 3.

4. Neoliberalism and the Individualization of Suffering

Younis critiques the neoliberal tendency to individualize suffering, particularly in the context of Islamophobia. He critiques that psychological disciplines often reduce structural problems, such as racism and state violence, to individual pathologies. He argues that this approach obscures the political and structural dimensions of Muslim experiences and reinforces the status quo. Also, Younis draws on his clinical experience to illustrate how this individualization plays out in practice, suggesting that mental health professionals are often complicit in pathologizing Muslim political agency and dissent. He calls for a more nuanced understanding of Muslim distress that acknowledges the broader social and political context. Younis also explores the use of psychology as a tool for controlling and monitoring Muslims, particularly in the context of deradicalization policies. He notices: *"The Extremism Risk Guidance (ERG) is a significant example of the racist, permeable membrane separating prison and public, made possible through the growth of 'pre-crime'"* (Younis, 2023, p. 86). This security approach has a detrimental effect on the mental health of Muslims, especially young people, who feel constantly suspected and under surveillance. Also, on the psychologists themselves, as he cited in one of his works on Counter-radicalization, public health, and racism: A case analysis of Prevent (2021): *"I found that mental health professionals—especially Muslims—self-censored their critical thoughts of Prevent, largely as a result of the political and moral subscript underlying counterterrorism: the 'good' position was to accept their counterterrorism duty, and the 'bad' position was to reject it"* (Younis, 2021).

5. Decolonial Psychology and the Politics of Mental Health

Younis is a booster for a decolonial approach to psychology that challenges the discipline's complicity in Islamophobia and racialization. Inspired by thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, he analyzes the need to situate Muslim subjectivity within a framework of surveillance and securitization. Younis calls for a psychology that is reflexive and politically engaged, one that acknowledges the structural and historical dimensions of Muslim experiences. He critiques the psy-disciplines for their role in keeping Islamophobia going and argues for a more critical and decolonial approach to mental health. Younis also highlights the importance of international collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and civil society organizations to develop psychological support approaches that address the structural realities of Islamophobia. Younis calls for a more nuanced and critical approach to the mental health of Muslims, one that takes into account the structural and political dimensions of their distress. In particular, he proposes a committed, decolonial psychology. As he points out: *"The psy-disciplines are not simply innocent bystanders in Islamophobia, but as I have argued throughout this book, are integral to these processes of dragging, tearing, breaking and killing"* (Younis, 2023, p. 152). This critical approach echoes the concerns of other researchers and human rights organizations. For example, a report by Medact (2021) highlights the ethical risks posed by "Vulnerability Support Hubs" in the UK, which risk pathologizing, stigmatising and criminalizing Muslims under the guise of prevention: *"Racialised groups, especially Muslims, are grossly disproportionately referred to the hubs. Given that people with mental health conditions are often stigmatised as dangerous and that perceptions of threat are also highly racialised, the hubs appear to combine this mental health stigma with Islamophobia. They risk, on the one hand, pathologising Muslim political agency and dissent and, on the other, criminalising, or rendering suspect, poor mental health among Muslims"* (Aked, Younis et Heath-Kelly, 2021, p.50).

In Europe, similar concerns have been raised about policies to combat radicalization. In particular, Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, 2007) has criticized the use of removal orders in the name of national security, which disproportionately target Muslims. Also, political discourse has become endangered by laws that favor prejudice: *"Others have worried that glorification laws could be used against Muslims who speak in favor of armed resistance against occupation, expression which is typically viewed as a form of protected, if controversial, political speech."* (Human Rights

Watch, 2007, p. 68). The lack of a balanced legal framework, simultaneously protecting national security and minority rights, is an issue that is aptly addressed in Younis' book. This is an issue that merits in-depth psychological and multidisciplinary reflection, supported by rigorous academic research and appropriate media coverage. Faced with these challenges, Younis calls for international collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and civil society organizations. The aim is to develop psychological approaches that do not deny the political and structural realities of Islamophobia while providing concrete support to those affected. In an interview, he advocates for increased international collaboration on developing this type of support. There's a lot of common ground when it comes to security, and it's important to remember that many practices are actually international. *"I'd like to see a lot more international collaboration on how to create this kind of support. There is so much common ground, we need to remember that many security practices, in practice, not in theory, are international: we have examples of British security officers, private or public, going to France, Denmark, even China, to share 'best practice'. We know a British civil servant who is going to China to train the police. The war on terrorism is global, it's an international thing. I'd love to see us develop a more robust collaboration with organizations in France, Germany, and beyond. It's time we create a consolidated effort to provide support to these families and communities."* (CCIE, 2022, p. 42).

Conclusion

Besides the book's decolonial epistemological project that we presented some of its ideas and details, one takeaway from Tariq Younis' work is how mental health and security concepts are used to justify the stigmatisation of Muslims and link their presence to security risks represented by terrorism and extremist crimes, such as what happens when individuals are reported based on behaviours such as anger or religiosity. This approach utilizes psychology to lend legitimacy to the stigmatization, doing so by connecting the target group's behaviors, beliefs, and practices to interpretations found within Western neoliberal "policies," which are then characterized as suspicious or extremist-related, and by linking these behaviors, beliefs, and practices to interpretations arising from Western neoliberal frameworks.

Therefore, it becomes necessary for "Muslims" to adapt in order not to be stigmatised. This adaptation requires them to suppress their feelings and integrate conditionally by abandoning religious or cultural identities, which creates a sense of alienation and additional pressure for not being able to express their beliefs, such as the case of Adam who reacted after he felt pressured and stigmatised. Although he had to go to the psychologist and tried to show his dissatisfaction with the treatment in order to obtain a document proving that he suffered psychological damage as a result of the police's racist treatment of him, the psychologist took the matter seriously, revealing that Adam did not suffer any harm, which led to his withdrawal from the sessions for fear of further consequences, and his plan ended in failure.

Tariq Younis's book paints a picture of a world where organized racism is commonplace, targeting individuals based on their religious beliefs and unjustly branding them as potential threats and symbols of backwardness, regardless of who they are or where they come from; this prejudiced perspective became significantly more pronounced after September 11th, further marginalizing these communities.

We know that people have a tendency to categorise themselves into groups and this is what is known as social identity, so stigmatisation is established by the non-acceptance of difference in order to promote a sense of superiority and that others are less or different, this reinforces their sense of power and control and also arises from situations where they feel their culture and interests are threatened by other people, on the one hand.

On the other hand, it is a way in which fear is transformed into stigmatisation in order to minimise the feeling of threat and to increase their sense of security, which hinders progress and co-existence and deepens social divisions.

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