Islamic Ethics and Self-Development: Communitarian, Individualist and Pietistic Perspectives

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Abstrak

Islamic self-help literature merupakan salah satu literatur yang paling banyak dibaca dan tersebar luas di kalangan umat Islam saat ini. Namun, kajian mendalam tentang wacana self-help Islam, para produsen literatur ini, serta konteks kemunculannya masih sangat terbatas. Literatur ini memainkan peran penting dalam bagaimana etika Islam dipahami dan dipraktikkan, meskipun pengaruhnya masih belum diteliti secara memadai. Artikel ini berupaya mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan mengeksplorasi tiga wacana self-help Islam yang tersebar luas, yaitu karya al-Hāshimī, Ayad, dan al-'Arīfī. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk: (1) menganalisis struktur dan koherensi wacana-wacana tersebut, serta (2) memahami perannya dalam menjembatani etika Islam dengan etika global. Studi ini mengidentifikasi tiga wacana utama: deontologis-komunitarian, holistik-individualistik, dan global-pietistik, berdasarkan karya tiga penulis yang mendapat perhatian internasional, khususnya di Barat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa etika Islam secara eksplisit berinteraksi dengan etika global, baik dalam teori tentang diri (otonomi, pencarian kebahagiaan, harmoni tubuh dan pikiran, kesenangan, dll.) maupun praktik (manajemen, aktivitas sosial-politik, olahraga, dll.). Temuan ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya membaca etika Islam dalam konteks modern yang terus berkembang. Meskipun berbasis pada sampel teks yang terbatas, studi ini memberikan wawasan awal yang relevan untuk memperluas kajian etika Islam di bidang lain, seperti bisnis dan bioetika.

.**Kata Kunci:** *Swadaya, pengembangan diri, etika Islam, etika global, kesejahteraan*

Abstract

Islamic self-help literature is one of the most widely read and widespread literature among Muslims today. However, an in-depth study of Islamic self-help discourse, the producers of this literature, and the context in which it emerged is still very limited. This literature plays an important role in how Islamic ethics is understood and practiced, although its influence has still not been adequately researched. This article seeks to fill this gap by exploring three widely circulated discourses of Islamic self-help, namely the works of al-Hāshimī, Ayad, and al-'Arīfī. This research aims to: (1) analyze the structure and coherence of these discourses, and (2) understand their role in bridging Islamic ethics with global ethics. The study identifies three main discourses: deontological-communitarian, holistic-individualistic, and global-pietistic, based on the work of three authors who have received international attention, particularly in the West. The results show that Islamic ethics explicitly interact with global ethics, both in theory about the self (autonomy, the search for happiness, harmony of body and mind, pleasure, etc.) and in practice (management, socio-political activities, sports, etc.). These findings underscore the importance of reading Islamic ethics in an ever-evolving modern context. Although based on a limited sample of texts, the study provides relevant preliminary insights to expand the study of Islamic ethics in other areas, such as business and bioethics.

Keywords: Self help, self development, Islamic ethics, global ethics, well-being

INTRODUCTION

Since the second half of the twentieth century, self-help literature attracted a large audience in the Arabic-Muslim world. For example, the writings of Dale Carnegie were translated into Arabic as early as 1950, and were reprinted several times. Dale Carnegie's How to Stop Worrying and Start Living (1948) inspired Arab authors to write original works of self-help with similar contents (al-Jiddāwi, 1997; 'Abd al-Wāḥid, 2001). In Egypt, self-help literature flourished as a consequence of cultural flows of capitalism and modernization, with interest sparked in public culture and individual ethics. This literature, as argued by Jeffrey T. Kenney, was embraced by the Society of Muslim Brotherhood which produced its own literature of Islamic etiquette (Kenney, 2015, 664). In Turkey, Volga Yılmaz Gümüş showed how translation of American self-help literature as well as the emergence of Turkish professionals of self-help training as human engineering, without any Islamic accents, at the same time (early fifties of the 20th century) with Nüvit Osmay, followed by later generations of authors (Gümüş, 2017, 95-96).

The Egyptian 'Amr Khālid also produced one of the most popular Islamic discourses of self-help (Olsson, 2015). This influence of Western self-help literature reached Islamic ethics beyond Egypt as well, spreading through different channels into the latter, as management advice, psychology or anecdotes. A famous example of how Carnegie's How to Stop Worrying and Start Living influenced Islamic ethics is the Salafi Saudi preacher 'Ā'iḍ al-Quranī's Lā-taḥzan (Don't be sad), first published in 1996 (al-Quranī, 1996). It was a best-seller in the Arab world, and translated into other languages read by Muslims (Urdu, Malay, Turkish, Indonesia, English, French, etc.), making its author one of the main public speakers and Islamic TV preachers. This book has, on its turn, generated a Muslim discourse on "Don't be sad", adapted to different publics: women, children, etc. Aside from 'Amr Khālid, relatively well-known and studied in the Western academe, the sub-genre of Islamic self-help as such has not been studied, and the features, as well as the philosophy behind it are yet to be examined.

In the following, I investigate three texts of Islamic self-help literature, written in Arabic and English, globally diffused in other languages, enjoying success and popularity within the field of Islamic ethics: Shakhṣiyyat al-mar'a al-muslima: Kamā yaṣūghuhā al-Islām fī al-kitāb wa-l-sunna by Muḥammad 'Alī al-Hāshimī, Healing Body & Soul: Your Guide to Holistic Wellbeing Following Islamic Teachings by Amira Ayad and Istamti' bi-ḥayātik: funūn al-ta'āmul ma'a al-nās fī ẓill al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya : ḥaṣīlat buḥūth wa-dawrāt wa-dhikrayāt akthar min 'ishrīn sanah by Muḥammad al-'Arīfī. Although I am aware that a corpus of three texts does not allow us to make generalizations, my aim is to capture the common denominators between these texts and to obtain some first thoughts on how modern Islamic ethics address self-development. One particular guiding line of this article is the way Islamic ethics accommodate and respond to the set of values self-help literature embeds, in what pertains to modern and post-modern individualism and subjectivity

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a text analysis method to explore the discourse in Islamic self-help literature. The main data comes from

the work of three authors who have had a significant influence on the spread of Islamic ethics globally, namely al-Hāshimī, Ayad, and al-'Arīfī. These three authors were chosen based on the popularity of their work and the breadth of the international audience they reached, especially in the West.

The data collection process involves reviewing the main texts in the form of books, articles, and related publications from the three authors. Secondary data includes critical reviews, interviews, and reader responses obtained through digital media. The inclusion criteria in this study include works that explicitly address Islamic ethics and their relevance to the practices of modern life.

Data analysis is carried out through several stages. First, thematic analysis is used to identify key themes in Islamic self-help literature, such as communalism, individualism, and piethism. Second, critical discourse analysis is applied to evaluate the relationship between Islamic ethics and global ethics, especially in modern concepts such as happiness, body-mind harmony, and autonomy. Furthermore, a discursive comparison was carried out to find differences and similarities in the approach of the three authors to the theme. Validation of findings is carried out through triangulation, namely by asking for input from experts to ensure that the interpretation of the data is in accordance with the theological and socio-cultural context. In addition, verification is carried out against secondary sources to strengthen the results of the analysis.

Although this research is limited to the work of three authors and texts published in a global context, this approach is expected to provide new insights into how Islamic self-help literature functions as a medium that bridges Islamic ethics with modern global ethics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Deontological-Communitarian self-help: al-Hāshimī's The Ideal Muslimah

Muḥammad 'Alī al-Hāshimī (1925-2015) is a prolific Syrian Islamic writer who has published over 20 Islamic and literary books, some of which have been translated into several European languages. He graduated from Damascus University in Arabic Literature and Education in 1960. In 1962, he traveled to Saudi Arabia to teach Arabic for three years in colleges. In 1970, he obtained his PhD in Arabic literature at the University of Cairo in Egypt. He then returned to Saudi Arabia, at the request of the Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, where he taught Arabic language from 1973 until 1996 (al-Hāshimī's website, n.d). Al-Hāshimī is an Islamist intellectual who belonged to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, the Branch of Aleppo, and was influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brother Sayyid Quṭb (Basaer, 2015).

In the West, Muḥammad 'Alī al-Hāshimī is particularly known for the books Shakhṣiyyat al-mar'a al-muslima: Ka-mā yaṣūghuhā al-Islām fī al-kitāb wa-l-sunna and Shakhṣiyyat al-muslim: Ka-mā yaṣūghuhā al-Islām fī al-kitāb wa-l-sunna his two most popular books. These two books, in addition to al-Mujtama' al-muslim : Ka-mā yaṣūghuhā al-Islām fī al-kitāb wa-l-sunna, are widely available through translations by the International Islamic Publishing House in Riyadh, and participate in the dissemination of an Islamic discourse on individual and social ethics. However, his most translated and widely circulated book is the one discussed here on the Muslim woman, translated from Arabic into a dozen European languages (including Russian and Spanish), indicating a market for of an Islamic discourse on self-help, that resonate with Muslim women in the West.

This book was written and first published in Arabic in Beirut in 1994 by Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya. Since then, the book has been published several times in Arabic by Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya and other publishing houses. It was edited four times between 1994 and 1996, which could be explained by the context of the heated debates about women and Islamic oppositions to the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. Here, I am using the eighth edition published in 2002.

Like the majority of Islamic-self help books, Shakhṣiyyat al-mar'a al-muslima compiles a considerable number of Qur'anic verses, prophetic traditions and anecdotes from the classical history of Islam, taken from some forty Sunni books (quoted in footnotes and in the bibliography). The book aims to build the balance of the Muslim woman's personality on a commitment that is religious (piety), individual (well-being) and sociopolitical (commitment to the family, society and affairs of the Muslim community). This holistic view of the Muslim self as seeking refinement in the private as well as the public spheres has its origins in three sources: classical ādāb shar'iyya, the ethics which teach how to behave Islamically in all situations, from eating to commanding right and forbidding wrong, the Muslim Brotherhood ideology whose project is to build Muslim society from below in all its dimensions and in the Western self-help literature, equally interested in a balanced and holistic character of the individual. The book advocates a way of life affirmed as a complete Islamic way for women, from the Quranic teachings and the prophetic tradition, covering the behavior of the Muslim woman towards God, herself, her parents, her husband, her children, her relatives, her neighbors, her friends and society. The focus is laid on the duties to be performed where each dimension is a series of religious obligations and norms to be respected, in a hierarchical order from God to others.

Al-Hāshimī wants Muslim women to behave according to the norms set by the Quran and sunna, in each relationship, whether with God, herself, the family or society, respecting the pyramid of relationships in which her relationship with God sits at its top. Thus, the first relationship concerns the behaviour of the Muslim woman towards God, where the ideal woman is one who believes in God, obeys and worships him, practices religious rituals, avoids any situation of isolation with a stranger, wears the veil and never travels alone without a guardian (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 11-101). Next, it is the deeds of the Muslim woman vis-à-vis herself at the level of body, mind and soul. As for the body, she is moderate in nutrition, practices sports, she is clean and takes care of her appearance. In her mind, she is curious, educated, reads books, and departs from quackery. In addition, she reinforces her soul by devoting herself to rituals and spirituality, frequenting virtuous women (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 102-135). The following relationship deals with the manners of the Muslim woman towards her parents, demanding that she be devoted to them, giving priority to the mother (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 136-148). As for her behaviour towards her husband, she should base the choice of her husband and lifestyle on religion; al-Hāshimī asserts that the ideal wife is chaste and wants to satisfy her husband (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 149-209). Subsequently, al-Hāshimī deals with the conduct of the Muslim woman towards her children. Here, she must assume her responsibilities towards them, educate them, show them her tenderness and treat them fairly (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 210-227).

The ideal Muslim woman has also to be the ideal mother-in-law, making the right choice of the future daughter-in-law or future son-in-law, while being caring and fair (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 228-237). Kindness and fairness are values that al-Hāshimī also recommends in the ideal Muslim woman's behaviour towards her relatives: she should maintain kinship ties even when family members are not Muslims (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 238-253). In her relationship to her neighbours, she should respect good neighbourliness and show benevolence towards her neighbours even if they are not Muslims. Based on prophetic traditions, the author argues that the bad neighbour is deprived of true faith (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 254-268). As for her behaviour towards her friends and "sisters in religion": the Muslim woman is in particular bound to love them in God, to be indulgent, counsellor and benevolent towards them (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 269-296). However, the dimension on which al-Hāshimī lays most focus is Muslim women's ethics in society: the ideal Muslim woman must be truthful, counsellor, benevolent, modest, dignified, discreet, fair, modest, etc. Among the social acts that the author specifically recommends to women are: to mingle with women and to hear their wrongs, to reconcile Muslim women, to preach Islam, to command the good and to forbid evil, to take an interest in the political issues of Muslims and opt for a job that corresponds to her femininity (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 296-487).

A particular idea that the author has developed throughout the book is the moral distinction of the Muslim woman; she must be distinguished from the non-Muslim woman by superior ethics. He argues that "only the Muslim is able to disseminate all these values (affection, tranquillity, stability, satisfaction and happiness in the home) in today's world, a world where women suffer painfully from the materialistic philosophy which imposed on non-Islamic societies an infernal way of life" (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 8). Then, he adds, "Islam recommends to Muslims to distinguish themselves by the excellence of their clothes, their attitude, their conduct and their actions, in order to be exemplary to follow, worthy of transmitting to people its noble message" (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 102).

Al-Hāshimī also insists on an ethics of balance between body, mind and soul, because, as he says, "the human being is made up of these three parts and it must, therefore, give each of its components the necessary attention. The success of the human being resides, precisely, in the maintenance of the balance between body, mind and soul" (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 130). Concerning the body, he recommends to Muslim women to be moderate in nutrition, to avoid obesity, narcotics and excitants. In addition, she should also discipline herself " to avoid a lot of bad habits of non-Muslim societies like absurd late night parties ... she should fall asleep early, to get up early" (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 104-105).

In the social engagement of the Muslim woman, the author says "the Muslim is like a lantern; once filled with light, it illuminates the way to those who are in darkness. Aware that she is the immense reward reserved for those who sincerely call for truth, she never hesitates to enlighten disoriented minds and guide them to the right path" (al-Hāshimī, 2002, 104-459). With this praise, the Muslim woman can feel herself invested with the mission of guiding others towards the truth, while current societies and individuals tend increasingly to admit the plurality of regimes of truths, mutual respect and social cohesion. He adds: "by entrusting women with the mission of commanding the good and forbidding the evil, Islam grants them a status of prestige, because it allows them to be in the position of commander, them who were always commanded"(al-Hāshimī, 2002, 459).

Thus, al-Hāshimī wants the Muslim woman to feel distinguished, as she holds a message, a prestige or a light in the dark, caused by the so-called Western meaningless materialism. Not only she should help her children, sustain her family life and actively interact with society, but she should help non-Muslims with proselytism, who are to be guided or rescued. It is noteworthy that although al-Hāshimī authored this book on the Muslim women's self, he dealt with the self in only 33 pages while the rest (450 pages) is dedicated to obligations towards God and the others. This alone indicates that the self is a minor part in the deontological-communitarian Islamic ethics of al-Hāshimī.

This type of Islamic self-help discourse displays the characteristics of Islamic ethics as promoted by the Muslim Brotherhood, and reformist Muslim schools of thought in general, in that it is vertical and concerned with virtuous individual behaviour inas much as it relates to collective virtue and spirituality. It is also more interested in social ethics, politics and broad community relations (Maréchal, 2009, 191-214). Such ethics can be clearly seen in the famous work of Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's Khuluq al-muslim, first published in 1953, especially in his formulation that "the circle of ethics encompasses all", whereby ethics are the whole of religion and the whole of life, and good behaviour should be adopted in all situations (al-Ghazālī, 1987, 31-33). For instance, when al-Ghazālī discusses the character of cleanliness he says "Islam's care for cleanliness and hygiene is part of its care for the physical and the spiritual force of Muslims because it requires bodies in which run the blood of health in their veins" (al-Ghazālī, 1987, 158). The idea of comprehensiveness, balance and holism of Islamic ethics as perceived by the thinkers of Muslim Brotherhood can be traced back to Ḥasan al-Bannā's first principle (of the twenty principles) that "Islam is a comprehensive system which deals with all spheres of life" (al-Bannā, 1996, 5).

Holistic-individualistic self-help: Ayad's Healing Body & Soul

Amira Ayad is an Egyptian writer and therapist who lives in Ontario, Canada. She graduated with a Master's degree in Pharmacy and a PhD in Natural Health. She also pursued studies in Islam at Emmanuel College-University of Toronto. She is the founder of the Women Whispers Academy, a wellness center in Ontario. Amira Ayad has published several books in English, the most famous of which is her Healing Body & Soul: Your Guide to Holistic Wellbeing Following Islamic Teachings. This book was translated into French (2013) and Urdu (2015) which gives to the author an international visibility. Ayad has published also The True Secret (2011), and Body Whisperers (2015). She is active on social media where she addresses issues of mental health and nutrition from an Islamic perspective. Ayad is not known in the Arabic-speaking world (Ayad's website, n. d).

Healing Body & Soul was published in 2008 by the International Islamic Publishing House in Riyadh, and reprinted in 2013, a sign of its success. For a Western Islamic audience, this book has a triple advantage over other Islamic self-help books: 1. It is written in English by an author who understands the context of living and thinking in the West, 2. It compiles elements of medicine, sport, spirituality, food, care, hygiene, etc. that one can find elsewhere fragmented in several small works dedicated to particular aspects, or in the so-called books of prophetic medicine, written by traditionalists, 3. It is authored by a specialist of medical approaches which bestows it with a technical and precise knowledge of healing processes.

Ayad argues in favour of a holistic Islamic medicine, carried both by Islamic traditions and by research on alternative medical approaches, Western in particular. The author quotes, excessively, from classical and modern Islamic works of spirituality, as well as the founding texts of Islam, the Quran and the prophetic tradition, in addition to works by American authors in psychology and self-development. The explicit goal of the book is to provide a series of tips related to physical health, nutrition, mental health, emotion and stress management, and spirituality. These counsels are supported, inspired or derived primarily from Islamic texts. The text is both informative for its audience, when it deals with data on vitamins, for example, and prescriptive in the sense that it asks its audience to avoid the prohibitions of Islam and to apply its recommendations. Mostly, the author adopts a concordist outlook, without being markedly apologetic, and rather undertakes without complex the double origin of her sources.

Ayad's context and motivation are different from al-Hāshimī's. She clearly belongs to the current trend of alternative medicine, receiving support from non-Muslim professionals of the field ; she fully embraces the debates within psychology and medicine on healing, interacting with the world of holisitc medicine as a natural health consultant and nutrionnist. Ayad also surfs on the wave of publications and websites about "Islamic personal development" that has emerged in the recent years in the West. The emergence of a "Muslim bourgeois public", in search of therapies to improve their quality of life, which is also an indication of deep discomfort in Muslim communities about living Islam in Western societies, could explain the market Ayad targets.

The cover of the book consists of an image of a room with a large window that lets in the sun, a traditional prayer rug, and a copy of the Quran. These symbols are placed at the top of the cover, and occupy the foreground; they are associated in the Muslim imagination with prayer and reading the Quran, two major rituals in Islam. At the bottom of the picture, and in the background, we can see a table covered with bread, vegetables and some other foods. The whole picture evokes the food of the soul through prayer and religion in general, and the body through "selected" food.

Ayad begins by a short history of conventional Western medicine that the author criticizes for having been interested only in the physical aspect of the body, although the alternative medicine advocated by the author is also Western. Then, the author also traces the history of Islamic medicine, emphasizing its holistic approach to health, and Islam as a complete code of life that allows this holistic approach (Ayad, 2008, 17-37). This represents the thesis of the book with as a major premise that the holistic approach is the best approach to health; the minor premise is that Islam is a complete way of life, and the conclusion is that Islam offers this better approach. The author combines here a theory of well-being, in this case Western, of the holistic approach, even if it is part of a heritage of Eastern religions and philosophies too. The author displays here a closed mind as she wonders why following the wisdom of the "polytheist" Japanese, Indian and Chinese in health physical and mental whereas Islam has a complete way of life contained in the Quran and the prophetic tradition about the good life? (Ayad, 2008, 17). Yet, the author uses more than 300 Western sources in English (some of which draw on Asian philosophies) and only 130 sources in Arabic.

Ayad claims a theory of five bodies: physical body, biochemical body, intellectual body, emotional body and spiritual body. On the physical body, Amira Ayad gives several tips from Islamic teachings to preserve it: avoiding the consumption of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, respecting the rules of cleanliness for the personal hygiene and oral hygiene, the preservation of the respiratory and cardiovascular system, skin, immunity, and musculoskeletal system. She also emphasizes the importance of stretching exercises for physical health, provided by practicing five times a day of the obligatory Muslim prayer. Additionally, the author highlights the role that prohibitions and restrictions on sexual relations in Islam can play in the preservation from sexually transmitted diseases (Ayad, 2008, 39-87).

Yet, her discussion of the physical body shows all the limits of a concordist approach, for example when she announces that the Prophetic medicine outpaced modern science with regard to the importance of physical exercise, (Ayad, 2008, 71) while the Greeks and Indians, to name but a few ancient civilisations, had made sports a central activity in education, philosophy and health, some ten centuries before Islam.

The second body, the biochemical body, is the process of nutrition and interaction with the environment, particularly through breathing. It focuses on the notion of halal food, which she defines as good food. With the exception of prohibitions such as those of blood or pork, the subject of this chapter is almost entirely borrowed from the pyramid of nutrition established by Western health organizations. The author presents information on plants, vegetables, fruits, recommended by Eastern and Western cuisines, which are sometimes mentioned in the prophetic traditions based on common knowledge and centuries-old folk medicine (Ayad, 2008, 90-214). This puts into question Ayad's notion of Islamic medicine. With regard to the environment, Ayad cites Islamic recommendations on the protection of plants, animals and water resources (Ayad, 2008, 221-230). In fact, these recommendations concern above all mercy towards animals and the prohibition to destroy trees, although they can also encourage the Muslim public to think about the preservation of the environment today.

With regard to "the intellectual body", Ayad gives advice on the brain preservation, learning, brainstorming, sleeping well, keeping a positive spirit and reduce stress. She also presents religious formulas of positive self-suggestion and personal development, especially those expressing gratitude (Ayad, 2008, 231-271). She ends with a discussion of neurolinguistic programming. Here, she argues that the idea that neurolinguistic programming is only a new term for Muslims have practiced for centuries the invocations of God as a spiritual source of energy (Ayad, 2008, 272). This statement is particularly reductionnist insofar as neurolinguistic programming is an approach of communication, personal development and psychotherapy centred on the behaviour and interaction of individuals, and not on formulas of religious invocation, which are part of all religions, and shared between Islam and other traditions.

On the emotional body, Ayad advises her readers to identify the sources of stress in the personality of the individual, in the environment and in society, and on the best way to manage it. The author recommends faith as a way of dealing with emotions and stress, including faith in God and the belief that this world is temporary to achieve strength and peace and live happily and in harmony with predestination, which is the will of God on earth (Ayad, 2008, 277-287).

Concerning happiness, she gives twenty tips to be happy: gratitude, help others, live the present moment, etc. (Ayad, 2008, 287-376). These recipes are sometimes drawn from Islamic texts that ask to submit to the will of Allah, sometimes borrowed to the Anglo-Saxon management rules (as the daily definition of schedule and objectives). She also gives tips for an active social life and encourages establishing regular contact with others, and maintaining strong family relationships (Ayad, 2008, 376-392).

Finally, the fifth dimension is devoted to what the author calls the "spiritual body"; it is about practicing the rituals of Islam concerning the prayer, the invocation of Allah, the fasting, the pilgrimage, the recitation of the Koran, and the almsgiving. The main idea in this aspect is that the rituals of Islam provide both spiritual and physical benefits (Ayad, 2008, 393-442). Ayad's claims here are circular in the sense that the spirituality of the Muslim, which is Islam, can only be nourished by Islam.

Ayad concludes with a story transmitted by the Islamic tradition about a Muslim army that was at risk of defeat in Persia. After an inventory of its behaviour, this army realized that it had failed to follow a prophetic prescription, that on oral hygiene by the siwāk (the plant [salvadora persica] traditionally used in the Middle East for cleaning and whitening of teeth). This is the only prescription that these fighters did not respect. The order was given to the soldiers by the Muslim commander to chew the siwāk. The Persian spies informed their leaders that the Muslim army was preparing its teeth to "eat" the Persians and the Persian army then abandoned the battle for fear of cannibalism. Ayad draws the following lesson from this story: you should not underestimate any of the Islamic teachings about health (Ayad, 2008, 443-444).

An example of the "holistic Islamic approach" Ayad adopts is the section of her book on breathing; the author begins by establishing the importance of breathing, before claiming the Islamic character of good breathing by citing a prophetic tradition that states that " No human fills a vessel worse than his own abdomen; a few bites are enough for man to keep his body upright, but if it is indispensable, then a third for his food, a third for his drink and a third for his breath"(Ayad, 2008, 54-55). As it seems to us, and the way it was understood by traditionalists, this tradition is not about good breathing, but a warning against overeating. The author, for her part, interprets this tradition in the following words: "the Prophet was emphasizing the importance of proper breathing by pointing out that it is as essential as food and drink"(Ayad, 2008, 55).

Subsequently, Ayad exposes Western modern medical knowledge about the effects of respiration on metabolism, hormones, and immunity. She quotes Andrew Weil (the famous American physician and one of the fathers of holistic and alternative medical approaches), on breathing as a link between the mind and the body, which controls emotions, the nervous system and the unconscious mind. In particular, the author recommends Weil's exercise of observing one's own breathing each day, five minutes, to harmonize body, mind and soul. Based on Teresa Hale, Ayad criticizes the techniques of yoga breathing because in her view they lead to losing too much carbon monoxide, which prevents the cells from properly using the oxygen breathed. Her section on breathing is filled with quotes from Andrew Weil and Teresa Hale (Ayad, 2008, 55-56).

To conclude this section, the author argues that the best way, according to her, to regulate breathing is to read the Quran aloud, following the example of the

Prophet. She quotes the traditionalist Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 1348) on reciting the Quran as the best exercise to strengthen the chest. Ayad promises wonderful benefits to the person who recites only some Quranic verses. She then praises the Qur'an as the word of God, superior to all books by its perfection and equilibrium. She calls to try the recitation of the Quran, learning the technique of the psalmody of the Quran, called tajwīd, to find the balance between body, mind and soul (Ayad, 2008, 56). Thus, the author ends up preaching, and calls to learn the religious discipline of the psalmody of the Quran, a real challenge in itself knowing that the reader of her work does not have most probably the tools to read in Quranic Arabic the psalmody of the Quran.

In general, the book popularizes non-Islamic dietary knowledge, practices and modes of good health among a Muslim public. Seen in this light, this book makes a positive contribution to improving the well-being and quality of life of its readers. It considers health and success as objectives together with religious piety, not its instruments. However, it could negatively affect readers, especially those living in the West, being the first audience of the book, by conveying the idea that Islam, as a body of traditions, offers answers to all questions, Islamizing, thus, well-being and personal development. Rather than drawing on the rhetoric of concordism and glorifying the Islamic tradition, the author could have displayed her experience as a therapist; self-help books usually draw on personal stories, clinical cases or encounters that convey in lively manner distant concepts. The author seems to overlook the importance of practice and experience. The lack of respect the author shows for the non-Islamic traditions, although she relies heavily on the Western alternative therapies, is also striking. For the sake of equity, the Islamic tradition itself draws on ancient knowledge of Greek, Buddhist and Hinduist philosophies and medicines. The book does not teach either modesty or the quest of knowing one self and the lifelong improvement of the character. Often, it resembles the compilations of medieval Islamic manuals of traditionalist ethics, whereby there is for every situation a ready-to-apply tradition or rule.

The Pious and global Salafi self-help: al-'Arīfī's Enjoy Your Life

Al-'Arīfī is a well-known Salafi preacher and theologian from Saudi Arabia. He was born in 1970, in the tribe of Banū Khālid, which claims genealogy of the Companion Khālid b. al-Walīd. He studied Islamic theology at the Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, obtaining a PhD in Islamic theology on Ibn Taymiyya and Sufism in 2001. In parallel, he studied (and acquired authorization to teach) with transmitters of the Quran and hadith from Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Egypt and Yemen. He also studied with the major Saudi Salafi clerics such as Ibn Bāz (d. 1999). Besides acting as a Friday preacher in Riyad, he operates as a consultant for many international Islamic organizations. He authored more than 20 books in Islamic theology, Islamic law and Islamic ethics. Some of his books sold millions of copies, his religious TV shows are huge successes (al-'Arīfī's website, 2016) and his account on twitter attracted more than 14.5 million followers (al-'Arīfī's twitter, 2019).

His most influential work on self-help is Istamti' bi-ḥayātik: funūn al-ta'āmul ma'a al-nās fī ẓill al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya : ḥaṣīlat buḥūth wa-dawrāt wa-dhikrayāt akthar min 'ishrīn sanah sold more than 2 million copies and was translated into eleven languages including English, under the title of Enjoy your Life : The Art of Interacting with People. The book was published in 2006 and since then it was reprinted, as for 2018, 44 times (al-'Arīfī, 2018).

The book is structured in 91 short chapters (of few pages each). It starts with the first chapter on the reader who will not benefit from this book, the « unfortunate one who surrenders to his own errors and becomes satisfied with his limited skills", as described by al-'Arīfī (al-'Arīfī, 2008, 20). It ends with chapter 91 on being brave and starting changes immediately, about the importance of practicing the skills one learns from the book and from life in general (al-'Arīfī, 2008, 591). Thus, the opening and the ending set the tone for the entire book, which is a call to action and self-improvement, motivating the reader to enjoin theory to practice, and take concrete steps forward.

Since the introduction, Enjoy Your Life is clear about its method as al-'Arīfī relates that:

« As a sixteen year old, I came across a book called, 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' by Dale Carnegie, which I found to be quite excellent and which I subsequently read several times…I began to apply its principles when dealing with others and witnessed amazing results… I then began to search our own history and discovered that the life of Allah's Messenger, his Companions, and anecdotes of some of the prominent men of this ummah are more than enough for us to learn lessons from" (al-'Arīfī, 2008, 17-18)

Thus, as expected, al-'Arīfī chooses anecdotes to illustrate his ethical instructions. He favours his own stories or those related to him by friends and acquaintances, because they are short and close to the environment of his readers. However, he often quotes from the Prophet's biography and other sources of Islamic hagiography and Islamic history or even Arabic literature, both prose and poetry. The style is easy and modeled on spoken standard Arabic.

The recurrent topic throughout the book is certainly how to communicate effectively with people, winning their hearts before transmitting da'wa or simply interact with the others on worldly matters. Often the book reads as any self-help book, when for examples it recommends in chapter 19 to leave a good first impression and in chapter 26 to remember the names of people except that they contain examples from the Prophet's biography and the Quran (al-'Arīfī, 2008, 117, 176). Al-'Arīfī wants his reader to achieve success, and therefore, multiplies stories of people who became rich by respecting the kind of advice he provides.

However, the author displays an insistence on the Sunni orthodox creed in several chapters. Every now and then, he reminds the reader on the need to refrain from an uncontrolled quest of success. In chapter 16, he advices to purify one's intention for the sake of Allah, requesting to treat people, rich and poor, equally. He quotes the Prophetic tradition about the importance of good manners for one's complete faith, insisting that the right conduct matters more than ritual as morality shows how sincere one is to God. He concludes that "purify your intention so that your interpersonal skills can turn into acts of worship, with which you can draw closer to Allah" (al-'Arīfī, 2008, 90). Similarly, he asks in chapter 48 the reader to be content with what Allah has apportioned for each. In this chapter, he relates his visit to a psychiatric hospital only to realize Allah's blessings in making him sane. He draws the following lesson „Allah may provide someone with wealth, noble lineage and status, yet deprive him of sanity. You will find him the wealthiest and the strongest of all, yet he is imprisoned in a mental hospital. This is how Allah gives people some things while depriving them of others. Your Lord creates what He wills and chooses. The people have no choice therein" (al-'Arīfī, 2008, 333). This quite emotionally heavy lesson, as it contains a detailed description of

several psychiatrist cases, is followed by the Prophet's tradition about being easy and avoiding quarrel. He concluded by recommending to „look to the brighter aspects of your life before looking at the dark side and you will surely be happy" (al-'Arīfī, 2008, 336).

This theological content moderates the communicative content, but does not dominate it. Al-'Arīfī is primarily preoccupied with teaching the skills of easy communication, to influence relations within family, schools, public spaces, work places, etc. The narrative content (the Prophet's biography in particular) is paraphrased, softly presented and quoted as an argument of authority, a norm established for the reader and a literary device. The author aims above all to help the reader enjoy life, overlook negative feelings, avoid conflict, etc. Through polished stories (chosen from Saudi and international contexts), a vocabulary of happiness, pleasure and success, he embodies the global Islamic ethical-scape.

Although this might come as a surprise, the two Muslim most successful works of self-help in terms of popularity, al-'Arīfī's Istamti' bi-ḥayātik and 'Ā'iḍ al-Quranī's Lā-taḥzan are two works written by Salafis from Saudi Arabia, with training in Islamic theology and Prophetic tradition. This could be explained perhaps by their response to the globalization of ethics more than Islamist thinkers, still restrained by a communitarian ideology. The investment in global da'wa for an autonomous subjectivity rather in their community-building makes them more attentive to individual needs and experiences. In addition, evolving in the Gulf societies made them familiar with global ethics as these societies are an active part of the global ethical-scape, not only through economy, but politics and religion as well. A third variable that contributes to the marketability of this Salafi self-help literature could be the powerful audio-visual industry in making and selling a globalised content, destined for international audiences through religious channels.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current study was to gain insights into the sub-genre of Islamic self-help literature and the features it displays as well as the philosophy behind it. In particular, I was driven by the question of exploring how this literature could be a leitmotiv of Islamic ethics without loosing focus on the modern subjectivity. The study has identified three discourses: deontological-communitarian, holistic-individualistic and global-pious discourses, on the basis of three authors whose works acquired an international audience, especially in the West. The results of this investigation show that Islamic ethics explicitly engage with global ethics, both with the theories about the self (autonomy, the quest of happiness, harmony of body and mind, pleasure, etc.) as well as practices (management practices, socio-political activities, sports, etc.) in the West. These findings suggest that Islamic ethics should be read in relation to ethics-in-context, that is with regard to the modern ethical trends they interact with. Although the current study is based on a small sample of texts, the provided insights may be of assistance to extend our knowledge of other fields of Islamic ethics (business, bioethics, etc.).

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