

CHAPTER I

Histories of Psychological Assessment
An Introduction

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1.1 Introduction

History is described as a factual account of the past.¹ Yet it is clear that history is more than just facts, it is a narrative told from a particular point of view. This is evident from Hermann Ebbinghaus, when he wrote that “Psychology *has a long past, yet its real history is short.*” Ebbinghaus’s quote reflects a status quo in psychology at present where mainstream psychology adopts the view that it developed primarily in the nineteenth century in the laboratories of Wilhelm Wundt. The field is attributed to having originated primarily in the Global North.

A famous proverb from Africa, *Until lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter*, captures this best in that the current historical narratives pertaining to psychology and psychological assessment are written by individuals from very specific nationalities and cultures and do not adequately capture the diversity and breadth present in the myriad of histories relating to psychological assessment. While the need to capture the histories of psychological assessment in one volume is evident and necessary, this becomes even more important in the context of globalization. Hence the assumption of the universal applicability of psychological assessment techniques characteristic of mainstream psychology must be debunked. This book, by virtue of focusing on the international histories of psychological assessment, highlights contributions from other spaces – nations in particular – that have traditionally been marginalized.

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Internationally there is evidence to suggest that assessment has always been used. By way of example, in ancient China, emperors would test workers to determine who had potential to serve as scholars and advisers using the imperial examination system (see Chapter 13). In Persia now Iran, Al-Razi (Rhazes) conducted the first assessments for mental health and wrote *Al-Hawi* in the tenth century (see Chapter 11). Around the same time there was work in philosophy and physiology from the University of Sankore in Timbuktu showing that the early precursors of scientific psychology were likely to have been studied at the university (see Chapter 4). These are just a few examples from the many that are presented in this book on the international histories of assessment.

1.2 Overview of the Book

This book brings together chapters focusing on the history of psychological assessment in particular countries across regions from all the continents. Chapters are not just narrative accounts of the development of psychological assessment in a particular country or region. Authors were asked to situate the chapters somewhere between narrative and historiography. Hence the chapters assume a more critical stance in reporting the history of psychological assessment that recognizes that history is never fact and always represents the subjective position of the author. Authors have drawn from existing sources and research but have simultaneously explored the social positionings of such research. We hope that this allows for a richer and perhaps even more interesting account of the international history of psychological assessment.

It is not a coincidence that the book begins with the chapters from Africa. Empirical evidence identifies Africa as the cradle of humankind. The earliest evidence of human existence has been found in the fossils located in East and South Africa. Further, there is evidence from East Africa as well as North Africa that speaks to sophisticated civilizations and kingdoms existing in Africa at least 200,000 years ago. However, the earliest known recorded histories from the continent are from ancient Egypt and later from Nubia, the Sahel, the Maghreb, and the Horn of Africa. Hence the African chapters are presented first in this volume followed by those from the Arab Levant, Europe, Asia, Oceania, and concluding with chapters from the Americas. We will now briefly discuss the contributions of each region.

1.3 Africa

There are 54 countries in Africa as we know it today. However, at a point pre the desertification of the Sahara there were at least 10,000 kingdoms on the continent. The continent has always been rich in terms of mineral and agricultural resources and had a number of wealthy dynasties that were core to trading between Europe and Asia over the years. Following the desertification of the Sahara, countries in North Africa became more intertwined with the Middle East and southern Europe. Countries to the south of the Sahara are commonly referred to as sub-Saharan Africa and this constitutes majority of the continent (46 of the 54 countries; O'Collins & Burns, 2007; Wilburn, 2008). Hence the African region focuses on the areas of sub-Saharan Africa while North Africa is discussed under the Arab Levant region.

According to the 2019 revision of the World Population Prospects, the population of sub-Saharan Africa was 1,038,627,178 in 2018. Primarily due to the Bantu migrations, which originated around West Central Africa possibly Cameroon through to Central and East Africa and into Southern Africa, the region shares a linguistic commonality but consists of a diverse mix of cultures and traditions across the regions and countries. While there is evidence of sophisticated kingdoms in sub-Saharan African over the years, we were unable to locate evidence of formal assessment processes akin to psychological assessment as it may have been practiced in ancient China.

Across the regions, the modern history of psychological assessment as we know it mirrors that of Europe and was primarily introduced in some way with the colonization of countries. Except for the Ethiopians, Haitians, and Liberians, Africans and people of African descent were living under some form of European colonial domination by the end of the nineteenth century. The principal powers involved in this modern day colonization of Africa were Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, and Italy. However, by 1939 it was evident that France had colonized much of the Horn or west of Africa while Britain had colonized the east and southern parts (O'Collins & Burns, 2007; Nsamenang, 2007). Central Africa was split between France and Britain as indicated in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2 provides a history of assessment in South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. All four countries evidence a history of colonialism that has impacted in different ways on the history of psychological assessment in these countries. The chapter gives a critical examination of the development of psychological assessment during and after

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colonialism arguing for a need to have assessments that are more relevant to the context. With the exception of Zambia, the three other countries rely on etic tests or local adaptations of etic tests. Zambia has been particularly innovative in developing emic tests using indigenous knowledge, for example, the Panga Munthu Test – a version of the Draw-a-Person test that requires children to make human figures out of clay (a material more familiar to local children). The innovations used across the countries in the region to ensure unbiased testing in multicultural populations are discussed.

Chapter 3 provides a brief history of psychological assessment in Central Africa, identifying types of psychological tests in use in Central Africa as well as the issues and problems that arise when making use of such psychological tests at both national and local levels. It is evident from the chapter that psychological assessments are largely used in educational settings and have yet to become more widely used across other areas. The chapter provides interesting suggestions for new possibilities for educational improvements in global and local contexts with regards to assessment technologies and practices, inclusion, educational psychology, and educational policy.

Oppong, Oppong Asante, and Anum describe the West African history of psychological assessment focusing on developments in Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone in Chapter 4. The chapter identifies Ghana as among the dominant players for psychological assessment in the region arguing that the origins of psychology in Ghana may be traced as far back as the establishment of the University of Sankore, Timbuktu (989 CE) through to the establishment of Basel Seminary in 1898, and more recently to the Department of Psychology at the University of Ghana. Nigeria's history of assessment may be traced back to the Islamic scholars in the northern part of Nigeria in the early fourteenth century. Modern day testing in Nigeria commenced in 1955 when organized and formal guidance and counseling services became available. To date Nigeria boasts the most psychology departments in the region. The chapter attributes the slow development of psychology and assessment in Liberia and Sierra Leone to the protracted civil war and the 2014 Ebola outbreak, which strongly impacted the mental health of both countries. The authors call for further development of assessment across the region identifying a need for indigenous measures and test adaptations as well as a need to share and disseminate assessment knowledge across the region.

The eastern region of Africa is not represented in the book but has also had interesting developments with regards to psychological assessment

since the countries obtained independence from colonialism. Kagaari and Kibanja (personal communication) have argued that psychological assessment in East Africa is still in its infancy stages. In this ethnically diverse region, the practice of psychological assessment has been limited by cultural, political, and economic factors. The clash between ethical principles and cultural beliefs in the region limits the practice of assessment along with the politicization of psychological assessment leading to stigmatization of practice. Further, the lack of indigenous psychological assessment tools that are culturally sensitive is a core concern. There is also a huge variance in the region with regards to the pace at which psychological assessment is growing and being utilized across countries varying in political and cultural landscape. For instance, due to past wars and internal conflicts within Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan, psychological assessment is more broadly inclined to clinical assessment than other forms of assessment. Tanzania, South Sudan, and Uganda have over 50 ethnic groups, yet Rwanda and Burundi have a maximum of four. This implies that influence of language diversity during practice is more significant in the former countries than in the latter ones. Also, lack of vibrant legal entities to regulate practice amidst cultural diversity, psychology illiteracy, and political quagmire within countries has influenced the acceptance and use of psychological testing within the region.

It is evident that, except for a few countries across Africa, psychological assessment as it is practiced today is still in its infancy. In a number of countries war, internal conflicts, and economic and health challenges have ensured a very slow development of the field. In many countries in Africa psychological assessment is used on a broad scale in educational settings with a much lesser focus on assessment in other areas like clinical or organizational settings. This is in part due to the lack of trained individuals as well as the scarcity of accessible tests. International tests are too expensive and there are very few facilities that can assist with translating or adapting international tests or developing local tests. Despite these challenges it is evident from the chapters that assessments are being used and there is value to using them.

1.4 The Arab Regions

In line with the spirit of this book, encapsulated by the earlier quote from Ebbinghaus, psychology and psychological assessment in the Arab region has a very long past, but only a short history.

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The Arab region, sometimes referred to as the “Arab world” is a loose term used to describe groups of countries spread across the African and Asian continents. The “inclusion” criterion of what constitutes an Arab country is often drawn along geopolitical, social, linguistic, and economic lines. Usually, the term “Arab countries” subsume the 22 countries that belong to the Arab League, with about 420 million people spread across countries that share Arabic as one of their official languages, but that are incredibly diverse. Narrower groupings have been more meaningful in terms of describing countries that are more homogeneous culturally, linguistically, and geopolitically, even though this does not necessarily include all countries in the Arab League. For this book, we group countries into those of the Arab Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Occupied Palestine), the Arab Gulf (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates [UAE], Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and sometimes Iraq is included), and North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Sudan).

Psychology in the Arab region has its roots in early Arab scholars who wrote about the *nafs* (akin to the Greek *psyche*) – a concept that maps onto the self today. Under the umbrella of religion, philosophy, and medicine, the writings of Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Ibn Tufail, and many others were translated to Greek and Roman and transferred to Europe during the Dark Ages (Ahmed, 1992; Soueif & Ahmed, 2001).

The beginning of modern psychology in most Arab countries began around the 1940s when Arab psychologists, especially from Egypt and Lebanon, attempted to model the French and the Anglo-American psychological approaches in research, teaching, and practice. Egypt is often credited as leading the way in psychology, followed by Lebanon and Saudi Arabia – countries that are key players in their respective regions of North Africa, the Levant, and the Gulf. These countries were among the first to establish psychology departments, outpatient and inpatient mental health services, legislations regarding mental health parity, and professional regulation (Baker, 2012). They were also among the highest producers of academic research (Okasha & Karam, 1998), with more recent data still showing that almost 80% of research output across the Arab region between 2009 and 2019 was produced by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Tunisia, and the UAE (Zeinoun et al., 2020). When it comes to psychological assessment in particular Egyptian psychologists and psychiatrists have translated tests from English to Arabic – initially aptitude and projective tests, and later tests of personality, psychopathology and self/social constructs (Baker, 2012).

To better understand the modern history of psychological assessment in the region, it is important to situate this history into a broader context. The field of psychology in the Arab region has witnessed many ebbs and flows in its overall development, which led to differential evolution across various countries throughout the last two centuries. First, the colonial history and recent wars in the region have left a diverse influence of British, French, and American schools of thoughts, which have led to different psychological traditions across countries. For example, in the 1980s many Lebanese psychologists used projective techniques owing to their educational and training background in French universities that were primarily psycho-dynamically oriented. In contrast, the British influence in Egypt saw many psychologists in the early 1900s gaining their education in the United Kingdom, and returning to Egypt to establish labs and engage in the then popular psychometric research and test standardization (Baker, 2012).

These influences meant that early work on psychological testing relied on importing psychological tests from the United Kingdom, United States, and France, and only recently has there been more effort to produce indigenous tests (e.g., Abdel-Khalek, 1998; Zeinoun, 2017). Arab countries are strongly influenced by the work of Islamic scholars in the ninth century who wrote about psychological concepts. In the past few decades, psychologists have attempted to blend Islamic concepts and spirituality into their understanding, measurement, and treatment of psychological phenomena (Keshavarzi et al., 2020).

Further, the various wars and political instabilities in the region were consequential to the field. Many countries with weakened states had poor infrastructure needed to fund, educate, and elevate the science of psychology, while at the same time many of these countries needed applied psychology to alleviate trauma and psychological distress. As a result, psychological services in countries like Lebanon and Palestine rely heavily on local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs and INGOs). These organizations have contributed to improving psychometric tools in their research and services, but these are often from an etic perspective.

Nations in the region have also varied in the rate of their development. While countries like Egypt have shown a steady development of psychology across the years, some Gulf countries like the UAE, which was founded in 1971, show an exponential development and on various levels have surpassed other countries in terms of psychological services. For example, in the decades between 1966 and 1985, Egypt produced an

average of 2.4 psychology-related articles per year, while the UAE did not produce any. However, two decades later, the UAE had surpassed Egypt in the rate of annual publications (Jaalouk et al., 2012).

Finally, despite the many linguistic and cultural commonalities across the Arab countries, they are also ornate with diversity across and within countries. Some argue that the terms “Arabic language” or “Arab culture” are not as homogeneous as they imply and that psychology needs to cater to both the commonalities between the countries as well as to local particularisms using a glocal approach (Daouk-Öyry et al., 2016). Case in point is the Arabic language that exists in multiple variations (e.g., Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic), in addition to spoken vernaculars that can be almost unintelligible across distant countries. When adapting tests from a source language to “Arabic,” there is an assumption that Arabic is one static, homogeneous language, and that an Arabic scale in Morocco would function just as well in Jordan – an assumption that is debated by many authors (see Daouk-Öyry et al., 2016).

This book includes one chapter from this region (Chapter 5), namely the Arab Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan). The Levant has long been at the center of cultural, social, and geopolitical changes in the region, which have been central in shaping the development of psychological practice and science in the region. The region has been at the cross section of multiple foreign influences (French, British, US, Arab), all of which have impacted academia. This resulted not only in multiple ideologies and schools of psychological thought that remain until today but also in a trilingual academic system that further deepens the disconnect among psychologists and test-takers in the region. Additionally, the Levant’s experience of occupation, trauma, diaspora, and political instability has led to an increased need and interest in mental health services and displaced populations, and hence the measurement of related constructs. More recently, with increased funding for research on such populations, non-Arab researchers have gained a renewed interest in the region, which has led the way to increased collaborative efforts in the development of psychometric tools. The chapter begins with a general overview of psychological assessment in the region, followed by discussion on how test development and clinical testing have been impacted by the political and social fabric of the region. The chapter places a particular focus on the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead, in terms of research and practice in clinical, educational, and industrial/organizational practice.

1.5 Europe

The European section comprises five chapters that among them cover the geographical distribution of Europe almost completely. The chapters focus on: The United Kingdom, Northern Europe (Scandinavia), Western Europe (mainly Germany and France), Spain and Portugal, and Eastern Europe. These chapters offer a lucid account of the evolution of testing during the twentieth century and its current state, for the most prolific contributor to the invention and development of modern psychological testing: Europe. The other prolific contributor, North America (the United States and Canada) is much more homogenous in terms of language, culture, and consistency of trends across both time and geographical areas in comparison to Europe.

Given that Europe is so diverse, with so many cultural and linguistic differences, and has during the time span covered experienced two world wars, the accounts given in this section about the evolution of tests and testing in its different areas are equally diverse. These accounts show the large English influence in Western and Northern Europe, and the equally strong German influence in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, during the early years. They demonstrate clearly how dominant philosophical stances and trends in general science have shaped the zeitgeist and with it the emergence of testing. They also show how the emergence of testing and its diverse and promising incipient evolution in Eastern Europe was curtailed after World War II by the USSR. Finally, the chapters illustrate in what radical manners ideology can impact testing – especially if it is sanctioned by a totalitarian state, as was the case for Eastern Europe.

Chapter 9, focusing on the United Kingdom, tracks the developments of assessment originating with Darwin and Galton to the development of occupational testing (together with such innovations as Assessment Centers) and finally to the advent of Britain as an important producer of internationally used tests. The historical description of eugenics in the chapter shows that ideology has pushed psychology in general and testing especially in morally reprehensible directions not only in totalitarian regimes but also in democratic countries. At the same time, methodological advances that were made at that time have influenced psychology and assessment as well as other fields. The correlation coefficient and linear regression among others are creations of that time. The United Kingdom has also pioneered the use of psychological testing in work and organizational psychology, with such innovations as the development of Assessment Centers during World War II. During these years the

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United Kingdom created its reputation as a “net contributor” to the worldwide repertoire of assessment instruments, with British companies such as SHL being in the forefront of occupational testing worldwide.

Western Europe is as dominant a player in the development of modern testing as the United Kingdom. In Chapter 7 Lang and Corstens discuss the contributions of Germany and France starting with Wundt’s psychological laboratory in Leipzig and Binet’s work on intelligence testing. The scholars that were trained there (among others, James McKeen Cattell and Charles Spearman) progressed to influence assessment in the United Kingdom and the United States. Other Germany laboratories like those run by Ebbinghaus, Münsterberg, Lipmann, and Stern spearheaded several breakthroughs in the first half of the twentieth century. The chapter also discusses assessment in the Netherlands, mainly focused on the work of de Groot and his interests in educational psychology. This important and influential work culminated with the founding of CITO (Centraal Instituut voor Toetsontwikkeling, National Institute for Educational Measurement) in 1968. Dutch psychometrics has since remained at the forefront and has been highly influential in the domain of measurement methodology and statistical methods over the past 30 years.

In Chapter 6 Nielsen and Bartram discuss the history of assessment in the Nordic countries focusing on Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Scandinavian psychology was influenced from the very early days by all three centers that were at the forefront of modern-day psychological assessment: the Anglo-American, the French, and the German models. Contacts with France were strong with the Binet scale, for example, being adopted so quickly in Norway that it was used in Bergen in the same year as it was published in Paris, 1908. Links with Germany were also great, focused mainly on the work of William Stern. The US connection was focused on the work of Hugo Münster and has remained strong to date, especially in Norway. Psychology exploded in the Nordic countries, particularly in Norway after World War II due to the need to rebuild infrastructure and to effectively select and counsel individuals toward careers. Hence organizational psychology – and the heavy assessment-oriented stream that is part of it – has grown in Scandinavia into a separate field. Scandinavian countries today are closely linked to the European Federation of Psychologists’ Associations (EFPA) and the International Test Commission (ITC) and are fully participant in the European assessment community.

The two Iberic countries, Spain and Portugal, share much in the history of psychology and of psychological assessment as discussed in Chapter 8.