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In recent decades, the growing political influence of Islam throughout the Muslim world has revealed an unmediated nexus between religious ideals and the ensuing political realities. In this work, Ivan Kalmer presents an in-depth analysis of the relationship between divine power and existential realities encompassing human self and the universe. Kalmer refutes the idea that Islam promotes an authoritarian form of government and demonstrates that the presumption that it does so emanates from deep reaching anxieties that go beyond religion and even the East-West relationship. In the introductory explanation, the author lays out the conceptual foundation of orientalism and specifically focuses on the more general concept of sublime power. The sublime power, according to Kalmer, is presented as a primal father demanding absolute obedience from humankind to fulfill His selfish desires. This idea of selfish power is then projected as the Muslim understanding of the sublime power, an understanding that is seen to emanate from Muslim theological beliefs. The author offers a new and critical insight into this complex issue, and as he peers, he attempts to examine the various aspects of sublime power, arguing that “the Lord,” as an imperfect or partial representation of the sublime in most discussions around this subject, is seen as an abstract force without any evidence to solidify its imagined existence. Kalmer contends that for Christians, their God is mindful of His creation. In contrast, the idea of a vengeful God, which, to non-Muslim observers appears to be the case in Islam, is borrowed from the Old Testament, which, in turn, presents the idea of God as an apoplectic moralist and a vindictive enforcer of strict law, having overwhelming power over His creation. In order to situate the book in the contextual framework of contemporary debates around Orientalism, the subsequent chapter focuses on Edward Said’s work and presents a comparative analysis of voices—Said’s and others— by testing suppositions, concepts, and theories with an aim to demonstrate a logical connection between Kalmer’s claims and the supporting facts used to substantiate his thesis (Said, 2000).

Chapters three and four focus on the historical evolution of Orientalism, from the time of ancient Greece to the beginning of modern Orientalism. The later period, as the author points out, was marked by Ottoman dominance in Europe, which commenced in 1452 with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. Following this history, the author draws attention to the idea of divine as manifested through “the nature of divine intervention in human affairs” and the relationship between the mundane and the sublime, which is then analyzed through several important case examples (p.44). He attempts to peek into the artistic expressions of the imagined Orient and specifically focuses on the works of seventeenth and eighteenth century artists and Orientalists. Kalmer discursively engages with a plethora of works, data points, artists, and reference points, and swiftly analyzes the philosophical discussions and theological diversions on Christianity in an informal manner that might fuddle the reader in assessing and contextualizing the arguments given in the book. This is one of the work’s main problems, which ultimately distracts the reader from approaching the book’s main argument in a nuanced manner.

Chapter eight deals with Hegel’s concept of the sublime in the context of Judaism and Islam. Hegel, according to Kalmer, approaches this issue with a set of contrasting ideas, first looking into the historical evolution “from the abstract to the concrete” and then emphasizing the existence of the universal form of spirit with specific features and characteristics that transcend beyond one particular race or religion (p.80). For Hegel, in the context of the sublime, the spirit is not seen as a concrete entity having an existential beginning. According to him, the spirit

functions outside the realm of existence and, as such, has no substantial characteristics, including the human form of existence. Here, Kalmer uses the phrase “obedience to the letter,” describing the way in which “Oriental” subjects approach their lord by considering “the letter” a command demanding unconditional obedience—as opposed to approaching their lord as a spirit, which would then necessitate comprehensive engagement with their spiritual text, including its laws and decrees. Accordingly, Islam is seen as a religion stressing the application of divine laws without contextualizing their implementation in specific geographical settings. At this point, Kalmer refers to the work of Alain Grosrichard and states that this tendency toward literal textual interpretation sees the adherence to such literal interpretations as a manifestation of subordination to the orders of a despot God. As such, followers of Islam are perceived as unquestioningly deferential to despots, and Islamic governments are presented as universally inclined to implement despotic, authoritarian regimes or, at the very least, non-democratic forms of government. Problematically, this understanding misconstrues followers of Islam (often conflated with all Arabs in mainstream academic thought) as having a single, universally applied outlook (Esposito & Voll, 1996). This misconception not only discounts the subtleties that do exist within Islam but also appears to preclude the necessity for more in-depth scholarship of Islam. Because the need for further study is dismissed, current impressions appear “self-evident” and serve to validate the existing western point of view. Kalmer says, however, a number of principles can be extracted from the Quran that contradict the Western assumption that Islam inherently precipitates authoritarian rule. For example, he says although it might seem that democracy is quite impossible in Islam—particularly because the concept of the sovereignty of one God (known as the concept of *Tawhīd*) appears to coincide with the “sovereignty” of an authoritarian ruler—many Muslims would insist that a political system oriented towards *Tawhīd* indicates the possibility of the existence of moral democracy in Islam, which in turn provides the conceptual and theological basis for the realization of equality and justice within a democratic system. The subsequent chapters discuss the ways in which the imagined Orient experiences the condition of being surveyed by an ultimate power. Kalmer reminds the reader, however, that the phenomenological disciplinary state of surveillance and acute governmental control became prevalent under democratic as well as totalitarian authorities in the twentieth century and stimulated modern governments to implement mechanisms for controlling people. At the same time, Kalmer describes Michel Foucault’s concept of government as a “pastoral power”—which serves to organize citizens and guide them as a civil collective—and which sees the modern form of governance as able to evoke obedience (as opposed to simply relying upon absolutist or monarchical rule).

In the concluding chapter, the author focuses on the early Orientalist depiction of Islamic suicide fighters. Kalmer says that the Orientalist depiction reflects normative perspective of a complex reality that incorporates psychological and sociological complexities, most often including violent tendencies, the impetus to create a “desirable world,” and a worldview that promotes self-sacrifice. For Kalmer, the act of self-sacrifice subordinates worldly defenses of the corporeal self over the sublime faith. This chapter presents an obscure picture of suicide terrorism, however, and does not extensively expand on the existing literature, neglecting even prominent works of contemporary scholarship on the issue. Kalmer’s presentation is further haltered by flawed observations such as, for example, that Muslim suicide attackers are seen not as prompted by spiritual desires but, in fact, by bodily pleasures and that religion itself is a motivation for committing crimes against humanity. While analyzing these statements, it appears that the connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism is deceptive and that

the main aim of suicide terror is to force modern nation states to withdraw forces from illegally occupied lands. Religion per se does not seem to be a root cause of suicide terrorism, although religion might be used as a tool for achieving broader strategic objectives (Pape, 2005).

This book approaches the phenomenon of orientalism with an interdisciplinary analysis that traces connections between early orientalist perceptions of Islam and its contemporary manifestations and transformations. Although Kalmer sets out with an insightful and critical undertone, some of his observations ultimately seem at once blistering and acerbic and, at times, overly simplistic. Despite this, Kalmer's attempt to contextualize the book by referring to the radical division between "hard" and "soft" orientalism—an idealistic search for a moral value within the idea of submission—seems to be the most engaging aspect of the book. The rest of the book, if read in light of recent events, unfortunately seems to fall victim to that which Kalmer himself warns against: reliance upon "self-evident" justifications to consolidate existing notions of Eurocentric and orientalist power discourse and value of knowledge, promoting a worldview that seeks to override all other worldviews by presuming the validity and authority of Western viewpoints and applying them universally to the rest of the globe. Despite some compelling elements, Kalmer's writing does not aim at deconstructing what is ostensibly hidden behind the veil of orientalism. As such, the true value of his book lies in the fact that he contextualizes and reevaluates the way in which orientalism has nurtured the negative perception of Islam. Thus, Kalmer contributes to the repudiation and elimination of myths about Islam and Muslims and further advocates that we must value the universal lesson of humility, which is, among other virtues, taught by the religion of Islam.

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