Kramer is not especially troubled by current trends in Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, shares Kramer, a former director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, shares Pipes’s views, though he has generally been less strident in expressing them. "Ivy Towers on Sand is primarily a critique of scholars dealing with issues related to American foreign policy in the Middle East. Kramer is not especially troubled by current trends in the study of Sufi poetry.

Both Kramer and Pipes, like their intellectual mentors Bernard Lewis, view the Muslim world as inherently irrational, violent, and above all, anti-Semitic. The Arabs in particular only understand force. The American government should not waste time trying to address their alleged grievances, or try to reason with Muslims in general, because these all boil down to primitive hatred of the infidel and resentment that the infidel now dominates the believer instead of the other way around (Lewis 1990). This view of the Islamic world underlies the policies of the Sharon government in Israel and the policies favoured by at least some members of the American administration. So the issues at stake are by no means strictly academic.

Changes in policy

It is of course natural that Kramer and Pipes disapprove of most American scholarship on contemporary Middle Eastern politics in recent decades. American scholars, like most of their European and Israeli colleagues, generally reject the notion that brutal repression is invariably the best response to Islamic militancy, Pipes—usually an extreme realist, and the terrorism and opportunism associated with it. Most Middle East specialists in the United States would argue that to win the "war on terrorism," it is necessary to dilute the threat that such movements pose to human rights as well as to the possibility of resolving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Moreover, while Kramer exaggerates the impact of Edward Said’s Orientalism on political science (Gaas, 2002), it is true that any scholar who dares to discuss discrimination against the Bahá’ís in Iran, slavery in the Sudan, or the Islamists’ persecution of Jews in Egypt runs the risk of being labelled as an “orientalist,” a “Zionist,” or an agent of American imperialism. Conversely, of course, anyone who dares to criticize the policies of Ariel Sharon runs the risk of being called an “Anti-Semite” or a self-hating Jew.

The field of Middle Eastern Studies has become politicized and polarized between two forms of moral myopia represented by Daniel Pipes on the one hand and John Esposito on the other. Reading Pipes, one could easily believe that Muslim hostility to the United States is valid. Many American specialists on the Middle East are so determined to reduce public stereotyping of the French idealization of all things Islamic, especially the militant movements commonly referred to as “fundamentalists” or “Islamists.” Scholars like John Esposito do ignore or downplay the anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that pervade the Islamist literature (Munson 1999). They have conducted research on this issue so as to present recent research and discuss the results presented at the conference.

The Danish Institute in Damascus is able to cover travel expenses and accommodation for a small number of scholars who want to present their current research. If you are interested in presenting a paper, please contact the institute’s director, Dr. Joergen Baek Simonson (idhsscs-net.org), giving a short introduction to your field of research and the contents of the paper you intend to present.

Papers read at the conference will be published as Vol. IV in the Proceedings of the Danish Institute in Damascus in 2003.

References

Albert, Alisse. 2001. “While they were sleeping...” Washington Post, 16 May.


--- Kapeliouk, Amnon. 1996. The Transformation of Islamic NGOs from arms-dealing and ‘ordered the creation of the United Nations and the Security Council to replace the League of Nations to rule the world through them’ (Harub 1996: 298–99). To write about Hamas without mentioning such rhetoric would be to present a thoroughly sanitized and distorted picture of the movement.

At the same time, however, Hamas’s hostility toward Israel is not simply the result of anti-Semitism. Hamas is, among other things, a nationalistic movement seeking liberation from what it sees as colonial rule. Hamas’s charter says its supporters are Muslims who boycott the Jewish state, and how they choose to interpret this charter. In the minds of Hamas’s supporters, the traditional dichotomy of Muslim versus Jew has now meshed with the dichotomy of ‘oppressor versus oppressor’.

Hamas grew out of the frustration engendered by the PLO and then the Palestinian Authority’s failures, both on the political and social fronts. The despair and rage that fuel Islamic militancy in the Gaza Strip have been graphically described by Amira Hass, who writes that “support for the Islamic movement is closely tied to a sense of Palestinian impotence” (Hass 1999: 111). Ahmad Qarab, best-known as Abu Walid, was one of the principal Palestinian negotiators of the Oslo accords. When Israeli soldiers prevented him from travelling to Gaza from his home on the West Bank, he reportedly declared: “Soon, I too will join Hamas” (Kapeliouk 1996: 201). Abu Walid did not really mean what he said. He was simply expressing the popular view of Hamas as the voice of Palestinian sentiments fed up with life in the West Bank and Israeli occupation. The Americans obviously have to find other voices.

In addition to expressing the rage and despair of Palestinian civilians unable to leave their towns without enduring humiliating interrogations at Israeli checkpoints, Hamas has also provided social services not adequately provided by the occupation authorities (Hass 1999, Roy 2000). The documentary film Nafahat Amal Allah (We are God’s Soldiers) directed by Atef Abu Saif, and funded by the Ivan Illich Foundation for Social Change and Education, who initially welcomed the Israelis in 1982. Former heads of Israel’s General Security Service, Shin Bet Ami Ayalon and Carmi Gillon, have repeatedly stressed that the ongoing military occupation is the product of desertion (Gillon 1999; Eldar 2001). Yet Kramer and Pipes advocate policies that would intensify this process and make the occupation more inefficient.

Nevertheless, no matter how much Kramer and Pipes may be in terms of the policies they advocate, some of their criticisms of Middle Eastern Studies in the United States are valid. Many American specialists on the Middle East are so determined to reduce public stereotyping of the French idealization of all things Islamic, especially the militant movements commonly referred to as “fundamentalists” or “Islamists.” Scholars like John Esposito do ignore or downplay the anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that pervade the Islamist literature (Munson 1999). They have conducted research on this issue so as to present recent research and discuss the results presented at the conference.


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