American perceptions, attitudes and policies towards the 'orient' are based upon at least two important factors: (1) the stage of development of American imperialism with all its requirements of meeting political, economic and military interests in the region or the country concerned; and (2) the corpus of knowledge produced in American establishments on the region or the country concerned and the resultant discourse that informs the analyst and the policy-maker, that is, the nature of American orientalism. The above two factors are integrally linked together in enunciating any particular attitude or policy.

It is well-known that after the fall of European colonialism, imperialism continued to operate in the neocolonial form through newer mechanisms of exploitation and control like transnational corporations and global institutional arrangements on trade and economy. And the United States replaced Europe as the abode of imperialism. There was a concurrent shift in the realm of knowledge production. If Europe was in the forefront of orientalist scholarship, that position was taken over by the United
States since World War II. It is not by accident that imperialism and scholarship dwell on together and traverse simultaneously. One has to be aware of the continuity and the change both in imperialism and orientalism. The stream of continuity in both of them is handed over by Europe to the United States. If change was more visible in the nature of imperialism, it was less so in the case of orientalism. American orientalism still retains much of the European orientalist bandwagon.

V. G. Kiernan remarks that "an economic system, like a nation or a religion, lives not by bread alone, but by beliefs, visions, daydreams as well, and these may be no less vital to it for being erroneous".\(^1\) In this vein, Edward Said says: "Granted that American expansionism is principally economic, it is still highly dependent and moves together with, upon, cultural ideas and ideologies about America itself, ceaselessly reiterated in public".\(^2\) Said further elaborates the linkages between imperialism and culture:

This twinning of power and legitimacy, one force obtaining in the world of direct domination, the

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2. Said, Ibid.
other in the cultural sphere, is a characteristic of classical imperial hegemony. Where it differs in the American century is the quantum leap in the reach of cultural authority, thanks in large measure to the unprecedented growth in the apparatus for the diffusion and control of information.³

If the expanding skies of "cultural authority" or "cultural imperialism" owed much to the explosion in information technology, the images and attitudes projected in its vast horizons on other cultures such as Islamic or West Asian, are mostly photocopies of the masterprint produced in the European orientalist letter-press.

This point is well-illustrated by Said when he says:

The parallel between European and American imperial designs of the Orient (Near and Far) is obvious. What is perhaps less obvious is (a) the extent to which the European tradition of Orientalist scholarship was, if not taken over, then accommodated, normalized, domesticated, and popularized and fed into the postwar efflorescence of Near Eastern studies in the United States; and (b) the extent to which the

³. Ibid., p. 352.
European tradition has given rise in the United States to a coherent attitude among most scholars, institutions, styles of discourse, and orientations, despite the contemporary appearance of refinement, as well as the use of (again) highly sophisticated-appearing social-science techniques.  

"Like a mirror", says Basim Musallam, "Orientalism reflects Western power and imperial appetite". At the same time, it would be a mistake to equate orientalism with imperialism. Such a notion "allows for the fiction that by combating Orientalism you are combating imperialism". What is significant is the understanding of the mutually reinforcing character of their relationship.

Looking at the history of American orientalism, one can see that much before the United States became a powerful imperialist entity, it was interested in knowing about "everything concerned with the Orient". The American Oriental Society (AOS) was founded as early as 1842 for this purpose. John Pickering, President of the American Oriental Society (AOS) was founded as early as 1842 for this purpose. John Pickering, President of the


Society, made it clear in the first annual meeting held in 1843 that the United States wanted to undertake the study of the orient following European imperial powers. In other words, "Pickering's message was that the framework of Oriental studies--then as now--was political, not simply scholarly". Such "interested" studies were to inform and assist US imperialism when it was fully grown during and after World War II.

Peter Gran in his essay entitled "The Middle East in the Historiography of Advanced Capitalism" attempts, as the title suggests, "to relate the development of Middle East studies in the United States to the general development of American culture or to the history of American imperialism". In other words, he has been trying to place the scholarly realm of orientalism in the proper context and conditions that moulded it, thus bringing forth the relationship between orientalism and imperialism. Gran's proposition is that

the study of American history and Oriental studies are aspects of the totality of modern American culture, and as such have passed through three main phases reflecting the contradictions


in early industrial capital from the middle of the nineteenth century, in late industrial capital and early monopoly capital following the turn of this century, and finally, in advanced monopoly capital from 1940 to the present.9

Gran finds that during the first phase, with industrialisation progressing, "the gentleman-scholar who was a member of a local or regional scholarly or antiquarian society was gradually replaced by the professional scholar", and it was during this period that associations like AOS and American Historical Association (AHA) were established. According to him, at the realm of ideology, the "Church stood in a position of adversary to the Orient" and aspired for conversion, "just as the merchants sought to capture sales". Gradually, this was giving way to concern among the missionaries for reforms in the orient "paralleling the change from sales to investment".10

During the second phase of late industrial capital and early monopoly capital (1890-1940), in orientalism, there "reflected a slow shift towards institutional history away from the study of personalities such as those of the caliphs"; remarks Gran.

9. Ibid., pp. 135-36.
10. Ibid., pp. 136, 137.
Many of the leading figures in the world of Orientalism served in the colonial bureaucracies, business, schools and churches in an era which witnessed the steady rise of nationalist opposition to the colonial presence. Their position—except in marginal areas—was inevitably one of preserving the investment in the status quo. The benefits they themselves derived depended more or less on minimising direct confrontation, on a partial acceptance of Islam or of Arab nationalism, for the sake of preserving the status quo. Similarities between Christianity and Islam were stressed.\(^{11}\)

Thus, this phase also saw the emergence of Arab-American academic relations, especially in Cairo and Beirut, which, even though limited in scope, generated orientalist scholarship within those countries.

If in the days of early industrial capital the 'orient' in general was the centre of cultural concern, during the early monopoly capitalist phase it was the 'Muslim world' and in the third phase, that is, the mature monopoly capitalist phase (1940 to the present),

\(^{11}\) Ibid., pp. 141-42.
Middle East area studies became the focus of American orientalism.\textsuperscript{12}

Edward Said sketches the nature of growth of orientalism in the United States during this latter period in the following manner:

Genealogically speaking, modern American Orientalism derives from such things as the army language schools established during and after the war, sudden government and corporate interest in the non-Western world during the postwar period, Cold War competition with the Soviet Union, and a residual missionary attitude towards Orientals who are considered ripe for reform and re-education.\textsuperscript{13}

This linkage between scholarship and establishments of power is a running theme in the contemporary history of the United States. The nexus between power and knowledge; orientalism's enlivenment as a discourse of power; the discourse of orientalism being reinforced by further and newer processes of knowledge production; and, in turn, the fattening of the arsenals of power through the depolyment of such a rejuvenated discourse—all of which are

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 147.

\textsuperscript{13} Said, n. 4, p. 291.
discernible in the arena of present-day international politics in more cognitive ways than before. In the United States, the explicit linkage between power and knowledge has been operational in the realm of nuclear science, for example. American universities and scientific institutions were conducting research for developing and sophisticating atomic weapons as required by the US administrations for their war efforts and cold war confrontation. Here knowledge openly serves power. 14 Political and strategic studies in US academic institutions are no exception. Area studies programmes in general and the so-called Middle East studies in our context, have been infested with sometimes overt and mostly covert power connection, understanding of which is of utmost significance in deciphering the operative strategies of the discourse of orientalism and the ways of its continued reproduction. If knowing about the orient was a necessity for colonial and imperialist exploitation and expansion, production of the required knowledge infrastructure of orientalism was part and parcel of that project of political economy of control.

As noted above, traditional American academic orientalism gave way to specific area studies like East

Asian studies, Middle East studies, etc. by the end of World War II. With the growth of US economic and political interests in West Asia, such a shift in study and research was needed for the "development of the necessary intellectual expertise needed to protect and strengthen these interests". The evolution of Middle East studies was associated with "the development of an intricate web of centers, institutions, foundation support and government connections" and also "a concommitant shift of emphasis from humanities to social sciences, and from ancient studies to modern concerns". When "the trend toward greater predominance of social scientists in American Middle East studies" continued, as Peter Gran points out, the traditional orientalists were shelved to "an uncomfortable ancillary role, respected neither for their methodology, their interest in the past, not even for their ability to teach Arabic in the philological tradition". Scholars tend to choose contemporary and "relevant" subjects for their research and most often their topics were "those of interest to the State Department", for which funds were available.

16. Ibid., pp. 4, 5.
17. Gran, n. 8, p. 148.
The imperialist quest for the know-how of control resulted in policy-oriented researches concerning West Asia proliferating on a large scale. Such utilitarian studies remained the primary preoccupation of many an expert in the field of so-called Middle East studies. Judith Tucker notes that even during "the more sophisticated 1970s",
The instrumentalist orientation of research in the field, heightened by the limited number of sources for research funds, still meant, for example, that political science research . . . was focused on the behavior of political elites in the region, a direct and short-term interest of US foreign policy-makers.

According to Tucker, policy-oriented funding of so-called Middle East studies also contributed to its "epistemological backwardness". Said talks about how, in this field, along with pragmatism, there is a neglect of "the larger question of what is it that one is doing".


21. Ibid.
In other words, the "whole theoretical dimension is completely absent in Middle East studies". Said asks: "Why is there a conscious or unconscious consensus against theoretical work in Middle East studies?". To him, the reason is political. Thus, this field of study, in its eagerness to serve the interests of power, was cutting a sorry figure within the garb of academic scholarly pursuit.

Stuart Schaar writing in Race and Class aptly describes the shift in the area studies by pointing out the contexts of work of "old timers" and new figures in this field:

The old timers were products of a clearly-defined imperial age, replete with carefully-drawn structures, lines of authority and institutions. The new products of Third World area studies in North America live in an equally intense imperial age, but one with informal structures and insecure foundations, facing challenges and revolutionary pressures. Their insecurity, opportunism and shallowness reflects the condition of contemporary imperialism.

A handful of scholars, individually and collectively, tried to break this power-knowledge nexus to the extent possible and to widen the theoretical and methodological horizons of the field. Talal Asad and Roger Owen wrote, in the inaugural issue of the London-based Review of Middle Eastern Studies, the following as the context in which their new endeavour was required:

For a number of years some of us who write and teach about the Middle East, both in this country and abroad, have become increasingly dissatisfied with the state of Middle East studies. This is not only a reflection of concern at the politically-motivated bias which can be found in much work on the subject, but also at its profound methodological limitations so often characterised by a combination of naive commonsense and vacuous theorising.24

They aimed at encouraging "the production of theoretically relevant work informed by a critical appreciation of the Middle East and its history"25 as against the reigning prejudices, power-play and substancelessness of the field of study.


25. Ibid.
To a certain extent, this critical reworking within academic orientalism and so-called Middle East studies occurred within the United States also. Edward Said calls this oppositional knowledge as "antithetical knowledge"\(^26\) in which category he identifies three main forces: (1) a group of young scholars who are politically honest, who do not want to be silent about US involvement in global and Islamic politics and accept it as neutral truth, who "seem especially sensitive to the ethnocentric forms of Orientalist discourse" and who stay outside the "patronage system"; (2) a group of older scholars like Hamid Algar, Nikki Keddie and Ervand Abrahamian whose work "runs counter to the orthodox scholarship dominating the field"; and (3) a group of writers, activists and intellectuals "whose role in society is determined by their overall oppositional stance".\(^27\) For these men and women, "knowledge is essentially an actively sought out and contested thing, not merely a passive recitation of facts and 'accepted' views".\(^28\)

But what is alarming is the fact that the notion about other cultures (especially Islamic and West Asian)

27. Ibid., pp. 149-52.
28. Ibid., p. 152.
and the images and views projected about them in the orientalist canon still persist and permutate in the citadels of power and in the mainstream tradition of scholarship.

Edward Said in one of his articles speaks about the operation of an "American consensus", which "sets limits and maintains pressures" on American opinion. This has led to the disturbing phenomenon of "a fierce unwillingness to accept any style of politics (or, for that matter, rationality) that was not deliberately its own". And in such an American context "the attachment to Islam seemed especially defiant".

Said deplores the situation that there "has not developed a discourse in the American public space that does anything more than identify with power". Even if, this can be treated as an over-statement, what Said notes next cannot go unnoticed:

For decades in America there has been a cultural war against the Arabs and Islam: appalling racist caricatures of Arabs and Muslims suggest that


they are all either terrorists or sheikhs, and that the region is a large arid slum, fit only for profit or war. The very notion that there might be a history, a culture, a society--indeed many societies--has not held the stage for more than a moment or two . . . .

If this thought about "profit and war" is part and parcel of American public discourse on the Islamic world, it is undoubtedly a component of the dominant ideology of imperialism. The imperialist state with its quest for profits, resources, markets, control and hegemony shapes its policies and pronounces them in such a discursive field.

32. Ibid.