

**'CONSTRUCTION' OF WEST ASIA IN AMERICAN  
PUBLIC OPINION: A CRITIQUE OF NEO-ORIENTALISM  
IN VISUAL CULTURE**

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We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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## CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgement</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>List of Photographs</i>	<i>ii</i>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1-16</b>
Joining the anti-Foundationalist Debate	
<b>Chapter – I</b>	<b>17-51</b>
Visual Construction of the Arab ‘Other’: An Investigation of the Cinematic Agenda	
<b>Chapter – II</b>	<b>52-76</b>
Destruction as a Sympathetic Spectacle: Creation of the American Victimhood	
<b>Chapter – III</b>	<b>77-97</b>
The ‘New Arab’ and the New International Order: Essaying Neo-Orientalism	
<b>Enclosure: The Shape of Things to Come</b>	<b>98-109</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>110-114</b>

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*Kallol Kanti Bhattacharjee*

## LIST OF PICTURES

### Chapter – I

Picture 1.1 King Kong, the Relic of an Old Enemy	26
Picture 1.2 Exorcist: The Demon from Iraq?	30
Picture 1.3 The Delta Force: The Virtuous Knights	42
Picture 1.4 Rambo III: The Face of Freedom	43

### Chapter – II

Picture 1.1 9/11: Faith collides with Fate and Fortune	54
Picture 1.2 Clash of Civilisations?: the Haunting Image and Huntington's Idea	55
Picture 1.3 "All that is solid melts in the air"	56
Picture 1.4 Narrating Pain, Stitching Narratives	57

# INTRODUCTION

## JOINING THE ANTI-FOUNDATIONALIST DEBATE

Nations are not finite beings. They are dynamic units in the arena of international politics. It is not their “destiny” that shapes the nations; rather, it is what they choose to depict themselves as at a crucial platform that defines the nation. Indeed nations are what they narrate. Progression of narration shapes the idea of the nation.<sup>1</sup> Stories concerning the nation, in fact, any nation, is constantly told and retold in the processual ways of its existence as its origins and motivations are continuously examined in many creative forms which in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been marked by the dominance of films and a preponderance of visual culture. Here we shall examine the disjunctures in international visual culture led by the US which would reveal how the culturescape of the superpower is shaped by those hegemonic disjunctures that narrate and shape the sense of American nationhood while creating its ‘Other’.

Mythologisation of the nation is an endless affair. It spans all the three aspects of a nation’s existence: past, present and future; in that mode the myth of invincibility, righteousness of the ‘Self’ and the moral depravity of the ‘Other’ is created and sustained. Literature, folktales, songs, academic thesis, films, plays, the media and to an extent even the Internet make for the array of performatives that define the contours, the interior and the exterior of the idea of nation. This dissertation is an attempt at unveiling the vital space occupied by West Asia in the American nationalist discourse and the ideology of coercive internationalism that sprang

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<sup>1</sup> See Homi Bhabha, “Introduction: Narrating the Nation” in Homi Bhabha, ed. , *Nation and Narration* (New York , 1990) , pp. 1-3

from that fateful interaction. Such a theoretical investigation is impossible without a view of the cultural landscape formed by the actors listed above. For reasons obvious, only films, media and still photography have been studied in their more recent performative essence.

Literary and cultural performatives have procreated modern nations and sharpened their expansive edges. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century national identity and international developments have been regularly documented in films. Initially only a tertiary cultural player in the arena of international politics, Hollywood films today constitute a potent reflector of international politics, albeit from an American point of view. That the theory of international politics has not shed enough light on the cultural forces shaping its boundaries can be traced to a failure of the discipline to relate the constitution of the social knowledge with the general developments in international politics. This brief study attempts to go beyond that limitation. The work that follows shows that the industry of visual culture – that includes the films and the electronic media – are part of the dominant discourse found in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 years. Arms of visual culture and information dissemination are continuously shaping and reshaping the power politics worldwide. Popular culture, entertainment and academic texts are constitutive agents of the canon of international politics. The discourse prevalent among these actors, like many other modern discourses aims to exclude those unable to understand or accept its rules<sup>2</sup>. It is the visible discontinuities in this cultural discourse of international relations and its anomalies that form the clues in this excavatory project of theory in these pages.

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in P.Rabinow ed., *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth, Peregrine Books), see pp. 76-100, cited in Ken Booth and Steve Smith, eds., *International Relations Theory Today* (Cambridge, 1995).

A major area of concern in this work is how authority is manufactured by the instruments of popular culture and media through the use of both mobile and still images. The visible aspects of these two arms are not all that there are in this story, because the image of the Arab/Islamic adversary they have created marks its presence by pretending to disappear with the removal of these images from the electronic or the celluloid world. The authority of photography as a testimony of the *real* ensures the subjective image lingers long after the movie halls and the media houses have closed for the day and starts influencing the governmental policy formulation for the real world<sup>3</sup>. Silent, almost unnoticed overwriting of real policymaking in international politics by the stereotypes found in popular Hollywood action films and the anti-Arab/Muslim bias in the Western electronic media since 9/11 reinforces contemporary concern over the growing power of the “image-world” and the intellectual poverty of the “real” world. It seems echoing Feuerbach’s<sup>4</sup> apprehensions of 1843 the international politics is getting closer to “representations” at the expense of the “reality”. Thus “Orientalism” in visual culture assumed real life political significance far from its literary variety championed by the likes of Flaubert and Chateaubriand of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The current cultural campaign in the films and the partisan Western visual media appears to serve the same purpose by providing much needed cultural and ethnological justifications for the near-imperial policies of the United States in West Asia.

The cultural discourse in the U.S.A. therefore is gilded by a margin that has been trying in some form or the other to contain West Asia with all its political challenge and popular disenchantment meant for the West and the U.S.A. within

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, 1977), see p. 153.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Sontag, *ibid.*

itself. This cultural contest is utterly one-sided and has a conclusion scripted beforehand. That international politics has become a very sophisticated and nuanced game has something to do with the profusion of new actors and players in its arena. Presence of popular culture in the political relation between the US and the third world in general and the West Asian region in particular is the outcome of the fast evolving non-state nature of international politics where very important allies of dominant states are often invisible forces and influences. This phenomenon cannot be understood by the traditional realist and idealist paradigms of international theory. Prevalence of non-state actors, globalisation and the ever-burgeoning power of the superpower makes for a fit case for ushering in the “third debate”<sup>5</sup>. Such an innovative and contemporary approach is necessary to understand the interplay of cultural actors and their counterparts in international politics. The innovative third way provides new opportunities to understand international politics in innovative ways. The rough outlines of the “third way” used in this project are being explained in the following lines.

### Deconstruction as a mode of ‘Construction’:

This conceptual framework draws heavily from the thinkers of social sciences who have defied the disciplinary boundaries with great flair while enriching them immensely. Prominent among them definitely are the names of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose ideas have contributed to the development of almost the whole array of critical interdisciplinary social sciences. Michel Foucault’s work along with his contemporaries and his illustrious followers have contributed to political science,

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<sup>5</sup> Steve Smith, “The Self-Images of a Discipline: A Genealogy of International Relations Theory” in Ken Booth and Steve Smith, eds., *ibid.*

sociology, epistemology, ethnography, philosophy, criminology and a host of others. Traces of his theses can be found in the ideas espoused by the critical thinkers like Edward Said who is of more immediate importance for this work. As a pioneering historiographer Foucault holds a special place in studying systems of power in a deconstructive fashion in diverse areas. By diverse application of deconstructive historiographic analysis Foucault proved the versatility of his critical approach to disciplines of established truth.

For example, according to Foucault, madness as one learnt of in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the invention of the idea of “sanity”, a result of the Enlightenment in Europe<sup>6</sup>. At another point he carries the same radical approach to the study of the Prison and does a stunning work there as well. According to him the modern society wary of keeping its denizens pliant and pious had created the Prison as a means of subduing the rebellious bodies.<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault did his study of prisons in the aftermath of the horrible European experience of concentration camps during the World War II which stretched the logic of prisons to its extremes. Foucault argued that continuous surveillance and control over the body of the rebel was the essential aspects of the prison system. In his works Foucault sets a powerful precedence of academic perspective that could be used to study the evolution of a host of other issues in diverse subjects. From the point of view of this dissertation it is Foucault’s emphasis on the bio-social life of the Subject that is of particular interest. Foucault tried to show in his works, what happens to the Subject when s/he is turned into an object by the Knowledge accepted by them. It is here that construction of Knowledge as a social force becomes a subject of academic

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6 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London, 1989).

7 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth, 1982).

curiosity: if uncritical acceptance of the Knowledge leads to the Subject's "objectivation" then perhaps the nature of Truth provided by the established Knowledge should be investigated for its own subjective nature. Equally interesting would be an investigation regarding the path that led to the formation of the established Knowledge and its acceptance by the Subject prior to his "objectivation". In purely Gramscian terms uncritical acceptance of the given truth then would establish the authority of the originator of Knowledge while taking it away from the Subject in a deft exercise of hegemony. For " 'Construction' of West Asia in American Public Opinion" this researcher has adopted a similar line of investigation to unearth the American cultural language used to construct West Asia and its people and culture as an adversary to the superpower. Preliminary survey of the problem area showed that the greater role in this project of otherisation was being played by the entertainment industry, the media, in short the community of visual artists. Therefore this study tries to find out how the visually projected power of the films and tele-visual media have created and built upon extant biases while drawing authoritative voices from the academic community and establish the relation of culture to power centre of the unilateral international state system. By emphasising 'construction', this dissertation tries to show the power of a deconstructivist approach in the study of the complex reality of international politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Films and the media in recent and not so recent past have been inundated with the portrayal of the evil Arab-Islamic terrorist/freedom fighter. Such has been the cycle of stereotypes formed by realistic depiction of terroristic crimes, and reports of real violence involving the Arabs in the Western media that terrorism and West Asia have become more or less synonymous to someone constantly

shaped by Western culture and information. Everything else, local delicacies, lifestyle, family ties, knowledge of history and historical objects of art of the region – in short, the normal aspects of life – have been consistently downplayed before the western gaze by the visual masters of the Hollywood czars and the media houses. Such has been the negative campaign over West Asia, Islam and the Arabs that its importance to the history of human civilisation in the world has been completely overshadowed by its negative and pejorative projection in the public media. The consequence of dominance of such a simplistic narration of contemporary history in the field of culture perhaps created a leading public perception in the US which ultimately resulted in the seemingly well-planned destruction of the National Museum of Baghdad by a gang of organised looters on 10 April 2003 under the very nose of the victorious American soldiers who cared little for the rich history of the land they had besieged<sup>8</sup>. “Stolen past” is the outcome of a cultural trend in the US which was based on denying West Asia its own past and handed it as well as the American domestic audience only a disturbed aspect of its present through its powerful cultural machinery. Such a “construction” of the Arab world had both a domestic and international agenda: firstly: it created a contrasting well ordered, patriarchal<sup>9</sup> and White Christian representation of the history, life and destiny of the social structure of the USA and provided a linear interpretation of the U.S. society ignoring the complex hybridised and mulatto<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gulshan Dietl “Museum, memory and mankind” *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 3 May, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley, 2001) [Through a perspectival study of cinematic and theatrical depiction of West Asia (Middle East) the author shows that the discourse that sutured the notion of the negative Arab-Islamic subject to the American ideosphere also tried to remap the “private” terrain of the American society which by 1991 assumed pretensions of gender sensitivity (p.273) for the outer world while becoming more masculinised in reality.].

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Talty, *Mulatto America: At the Crossroads of Black and White Culture-A Social History* (New York, 2003) [Talty analyses the course taken by the evolution of American culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of the post-Abolition era when Black and White cultures collided, mixed and

nature of the American civilisation today; secondly, and more importantly, the same visual project also had a massive international fallout , especially in West Asia.

To understand the language engraved in the culturescape of the USA one has to *read* its films and photography, in short its visual narration of the American national project as discovered in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century; by requirement, this work deals with the relevant films from 1970s, '80s, and 1990s alongside the visual reports regarding September 11, 2001. To decipher the language of power embedded in these cultural presentations I have resorted to a form of “contrapuntal reading” championed by Edward Said, perhaps the most illustrious follower of Michel Foucault.

This style of ‘reading’ was more or less outlined by Edward Said in his *magnum opus Culture and Imperialism* as a technique to criticise the texts without demeaning their creative significance. Said challenges the traditional notion of culture that defined it as a benign factor in the life of human beings and redefines the concept in a radical fashion by terming it as the arena where various political and ideological regiments clash with each other. Culture as defined by the imperial West of 19<sup>th</sup> century comes under scrutiny of Prof. Said as he points out that the greatest weakness of the traditional definition of culture was that it robbed one of the chance to criticise one’s own culture while believing it actually resides in an ideological vacuum. As a result the practitioners of this brand of culture fail to relate colonialism, imperialism and slavery with the literary and cultural output of the modern age which they characterised. Such a notion of culture therefore serves

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sometimes co-created wonders and cultural phenomena like the tragic actress Dorothy Dandridge, singer Sam Cooke and the boxer and Black sporting icon Mohammad Ali. As the title of his work pronounces, Talty is busy defining the identity of the USA in the years since the end of Segregation in the USA and he fails to pin a colour to denote that. Instead he resorts to the category of the “mulatto” to describe the cultural reality in the USA in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.].

as an “enclosure” to imperial practices of the West. The “contrapuntal” strategy of Edward Said reveals the nature and configuration of cultural practices in the Western world are shaped by its relation to the rest of the world, mainly what has been termed as the Orient. His revelation comes without denigrating the works and without turning a blind eye to the way imperialism has shaped culture throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. This process of reading does not discourage enjoying the famous novels and stories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; according to Edward Said it is actually a more useful and interesting way of reading and understanding a text. In a famous paragraph expressing his methodology in *Culture and Imperialism* Said says:

My method is to focus as much as possible on individual works, to read them first as great products of the creative or interpretative imagination, and then to show them as part of the relationship between culture and empire. I do not believe that authors are mechanically determined by ideology, class, or economic history, but authors are, I also believe, very much *in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history* [emphasis mine] and their social experience in different measure.<sup>11</sup>

Formation of the dominant discourse in the “battleground” of truths once again caught Said’s attention:

The overriding of one discourse by another is what it’s all been about. And I’m interested not only in the way the two co-exist, but the way in which you can read the works with these concerns in mind and, by a process of what I call contrapuntal reading, *transform* the works into the *enabling conditions* [emphasis mine] of a decolonising critique.<sup>12</sup>

Having introduced basically a Said-ian style of reading literary texts in a dissertation that primarily aims to work out a basic understanding of the hidden dynamics of international politics one now has the responsibility of establishing the relevance of a hardcore literary method in the analysis and understanding of visual

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<sup>11</sup> See Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1994), p. xxiv.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Osborne (ed.) *A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals* (New York, 1996), see p.68.

culture and its influence on the way states play politics. Here let it be said that films and narrative photographs are not mere visual entertainment or memorabilia; as part of the mass media they too can be the centre of great deal of controversy and ideological posturing. The visual world is markedly different from the written world, but its rules are more or less same. Visual culture therefore can be understood by the tools applied to understand and assess the literary works. Semiotics or the science of signs is helpful for both literary works and visual creations like films and still photography. According to semiotics spoken or written words can be analysed by dividing the signs into the *signifier* and the *signified*, which is, what is seen and what is meant. In other words visual representations can always be represented to mean something that the interpreter feels right<sup>13</sup>. In short images carry messages and therefore could actually be “read” like one reading literary texts.<sup>14</sup> Obviously reading in two different medium means two different things that ultimately increase the understanding of what has been written in a text or what is being shown on screen. While the works like *Delta Force* (1986) and *The Siege* (1998) provide highly entertaining moments for the audience, their political message should not be lost to the probing gaze of a critic as they cater their interpretation of basically international developments to a domestic audience. Films like these act as opinion generators among a cross section of the population who in turn constitute a strong foundation for political conservatism within the state. Edward Said’s methodology thus proves its versatility while dealing even with visual culture.

Since this dissertation deals with films and still photography apart from providing a general critique of the performance of the Western electronic media it

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<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction of Visual Culture* (New York, 1999), p.13.

<sup>14</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music Text* (London, 1977), p.15.

is necessary to assert here that “contrapuntal reading” would be the methodology to “read” visual representations of West Asia in the U.S.A.

The contrapuntal method of “reading” visual culture, that has been adopted for the sake of unveiling the hidden West Asia-specific meanings of films and the electronic media of the USA, serves a crucial function in enriching awareness of the visual culture and firmly establishes its hitherto nebulous relationship with international politics. This deconstructivist approach adds a new dimension to the theoretical field of international theory.

As an approach deconstruction is strongly recognised with what in the recent decades has come to be identified as the post-positivist school of international politics.<sup>15</sup> Compared to other disciplines in the garden of social sciences the impact of prominent philosophical debates of 20<sup>th</sup> century has been little slow to touch the parameters of theoretical ventures of international politics. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that most of the developments within the social sciences were the direct results of the unsettling international events like the World Wars, the Cold War and other devastating but avoidable events. The culpability of international politics in undoing the world was self-evident. Innovations therefore came faster to other branches of the social sciences. The debates of behaviouralism that raged as disenchantment with the traditional political theory grew in the aftermath of the World Wars<sup>16</sup> was fast replaced by the debates concerning post-behaviouralism which was founded on the idea that extreme rationalisation of human sciences was not in the interest of the academe or the society. By the end of 1960s and early 1970s the world was once again shaken

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<sup>15</sup> Steve Smith, “The Self-Images of a Discipline: A Geneology of International Relations Theory”, *ibid*, see p. 24-25.

<sup>16</sup> See Om Bakshi, *The Crisis of Political Theory: An Inquiry into Contemporary Thought*, (Delhi, 1987).

by a series of upheavals ranging from social unrest to the Vietnam War and economic recession in the West that virtually terminated the post-World War II 'feel good' period in Western Europe and the USA. The response was a massive multi-disciplinary movement that sprang from French post-structuralism of 1960s. The concerns of this theoretical movement which is sometimes also known as postmodernism was very contemporary that encompassed the areas so far avoided by the "modern" schools of thought. For once feminist theoreticians of political theory and sociology and those disparate academic regiments working on the formation of "subjects" found their pedestal in the scheme of social sciences. Post-structuralists like Foucault and Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze gave prominence to culture and showed that it was culture that shaped "subjects".<sup>17</sup> In other words a proper understanding of the world would be enabled only by a dissection of the sphere of culture. Postmodernism/post-structuralism which grew out of the rebellion against Marxist structuralists was the product of the halcyon days of 1960s. The unique interaction between academic activism and social resurgence left a rich legacy for human sciences whose traces as already described showed up in fields as diverse as sociology, political theory, history, visual anthropology, media studies and linguistics.

The same was not true for international relations. While other disciplines morphed international relations was led by the very "modern" and deterministic schools of realism and neo-realism as opposed to indeterministic theories of postmodernism. The Cold War which raged with erratic breaks induced by detente did not help in loosening the grip of realism on the field of academic study of international politics. Change however could not be resisted for far too long. By

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<sup>17</sup> *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, ed. , Lawrence Cahoon (Cambridge: Ma, 1996), p.5.

the 1980s and early 1990s a group of scholars like Wendt, Krasner<sup>18</sup> and Strange started relating their concern to supposedly postmodern subjects like culture, social norms, environment and globalisation among other non-state actors. This in brief serves as a ground for justifying the theoretical exercise in this dissertation that delves into the unpronounced relation between visual culture and the dominant camp of unilateralists in international politics.

The identity of this work is definitely post-positivist in general and postmodern in particular. The realist argument in favour of a structural analysis of the world affairs has held ground for long without always being successful in explaining the dynamics of the world. Despite its long stint the very modern and systemic sensibilities of their argument has excluded some more important elements which play a great role in keeping the illusion of “anarchy” alive while actually creating a rather coherent system of domination. Most prominent among these players of course is, culture that covers a very broad area of intellectual and sensory activities. This dissertation looks at the visual aspects of culture while devoting theoretical attention to the performance of the media’s capacity to produce images within the framework of critique of Orientalism championed by Edward Said through a number of his works.

The works of Said and Foucault before him have repeatedly challenged the theoretical underpinnings of modern knowledge like rationalism<sup>19</sup>, and the West-centricity rampant in ‘liberal’ social sciences. This particular tendency to establish definite foundations to knowledge concerning international politics has served its

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, “Power, Politics, Institutions, and Transnational Relations” in Thomas Risse-Kappen ed. , *Bringing transnational relations back in: Non-state actors, domestic structures and international institutions* (Cambridge, 1995), see pp. 257-279. See also Jean Bethke-Elshtain, ‘Feminist themes and international relations’ in James Der Derian ed. *International Theory: Critical Investigations* (London, 1995), p. 340.

<sup>19</sup> See Lawrence Cahoot, *ibid.* p.3.

pro-West purpose without being consistent provider of analytical frameworks of events at a truly global scale. The foundationalism represented by the realist school has not addressed the concern of post-industrial<sup>20</sup> events spawning under its guardianship. This is a major gap which is visible during the post-industrial war campaigns in the Persian Gulf region which does not elicit a response from the foundationalist schools of international politics. These schools are silent over the apparent phenomenon of a very postmodern war in a world that they are still inclined to describe in modern terms. The 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War was the first war of the post-Cold War era. It was also an era that finally completed the hold of the visual media over modern warfare. During the Vietnam crisis the media could only get erratic access to the developments on the ground. CNN bettered the performance of the media by bringing the war home to the eager television viewers in distant USA. That the evidently winnable war was beamed to people to their utter amazement and enjoyment, was a history of sorts. It meant the secretive war the early modern age was known for was now over. However, it was a “good war” from the very beginning. Reporting “good wars” is relatively easy because along with its spectacular qualities such a war does not pose any tough choices before the state or the media as both can work more or less amicably without sabotaging each other’s interests. That way Gulf War 1991 was every bit a war choreographed to showcase the “overwhelming” power of the USA over the visual media: it was the least modern and a pioneer of postmodern wars. But as subsequent observations<sup>21</sup> showed such wars were not really as transparent as reports in the CNN wanted the viewers to believe. The new media-state partnership opened the doors of new types

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<sup>20</sup> Melani McAlister, *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=15&ItemID=3368> [See Arundhati Roy’s work on the disinformation campaign during the raging crisis in Iraq].

of censorship and suppression of facts and information. But perhaps the best comment emphasising the postmodern nature of the Gulf War I came from Jean Baudrillard who said that since the war did not leave its imprint on other more substantial spheres apart from that of the visual media of satellite channels, it could safely be regarded as an event that “did not take place”.<sup>22</sup>

By the time the Gulf War I unfolded, too many scholars from the fields different from international politics had started commenting on the affairs of the world that left its theoretical landscape fairly transformed as a result. The contradictions of postmodern trends in the international affairs which were left unaddressed by the traditional theorists of security found expression in the works of emancipatory thinkers in the post-positivist school who explained the emerging contradictions away. This dissertation aims to be one such “reading” which combines the anti-foundationalist rigour of radical interpretivist theories which pushes the debate forward by illuminating less highlighted areas without trying to sound conclusive. This dissertation which is being drafted when the final phases of the Gulf War II are yet to unfold, proceed with the humble conviction that in a world where a confusing abundance of violence has become the only arbiter of conflicts the, emancipatory aspects of anti-foundationalist debate will contribute towards a clearer comprehension of the events, past and present.

This dissertation grows out of a concern bracing the entire spectrum of visual culture. Therefore the reader would find here references to films, electronic media and photography. Though usual styles of study would prefer to limit such a work to any one of the three arms of visual culture discussed here, that however, was occluded by a greater concern with the broad category of visual culture, of

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<sup>22</sup> Alan How, *Critical Theory* (New York, 2003), p. 148.

which the three form parts. A study of paintings and other aspects of visual culture perhaps will be undertaken at a later stage when the category of visual culture will receive a more rigorous treatment.

Though efforts were made to organise the text thematically, the chapters reveal interaction between the various arms of visual culture. Despite that interplay the first chapter can be read primarily as a discovery of the “Other” meaning of the inventory of the genre of action films from Hollywood in the last three decades in general and the post-Cold War years in particular. The second chapter that follows is a critical study of the photography that sprang from the incidents of September 11, 2001. The third chapter is the study of the resurgent issue of neo-Orientalism and its place in the scheme of globalisation. Enclosure, the last section of the dissertation, is a brief comment on globalisation and the scope of conflict resolution in contemporary era of international affairs in the face of the retributive culture critiqued in the pages here

## CHAPTER – I

### **VISUAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE ARAB ‘OTHER’: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CINEMATIC AGENDA**

The dissertation that follows is the result of looking at the international politics from a non-conventional perspective to study the developments and dynamics of the contemporary international politics. This theoretical attempt locates the centrepiece of this work of research in an area way beyond the confines of the realist international theory. Most of this work goes to establish the relation between visual culture and the changes in the international sphere. It often may seem that the two fields do not have any relation between them; in reality however, films, electronic media and photographic campaigns – in short, visual culture – today constitute the very soul of the international politics. The ground of international politics in West Asia is laid by the ‘politics of culture’ that is, the fundamental way the Western public opinion makers have chosen to address the region in their imagination. West Asia has become the jugular of American foreign policy since 9/11, but its presence in the American culture has an unbroken history. Incorporation of West Asia into the American vision for the world has been facilitated by the “cultural coercion” exercised by the various arms of the visual culture industry of the USA, most notably the films.

As it is the wont with history, it is not merely a product of the present’s unexplained or irrational attention to the past. History writing or historiographical narratives, that generate history from the bed of anonymous eventualities in fact is coincidental with the present. History is not a retrospective perspective alone; history unfolds simultaneously with the present. It is through this process of continuous formation of history that the nature of the Self and that of the Other is

decided: in other words the first act of history is the decision over who will be the author of history. And, history is not always written in ink. There are other ways of 'writing' history. The other forms of historiography have simply exploded on the surface of public thought with the emergence of the modern age.

Here Vico's observation rings true<sup>1</sup>. He had rightly pointed out that men make their own history and the discovered history is actually the part that has been made by the manufacturer of history. This is the true process of historiography that produces a history, a world view and a vision, that finally, in today's world is transformed into policies of the powerful nation-states that touch us all. Modern historiography that is history writing has been the subject of a level of subjective distortion that was most ably exposed by the critique of colonial literary historiography in his seminal essay, *Orientalism* by Edward Said.

Unlike *Orientalism* of Edward Said the ongoing discourse of dominance is not limited to literature; it is spread over a variety of medium and representation. But one feature that characterises both the analysis of the colonial and postcolonial structure of power is the very act of representation. The vital act of representation is the spot where history's subjective nature is illumined. A major game of the power politics is being played in West Asia today. But before the violence on the ground unfolded in 2003, a symbolic violence took place between the respective civilisational representatives at the level of representation on the screen of the films in Hollywood. Films being the most powerful medium of generation of public opinion definitely swayed American public opinion against the 'evil' Arab villain in numerous Hollywood films. Like some black magic practitioners who

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<sup>1</sup> See Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New Delhi, 2001), pp. 4 -5.

kill enemies with pinpricks on look alike rag dolls Hollywood films have pre-enacted the Iraq War of 2003 much before the real thing unfolded on the ground.

Beginning with a series of films in the 1980s, Hollywood achieved a number of goals even before the first shots of Western acrimony towards West Asia had been fired in Iraq. The Arabs in general were portrayed, in films after films in a light that reduced them to unproblematic killers, villains, and residents of a world who are far from the arms of reason. It was during the Soviet-era that the villains of the Hollywood films were first portrayed as the Soviet spies and crazy colonels - this was the cultural rendition that Cold War rivalries received on screen. The American hatred against the Arabs on celluloid was therefore not the first of its kind. This is the practice of "otherisation" that has very old history crossing the barriers of time and space. The Hollywood films with Arab villains terrorising the world and its decent citizens was the result of a simplistic perception of the world by the USA basking in the glory of victory in the Cold War. Such simple representations showed the world in truly black on white terms. In other words the world was now divided, at least on the screen of the films between the good and the evil. In short, the Hollywood films along with other visual representation invented a discursive ethics which was used by various segments of the media time and again. It is around this invented criterion that public opinion in the years prior to 9/11 and since then has been moulded. This discursive ethic is the skeleton of the so called public opinion regarded as the product of the most vibrant democracy. Visual culture today is the dominant tool of ideology. It is an alliance that the 19<sup>th</sup> century could not arrange for ideology: visual culture today can ideologise and de-ideologise. Influence of moving images on digitally telecast channels and dark movie halls would have been easily regarded as black magic or witch craft.

However, consumers of images are hardly concerned about the meanings conveyed to them through films and other arms of the visual media; sadly they are not aware of the nearly magical properties that entertainment has. Entertainment that is simplified, ingestible ideology is encoded with the magic that makes ideological conversion a relatively non-violent affair.

It is important here to realise that the present work lacks the visual elegance of a television documentary on the same topic or the compulsive quality of a film. Black ink on a paper can merely attract the reader, but, a colourful film can entice crowds in throngs. In other words, one can be taught a different viewpoint more easily with the aid of a film, because we live in a visual age. From small television sets in distant South Asian villages to the tents of Bedouins in the Arabian Peninsula; from the fishermen in Eastern Russia to the tribal households in Central Africa, they all are connected by what they watch. Thanks to satellite television channels and commercial films produced mostly on West Coast of the USA their object of vision is more often common than not. The center of popular entertainment, which is basically visual, has shifted bag and baggage to the US. USA therefore is the leader of the global culture that leads not by example but by its immense capacity to disgorge images through all the possible channels; in short, it is the master of the global culture factory. What we believe and what we see is therefore open to the injunctions flowing from the head of the culture factory.

At a certain level of understanding, it should be emphasised that globalisation was more or less inevitable given the historic movement of capital in the world. That the US has become the leader of international state system has something to do with the way history has unfolded in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These lines therefore look at the pro-US tilt of globalisation which comes from the

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congenitally unbalanced power equation between the postcolonial world and the post-Fordist West. These two worlds interact with each other at three distinct and seemingly unrelated ways. On the one hand there is the political/military engagement, on the other there is the economic collaboration, on the third front there is the cultural exchange. The disjuncture lies in widespread reluctance of the leading players in the international politics to accept the relations between the two spheres, of the world and their actual innate relations. Out of the visible signs and the invisible ones it is the invisible ones that are more potent and thereby influence the whole gamut of relations be it cultural, political and economic – between the postcolonial East and the post-industrial West. This interaction is not free from the equation of power between the East and the West. Doubtlessly, the East is no match to resourceful West in the field of today's capital intensive culture and cultural production. The interaction between the East and the West is tilted in favour of the West which unleashes powerful currents in all the fields in which they interact. Out of all the three fields, it is the field of cultural treatment of the East in the hands of the West that is most visible. The representation of the Arab 'other' in the Hollywood films in the past two decades has shown an inherent bias against the region and its people which was conveyed without uttering a single negative word about the Arabs and Islam. This silent building of bias can be described by borrowing a word from Edward Said's '*Orientalism*', Said describes two forms of 'Orientalism' in the cultural sphere, i.e. 'latent orientalism' and 'manifest orientalism'. The cultural campaign carried out in the Hollywood films that targets the Arab as an object of fear and loathing can be classified as 'latent orientalism'.



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It is here that the importance of visual culture in the creation of nationalistic fervour and passion becomes apparent. Though not strictly propagandist in the pre-II<sup>nd</sup> World War sense of the term, the value of films in the field of propaganda can not be discounted. Because, ultimately commercially produced films seldom violate the culture codes of the state they are dependent upon in the ultimate analysis. Leni Reifenstahl produced spectacular documentary films for 1936 Olympics for the pleasure of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi regime that highlighted the physical strength and beauty of the German people that spurred the drive for the purest form of German men and women, an aim that brought the calamity of Nazi adventurism. This state driven agenda died a quiet death in the aftermath of the World War II. But the Cold War proved to be a greater cultural war than any one had been imagined. Most of the war between the two blocks was fought in literature, films and pamphlets. Soviet Union actively promoted the international communist movement whereas Hollywood worked vigorously to produce films castigating what it regarded as the red menace<sup>2</sup>. The Hollywoodian crusade on red USSR continued till the Soviet empire collapsed in the early 1990s. In fact the cultural assault unleashed on West Asia in 1980s and 1990s had its roots in the tumultus anti-Soviet politics of 1960s and 1970s when Nasserite Arab nationalism revealed its alliance with the Soviet Union and the 'Oil shock' showed the West's dominance continued to depend on 3<sup>rd</sup> world resources in the hands of unstable regimes. The Western shock over oil was amplified by the discovery of an enemy hitherto thought to be a menace of lesser order. The 'Oil shock' opened the doors

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<sup>2</sup> Though films with the exotic 'other' had been made before, the peak of such enterprise was reached in the 1970s and 1980s when advanced technical wizardry gave them a life-like element and brought them closer to the stormy politics of the Cold War era. Films like *Octopussy* (1983) and *Red Heat* (1988) were classic anti-Soviet statements that successfully created enemy image amidst the cine-going population worldwide.

of Western antipathy towards the Arabs. Most of all, as the principal target of the sanctions, it was the USA which developed inveterate hatred for the Arab elites.

The Cold War was not a conflict between the East and the West. Despite all the talks of the confrontation between the two blocks, Cold War was an ideological strife between two bodies of thought which had common Western origin. The fact that even a primarily Western problem was described in terms of an East-West rivalry proves the stubborn and ancient nature of the problem between the East and the West. As a result the spot of Western enemy was not left vacant for too long after 1991. Because, after the end of the Western representative of the East, i.e. the USSR, the slot went to a truly Oriental representatives of the Orient i.e the Arabs. Together with this change, all the anti-Soviet cultural practices such as those in films were turned into anti-Arab project of the Western culture machine.

The difference between the anti-Soviet cultural onslaught of Hollywood and its anti-Arab stand in films was that the first cultural rivalry went back more or less to imperial tension between the Russian territorial ambition and similar inclination of the Western states, primarily the Great Britain among them. Contrary to that, Western problems with the Arabs go back to the colonial days when controlling and ruling the latter was a major challenge for the imperial states. The difference therefore is clear: the Soviets and the Western forces were basically fighting over the crucial question who will dominate the world; the Arabs on the other hand were objects of domination during the colonial era. Post-Cold War push to overwhelm the Arabs was a throwback to those colonial memories which were still very raw in the post-colonial zone of West Asia.

The problem of representation of the people of West Asia would not have been an issue had it not been a repeat performance of what had already been across

the region in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. The cultural imperialism unleashed across the Afro-Asiatic landmass then was known as Orientalism which ultimately spawned its own critique by the same name.

19<sup>th</sup> century Orientalism was aimed at creating the colonial subjects whereas the creation of the Arab 'other' at the end of the Cold War and in the post-Cold War years in the films of Hollywood was aimed at fulfilling a necessity that is deeply linked to the geopolitical, economic and cultural realities of the contemporary world system. In the absence of competing media of expression, the Orientalism in 19<sup>th</sup> century could create the colonial subject and reality without much sophistication. This exercise was refined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Films, popular films especially proved useful in this regard. Films are different from literary expressions, because celluloid has the ability to bring characters alive, make them real. The strength of films lies in their capacity to control the viewers' attention completely for the duration of the show (provided they have their money's worth). The attention for that period remains undivided and totally focused on the object on screen. In such a setting films do evoke reality and can make a powerful impact upon a lay viewer. A lay viewer is at greater chance of gaining the point of view of the films if it reflects the world of his habitation more closely. In short a politically charged cultural campaign has greater chance of success through films for the quality of cinematic experience, which is easily disseminable and available to the people across the globe. Repeated exposure of the audience to the cinematic truth can construct an image of the 'other' among the audience. This is the real difference between the old style Orientalism and the sophisticated dissemination of cultural codes, this dissertation calls as neo-Orientalism. Films are unparalleled in

influence; though there are other forms of opinion shapers, they simply are not as influential as the image factory consisting of the films and the photography.

Potency of the films as a mode of conveying political message became very well evident during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980, that is nearly throughout the Cold War years. The cold Soviet villain or soldier<sup>3</sup> with his steely eyes and mechanical unvarnished English struck fear in the hearts of millions of movie goers in those decades. The Soviet villain however was different in two aspects from the villain these pages are dedicated to. The Soviet villain was a human form of a mechanical spirit. The Soviet villain was extremely modern – in fact a creation of modernity; the villain had an element of East European diabolical qualities represented best by the paranoiac rule and purges of Stalinist Russia. The Soviet villain portrayed on the Hollywood screen was a very serious representation of what was a civilisational adversary of the West. This was very different from the villains promoted in Hollywood films before the onset of the Cold War. During those years Hollywood was firmly in the grip of ferocious wild beasts, manimals like Dracula and mean White men in khaki in Africa who often thrilled the audiences with their villainous performances.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Barbara Evans Clements, and others, ed., *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture* (New York, 2002). This wonderful collection of articles on Russian and Soviet masculinities provides insight into a less explored arena. See this book for understanding the evolution of the Russian masculinity over the past two hundred years. See especially p. 173 to get the impression of “stoical Russian soldier” who would be ready to die. The “stoicism of the ideal Russian soldier” can be contrasted to the image of the despairing Arab militants and irregular West Asian fighters projected in Hollywood films.

<sup>4</sup> Two films that finally surrendered their villains to the Cold War code of culture were *King Kong* (1933) and *Dracula* (1931). Despite latter-day attempts to regain their lost throne of notoriety by moderately successful sequels they remained a part of the pre-Cold War cinematic culture of Hollywood.

## Picture 1.1: King Kong, the Relic of an Old Enemy



Note: Hollywood has found the fount of colonial stereotypes a useful source to recruit its villains. With the end of U.S. isolationism the films like *King Kong* became history as more interesting enemies awaited the American audience far from American shores.

Contrary to the cold, calculative killer Soviet spy the Arab 'other' is anything but modern. He is a kind of King-Kong, a bestial irrational being who does not know how well to 'execute' his revenge and therefore is programmed to self-destruct. Thus, he is comical when not killing and kills indiscriminately since he does not know better ways to express his rage. The violence by the Arab 'other' not carried out as a result of a deep rooted political opposition; going by the simplistic depiction on screen the violence appears very much a sporadic, decentralised, and therefore more widespread social malaise. The on-screen depiction is simplistic and evidently very essentialist. A particular observation appears pertinent while memorising and comparing two enemies of the West: the Soviet East European with the Arab West Asian. It is the serious masculinity of the Soviet villain of James Bond films, which when compared with the constructed Arab enemy on screen show that it's the 'constructed' deranged masculinity of the Arab which sets

them both apart. The Soviet villain is a suave European ex-aristocrat converted to extremist modernity of communism. The Arab enemy in the Hollywood's action flicks are weighed down with the hysterical residue imposed upon it.<sup>5</sup> In that the Arab 'other' is a subject of the same problem that forms the core of all Hollywood action villains.<sup>6</sup>

Such unproblematised construction keeps the narrative entertaining while emphasising a negative image of the villain. Hollywood action films of the relevant genre have thus created or constructed a new enemy which is a mixture of the practice of colonial mockery of sub-intelligent Asiatics and the fear of unpredictable enemy. Following Laura Mulvey's seminal essay, *Visual pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, it can be said that the Arab body has been objectified for the sake of convenient visual experience.<sup>7</sup> The directors have treated and presented the new enemy in the light which they feel would be in line with the last great cultural encounter between the West and the East: colonialism.

The conclusion is rather simple: both the images of the Soviet villain and the Arab 'other' is manufactured from the traces of subjective assessments carried out in the colonial era; the Soviet villain on Hollywood screen is the successor of the Russian imperialist, a civilisational competitor; the Arab terrorist, on the other hand is the descendent of the colonial image of the native subject in West Asia. The films thus not only construct adversaries, they also allocate qualities to them according to their own inherited perceptions. In brief the filmic representation of international political reality reflects the equation of power (at least in the

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<sup>5</sup> See Gerald Butt, *The Arabs: Myth and Reality* (London, 1997), [this book gives an all round idea of the various political and cultural forces and influences that have constructed the Arabs in the modern times].

<sup>6</sup> Paul Smith, "Eastwood Bound" in Maurice Berger, and others, eds., *Constructing Masculinity* (New York, 1995), see p. 80.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hafvm/staff\\_research/visual1.html](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hafvm/staff_research/visual1.html)

Hollywood productions). Michel Foucault's definition of power serves greatly in exposing the construction of the Arab 'other' in the post-Cold War era. Foucault looks at notions of unequal distribution of power at the heart of social construction.<sup>8</sup> It is distribution of power among various actors that replicates itself in different aspects of international interaction. Culture that is the visual culture of Hollywood action films reflects that truth. This kind of representation produces the rules of engagement and domination in the international system.

Interestingly, not the entire cultural project of representation of the Arab West Asian is a purely post-Cold War phenomenon. The seeds of the fear and loathing of the Orient goes back to the Nasserite decades of 1950s and '60s which were preceded by the fear of crescent, that is the Ottoman Empire in the Middle Ages. Western visual representation shows nothing has changed since the colonial era as far Western cultural representation is concerned. This trend has continued silently even during the Cold War. Only after the end of the Cold War did the Arab terrorist become dominant in the American films. That however does not preclude deep seated Western resentment at the post-colonial East during the Cold War. This was in keeping with the established practices of the colonial era, when the colonies were thought to be full of heathen and fallen souls lusting for White women, who, while not rebelling against the wise rule of Christian Europeans<sup>9</sup> were creating orgies of violence. The colonies and the areas of influence were regarded as the source of dangerous disease, animals, anarchy and instability. Due to sustained record of disobedience by the regimes in West Asia the bias against the East was concentrated onto the region.

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<sup>8</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction* (New York, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> See Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (New Delhi, 2001).

The most recent war in West Asia fought between the US-UK combine and the disintegrating state of Ba'athist' Iraq was staged on the cultural backdrop which had seen the same war fought on screen many a times before the real thing in 2003. The cultural campaign that preceded the 2003 Iraq War went many years back to early 1950s, '60s and 70s. But the evil aspect of West Asia became apparent to the West in early 1970s. The film which would be referred to in this regard had very little connection to the region Nasser and Khomeini but the film did not make any effort to hide the fact the problem of the film began in that region. The film in question is *The Exorcist*,<sup>10</sup> the classic horror film which blurred the distinction between deviant behaviors and actual evil in the world.

*The Exorcist* is indeed a very difficult film to analyse. For someone seeking hidden codes of Western bias against West Asia in its cultural practices, that should not be a problem. But first the story: Chris MacNeil,<sup>11</sup> an actress in Georgetown, Washington D.C. lives in a large house with Regan, her twelve year-old daughter. The two form a close unit as Chris is a divorcee. Neither of them is overtly religious. To make matters worse Chris is depicted as a kind of liberated woman in a city inhabited by a series of characters, each fighting his or her spiritual and material battle. Little Regan shows a few signs of being affected by the insecurity of living in a broken home. The world of the mother-daughter duo come to a halt when Regan is detected with a rare psychological disorder known as "somnambular possession." The psychological description did not fit the case as it turned out to be more serious matter. With the help of spiritual detectives or priests Chris finds out that her only daughter was now replaced by the Devil who had laid

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<sup>10</sup> 1973, Director: William Friedkin.

<sup>11</sup> The actresses Ellen Burstyn and Linda Blair (Regan in the film) gave realistic depiction of the distraught mother-daughter duo whose lives are thrown off-gear by the spirit of Devil imported from Iraq.

a siege of to Regan's body which for all practical purposes was now the physical abode of the Devil, the opponent of God. What follows next made *The Exorcist* "The Most Terrifying Motion Picture of All Times." Under the spell of the Devil, the girl does everything that is devilish: she utters obscenities, attempts self-mutilation and kills those trying to rid Regan of the spirit.

**Picture 1.2**

***Exorcist: The Demon from Iraq?***



For this researcher, however this movie is important because it refuses to treat one question elaborately, though that lingers across its length. This question was brought to the viewers of BBC when in a news report that was telecast more or less simultaneously with 2003 Iraq War, which showed the Iraqi house close to Baghdad where the opening sequences of *The Exorcist* was shot. The question is: what relation does an Iraqi house have with a story set in Washington D.C<sup>12</sup>. The

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.azcentral.com/cnt/pop/articles/0130exorcist30.html> [ American forces have decided to open a theme park in Hatra, the location of the shooting of *The Exorcist* to provide "The Exorcist

answer perhaps lies in hidden codes of 'otherisation' that becomes apparent once in a while in an almost unconscious way since that code was lost its autonomous existence and is by now a part of the language of power. In its opening sequence, *The Exorcist* shows an archeological dig in progress in northern Iraq. There, Father Lankester Merrin (Max von Sydow) discovers a demonic figure. In the next shot the camera takes the viewer to the USA where the story begins. That the 30<sup>th</sup> year of that film's production would coincide with war on the soil where the film actually begins is significant for more than one reason. The casual treatment of the discovery of the devil's statue in Iraq signified a normal aspect of that arid land. Secondly, that the demon chose to attack an already troubled family in USA shows that in the dominant and more popular perception of the USA, it is still the Arab land which continues to be the source of evil, and other frightening phenomena to the world to its West. The fact that the Arab soil yields the demon is treated with a sense of cinematic normalcy as if that is a much a normal practice there as it was unusual to document what happened in Washington D.C. when the demon invaded the American capital.

That the Iraqi/Arab region was shown as the source of ultimate evil for the world should not surprise the viewers as the film in question was released in 1973, the year immediately following the tumultuous decade of the 1960s during which the unpredictable reputation of West Asia had further strengthened by a few historical factors. In 1960, OPEC was established and indications went out that the free flow of oil from the region would not be possible till perpetuity; along with economic threat, there were the strategic threat which emanated with the 1967 War between Israel and the Arab states led by Egypt. That the Arabs would play the oil politics

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Experience" to tourists seeking the dark side of Iraq as per a report in *New York Daily Times* on 30 January 2004].

to strengthen their weak position further weakened by the defeat at the hands of Israel in 1967 was evident as the impatience of the Arabs in dealing with Israel meant that they would break the rules of engagements to salvage their lost position of privilege. This gave the Arabs a rather unpredictable reputation<sup>13</sup> in the West. It was therefore normal for *The Exorcist* to choose West Asia as a site of the danger that would endanger the US. West Asia actually was the site where the American insecurity over its future stability was born. What was shown in *The Exorcist* was not the demon's statue; it was the solid Western fear over West Asia's intentions.

The jugular vein of the Western industrialised civilisation was in West Asia. The necessary sources of energy were almost entirely located there. Since early 20<sup>th</sup> century the oil industry of West Asia was based upon concessions granted to foreign companies. The monopoly of trade in oil lied primarily with eight companies: Anglo-Iranian (British Petroleum), Royal Dutch-Shell, Compagnie Francaise de Petroles and five American companies. Their monopoly came to an end on 14 September, 1960, when the oil producing states in West Asia and Venezuela established the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). These countries believed that their unity could help reverse the arbitrary price cuts introduced by the foreign companies to help their parent economies in the West. Though OPEC achieved very little of its stated objectives in the 1960s, what however alarmed the Western world was the sudden recognition of the commonality of interests by the oil-rich countries across the world. The OPEC won the publicity war while the West became aware of the fact that the vital energy

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<sup>13</sup> Melvin A Conant "Access to Oil", in J.C. Hurewitz, ed., *Oil, the Arab-Israeli Dispute and the Industrial World: Horizons of Crisis*, (Boulder: Colorado, 1976), see pp. 65-66 [ Sudden appearance of the Arab oil weapon in 1970s introduced a new element in IR of West Asian region that was so far totally unexpected from the Arabs. Arab exercise of the oil option to settle political and economic disputes virtually laid the inner chambers of the American power structure vulnerable to negative external influences even in a peace time].

resource of their military and economic security was fast slipping out of their grip and going to those whom they for long regarded as the supporters of the Nasserite brand of Arab nationalism.

The US-led Western block had definite reason to feel worried as the leaders of the Arab states had realised the political potential of the Arab oil resources. Arabs had a series of unsettled disputes with the US and its primary regional supporter Israel. Presence of oil was soon regarded as a way to exert pressure on the more powerful opponents. However, the leading oil-producing states did not agree with the idea of using oil as a weapon to teach the West a lesson. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq thus stayed away from the radical anti-West use of oil. But the time soon came for the difficult choice: whether or not to use oil as a weapon. After the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War in 1967 Arab oil-producers and transporters proclaimed on 5 June, a boycott to stop the flow of oil to any country that supported Israel. But this boycott did not last long. As the economies of the oil-producing countries began to be affected the desire to teach Israel-US combine a lesson turned into a resolve to resume the supply of oil. But even this short disruption had been sufficient to make the required impact on the West. The Western world realised that those who till yesterday were regarded as powerless had hit them where they had least expected a blow. A new enmity was thus inaugurated which though not as powerful as the Soviet Union was capable of causing total chaos in the society, economy and polity of US and other Western societies which were already besieged by social upheavals of 1960s. In the language of marine fisheries, if the Soviet Union was the shark, then the oil-rich West Asian states were a pack of piranhas.

A new addition was made to the pack of worries that had laid a siege of the Western world since the end of the World War II.

This political context is the backdrop within which the evil status of West Asia was revived in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Given the past colonial discourse regarding the region it was especially easy to revive the ill reputation of the region this time around. To make matters of propaganda more up-to-date, Hollywood-based American film industry, which had made West Asia the centre of dreams since 1950s, came forward with its package of celluloid assistance. The line of anti-Arab films was first very subtle and was just a trickle. Let us remember that during the early post-World War II years West Asia specific films such as *Cleopatra* (1963) and *Ben Hur* (1959) were not hostile to the region. In fact in the 1950s the visual project was definitely not influenced by the political animosity that marked the West's relation with Egypt-led West Asia; the whole enterprise amounted more or less to rewriting of history<sup>14</sup> of West Asia in a scale that was virtually impossible to counter for the newly emerging powers in the region with the intention of establishing the position of Israel in the region. Though less bitter than what was to come later, these seemingly grand historical epics amounted to denial of history to the Arabs which would prove to be of use later. By late 1980s, and 1990s when the Arab villain and the Islamic terrorist became the permanent

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<sup>14</sup> Keith J. Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London, 1996), see p. 3 [Whitelam makes a very interesting comment about the political and cultural impact of Western scholarship in the field of biblical studies. He says that due to their emphasis upon the Hebraic past of Christianity and Judaism as such, the Western religious scholars have lavished all their attention upon the Israelite history of pre-Christ era. By doing so, they have virtually 'invented' a past for the new state of Israel at the cost of silencing the Palestinian history. His work shows that not even serious scholarship is capable of operating in a sanitised atmosphere free from political and cultural fallout. The great celluloid epics mentioned above definitely brought stories alive on screen but by narrating West Asian-North African stories from the Western perspective with the aid of American/Western actors they also usurped identities of the locals. Though different in nature the visual depiction of the Arabs and their region in films served the same purpose as those scholarly works critiqued by Whitelam because both the schools had serious long term impacts upon real international politics on the ground]

fixture of the action flicks of Hollywood, otherisation of the Arab had lasted more or less the entire history of the cinema<sup>15</sup> in the West.

The anti-Arab essence of *The Exorcist* is so subtle that it might escape detection; but, that is where exactly, the cultural roots of international conflict lies and therefore that is where light should be shed first. That the devil lives for ages in the bosom of West Asia to attack a seemingly pristine life in Washington D.C, though only in a film speaks for the deep-seated cultural animosity within the culture machine of the USA. Right from 1950s, motion pictures of Hollywood had started reflecting the political reality of West Asia most of which was fundamentally changed with birth of the post-Holocaust state of Israel. Much before *The Exorcist*, the Arabs were left unattended as a series of visual celluloid epics addressed the question of Jewish history, suffering and atonement. These issues in turn addressed the cultural necessities of the young state of Israel. Movies of like *Ben Hur* (1959) and *Ten commandments* (1956) showed the plight of the Jewish people in various stages of history. These films relentlessly portrayed the Jewish longing for Israel despite all hurdles. That these films were being made by Hollywood had its own significance.

The waves of Jewish immigration to the USA from Europe which had started with the establishment of the Nazi Germany in early 1930s had completely changed the cultural contours of USA. The best European minds flew into the US leaving behind their dark memories of official discrimination under Nazi regimes. USA provided a very unique democratic experience to the exiled Europeans, who

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<sup>15</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley, 2001). see pp. 22-23 [Hollywood's cinematic fascination with West Asia goes back to cinema's early years in the West. Evidently cinema inherited all the cultural traditions which thrived in the non-celluloid medium before its arrival. *The Garden of Allah* (1921) and *The Sheik* (1921) set the path that has remained one of the more dominant schools of films in Hollywood.]

soon discovered there the unique ethos of USA which allowed them to succeed and flourish in art, culture, science, literature and finance. The Jewish *emigré* soon became as successful as the other Americans. Their success added sheen to the stories of success of American Jews who had already made themselves distinguished in all fields of that nation much before the appearance of Hitler in Europe. Hitler's programmes gave fresh impetus to Zionism which strove to save the remaining Jews. The powerful Jewish lobby aimed at promoting the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine. As a result, many of the leading Jewish families poured money in the formation of Israel. The presence of the Jews in all spheres of the American experience and their influence meant that the Jewish common cause with Israel did not remain a phenomenon for a fringe element of the American society. The cultural identification for Israel became an American characteristic.

Though there are living instances of the American assimilation of the hardworking Jews, a very accurate description can be found in the literary-sociological novel, *Ragtime*, by E.L. Doctorow. Doctorow shows in his novel how a poor Jewish artist survives and succeeds to provide his daughter all the goodness that their newly adopted country had to offer. In that quest the painter almost forgets that he is a Jew and at times introduces himself to his wealthy friends later in his successful life in the US as a member of a certain royal family in Europe<sup>16</sup>.

Thus it was natural to find the reflection of West Asian problems between Israel and the Arabs in a variety of American cultural life, from literature to the Hollywood films beginning from the 1950s. From *Ben Hur* in 1950s to the 1980s and 1990s American films have consistently gone back to project the Arab 'other' negatively in their quest to strike the right notes with the established domestic

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<sup>16</sup> See E.L. Doctorow, *Ragtime* (New York, 1996).

popular sentiments which were carefully nurtured by a state that was a superpower with heavy investments in the region.

When finally the violent campaign of U.S.-U.K. combine landed in Iraq in 2003, it landed with the aid of a public opinion that had been taught to look at West Asia, its culture, religion and inhabitants from a point of view set by the arms of Western popular culture. The grand cultural project, however, had little immediate connection with the events that began with unfolding events in Iraq. The large scale, often epochal treatment of West Asia in the Hollywood films in fact prepared the ground for the capitulation of West Asia to the West, which could take any form, including military.

The subtle, almost invisible bias in *The Exorcist* was the beginning of the synonymisation of West Asia with evil, which as briefly described above was the beginning of a new era of political-economic acrimony between the U.S.-led liberal-democratic West and the West Asia. However, this was preceded by a series of highly popular and artistically lavish historical epics, which in the 1950s and 1960s turned the representation of West Asia a matter of concern for the film industry of Hollywood.

Cecil B. De Mille's *The Ten Commandments* was released in November, 1956. The film was lavish, and *Time* called it "perhaps the most vulgar movie ever made". *The Ten Commandments* set a trend, by projecting the West Asian history on screen. This was followed as has been shown above by a series of similar films each more colourful than the other. More important was actually the contemporary political contest within which these films were made and impact that they made on the image of the region. As such biblical films catered to the<sup>17</sup> Christian core of the

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<sup>17</sup> See McAlistar, *ibid*, p. 28.

USA which was more Christian than the war ravaged Europe where the Catholic Church stood disgraced due to its silence over the Fascist atrocities carried upon the minorities and the marginalised people in Europe. While the biblical films catered to a domestic religious constituency, its influence was not merely that. Beyond the domestic its influence stretched into the international arena. By claiming to represent the people of West Asia in all their ancient and resplendent glory the film industry of Hollywood usurped the cultural space of West Asia merely by the dint of its muscles of capital, technology and glamorous manpower. There were two reasons behind the production of such films. On the one hand United States had taken to the revivalist Christianity which ensured a ready market for films which dealt with the episodes mentioned in the Old Testament of Bible. The increasingly religious USA started visualising Israel as its holy place which had to be supported and protected by all the God-given might of the USA.<sup>18</sup>

In other words it was due to the religious revival which was sweeping USA in the aftermath of the World War II that produced a ready market for such epics. The problem was, this domestic consumership drew heavily upon external, more precisely West Asian politics that pitted the Israelis against the Arabs. And, given the American tilt towards Israel, there is no scope to ponder whose history those movies were tendering forward. The biblical films also helped the Americans identify themselves with the Israelis. Jews were now regarded a part of the White enlightened USA of the East Coast. By the celluloid projection of Jewish characters by white actors and actresses Israel too was reduced to a simplified White Western nation. This dissertation would argue that while the portrayal of Jewish characters by White Hollywood stars helped the American public relate

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<sup>18</sup> McAlister, *ibid*, p. 155.

more closely with present day Israelis, but the similar portrayal of the Arabs usurped their space of representation. Similar portrayal had two different results for the Israeli ally and for the Nasserite enemy of US interests.

The elaborate treatment of Jewish history meant these biblical movies did not allow their viewers to draw their own conclusion about the history of the ancient Israelites as there was mp scope left for that. On the other hand the half hearted treatment or the mostly missing Arab counterpart of the ancient Israelites ensured the audience was free to draw their own conclusion. Better still, though movies like *Cleopatra* deal essentially with the history of that region, it is on the contrary depicted as Roman-Egyptian grandeur. The Arab link remained non-existent.

The massive influence exerted by the Hollywood films upon the formation of the American public opinion of West Asia has remained more or less un-discussed in the public medium. But the identity of the post-Cold War “enemy” has been a widely known secret in the public realm. It is for such cultural training that North Korea armed with Nuclear weapons was regarded less worthy of military attack than a de-fanged Iraq. Throughout the last thirty years the Arab terrorist has become first a non-entity subjected to viewers’ apathy only to become a permanent character whose clones would make numerous appearance in the action films of the USA. As the Cold War fell on to a moribund phase a new era of villainy inaugurated in *The Exorcist* graduated to make nerve shattering celluloid appearance. A society that lived for decades on foreign villain was not going to leave that gap for too long. The evil Arab now made equally negative appearance. This villainy had revived fresh impetus from the hostage crisis of 1979 when American hostages were held captive in Teheran by Iranian militants for 444 days.

Together with these events there were constant skirmishes between various Arab states and terrorists and the USA.

When in October 1983, Shiite terrorists blew up the headquarters of the US and French troops, the new era of the Arab terrorism had begun that targeted the US for achieving its goal. The Lebanese civil war had turned Lebanon into a killing field where everyone with an axe came to grind it. When Israel in June 1982 invaded Lebanon to liquidate the PLO which had turned Southern Lebanon into a launch pad of attacks on the Jewish state, Lebanon went into a tailspin. A Multi National Force consisting of US, French and Italian troops were sent to Beirut in August to supervise the evacuation of Palestinian guerrillas from West Beirut. The 8 October 1983 attacks left more than 400 American and French troops dead. The Multi National Force withdrew finally in February March 1984.

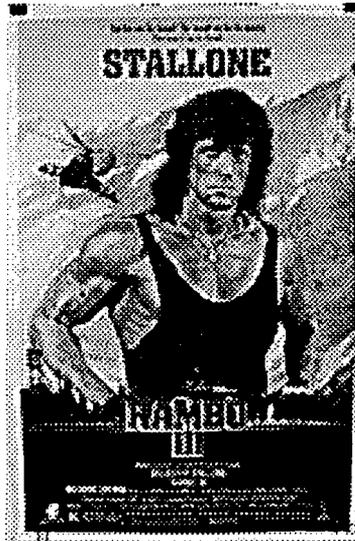
The spiral of mindless violence emanating from the Israel-Palestinian-Lebanon triad and various other regional opponents of the US such as Libya and Syria turned West Asia into the most difficult region of US foreign policy. This era and its politics was immortalised in *Delta Force* (1986). *Delta Force* also brings us face to face with the new rabid villain: the fanatical Arab terrorist. The new movie starts from the botched rescue attempt of US military in Iran on April 25, 1980.

*Delta Force* shows a hijack drama that began in the Athens airport. While innocent looking passengers exchange their stories in the airport lounge a few “suspicious” looking Arab men board the plane and the story picks up. Bearded and crazy Arab terrorists take over the plane once it is airborne. It was in this fast-paced hijacking drama that was to spawn a series of the same, very irrational, violent Arab terrorist about which the world had been talking since the futile civil war began in Beirut, that he made his first appearance. On meeting this enemy the

Western views of the enemy were vindicated. In other words the terrorists of *the Delta Force* were carefully crafted according to the popular perception in the U.S. The growing realisation in the U.S. was that this enemy did not understand any language but violence. In a way this was a deranged man. West had sympathy for him but, was helpless. This enemy had to be dealt with very sternly. The new enemy was very naïve. In that the terrorist often struck without realising that it had no means of self defence once retaliation would visit them. This suicidal enemy was another madness that civilization had punished and quarantine. In the last fight of *The Delta Force* the main protagonist Captain McCoy confronts the leader of the Arab terrorist squad. In a hand-to hand combat Captain McCoy spares Abdul (Robert Forster) a quick death and instead beats him to a slow and painful end. The naïveté of this terrorist is thus borne into the open: firstly, he makes the fatal mistake of waging a war against an all powerful enemy with virtually neither the intellect nor the technical wizardry to match those of the superior American forces; secondly, his technical inferiority is amplified by his physical vulnerability and weakness. Only an immature opponent launches an attack knowing well that that is nothing short of futile suicide.



**Picture 1.4**  
**Rambo III: The Face of Freedom**



Note: The poster of *Rambo III* (1988) shows the Cold War rivalry being fought over the terrain of Afghanistan. Notice here the depiction of the USSR as an inhumane enemy represented by nothing more than the lifeless, brutal combat helicopter in the background while the main protagonist is depicted as a defiant human agent of resistance. The mechanisation of the Other is a major theme of the visual representation of the opponents of American domination of the world in the visual culture of late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The human agent of the U.S.A found strength in the post-9/11 days when the visual representation of the terror strikes seemed to point to the wound caused by the flying machines to the human spirit of the U.S.A. However the poster of *Delta Force* (1986) above shows that the American forces are not exactly averse to the use of machines. But as the poster shows American forces are “in control”, working the machines to rid the world of the terrorist masterminds and hijackers and there lies the responsible and irresponsible uses of the machines.

These suicidal terrorists in a way characterised the entire Arab West Asia during the 1980s. Throughout the series of confrontations between West Asian states or non-state actors, and the USA, it became apparent that the Arab opposition is in fact so irrational in its strategic planning so as to merit the title of a fanatic. The probable explanation for such clueless behavior was, there were deeper

motivations, possibly religious in origin, which inspired the West Asian opponent of the US-Israel to hit at the West disregarding its physical well being.

The “irrational Arab” stereotype was further strengthened over the series of events starting from 1990 to 2001. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait on 2 August, 1990 he too substantiated the charge of unreliability of the West Asian people and the regimes which were strengthened by the media and the films of the U.S.

That the U.S. public opinion and the policymakers were already introduced to the new enemy through the films meant the psychological space of negotiating with the enemy shrank and the possibility of peaceful solution of the regional issues decreased. The Arab enemy, and, from 1979 onwards, the Iranian enemy occupied the entire visual experience of the U.S. public opinion by permanently seeking placements in the television and the films of the U.S.A. The enemy thus not only acquired a body and physical features, it also gained characteristics which were widely regarded as “suspicious.” Years of similar exposure boiled down to what can be called cultural coercion” renders the people favourable to the policies of the government of the USA. It softens opposition and persuades people to support the American policy. The films of Hollywood have effectively created the categories which according to Ashis Nandy are the 20<sup>th</sup> century equivalents of 19<sup>th</sup> century methods of domination, such as colonialism, and the division of the world in terms of development. The categories are mere inventions and are not based on anything more than simple truth claims. The constructed categories such as development, democracy etc. not only categories for better understanding. They

also lay open the door of better manipulation of the categories<sup>19</sup>. Categories are built around arguments projected, portrayed or spoken in our world. The series of Hollywood films from *Delta Force* ( 1986) to *True Lies*, (1994) have built up two categories, one Arab, the other the American; one predatory by nature, the other aims to seek justice for himself and for others; one a bandit, the other a just warrior.

Cultural tools, like the films perform a very effective role in creating categories and help them perforate the machinery generating public opinion. Films, which once were the bearers of the ideas of the high modern age turned a new age during the 1980s and 1990s. As a technological object of dissemination of ideas cinema was the natural vehicle for progressive ideas. This brought cinema close to the tumultus politics of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Slowly, the technical aspect of film making was overshadowed by the political meaning of films. Mastery over the cinematic languages meant mastery over technology and technological innovation. In other words those societies rich in technological sophistication, alone could support the leadership in the field of cinematic culture. Thus from being an instrument of radical political segment, films became the zone of intense commercial activity among various studies. At the end of the competition, USA was left with the leading position in the global film industry. Ascendance of the US film industry is the story of interplay of capital, technological finesse, accumulation of artistic talent and a boom in film viewership. Technology may have had an apolitical origin, but it is its deployment that introduced politics into as technical a matter as films<sup>20</sup>. As the predominant leader in the field of cultural production, USA enjoys

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<sup>19</sup> See Vinay Lal, *Empire of Knowledge: Culture and Plurality in the Global Economy* (London, 2002), p. 106 - 107.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Barry, *Political Machines: Governing A Technological Society* (London, 2001) [Barry opposes the notion of defining technology as an apolitical neutralizer of all conflicts which spring from politics. He regards technology as formative influence in human beings and human institutions. That is why technology is a source of politics in the modern world].

an enviable position in the world today. Its cultural activism is however played within the boundaries set by the most powerful state in the world. The dominant discourse of the American state ensured that the cultural products like films also produce images that would help in solidifying its grip on national and international power. As the most internationally influential ideological apparatus US cultural machinery has ensured that its state policy is carried across the world to all shades of political disposition. This technocracy has ensured US unparalleled cultural hegemony in international politics. In short, the parameters of cultural realm are fixed by the politically dominant discourse of the state. By its performance the sphere of culture in fact augments the chances of the state in various situation of international anarchy. This cultural influence is the most potent invisible force in the disposal of the American state. In modern age culture is technologically defined and exercised. More technologically advanced economy of the USA thus has made better use of the opportunity to produce cultural instruments from time to time. As stated in the Introduction, criticism of the political context of the films relevant to this dissertation does not in any way undermine their quotient of entertainment. It is therefore not the aim here to indulge in mindless criticism of the entire body of Hollywood films as instruments of hegemony in the cultural realm that underpins the sole superpower in international politics. This criticism is meant for all those films like *True Lies*, *Delta Force* and others that have seemingly formed a genre that facilitated the international ambition of the USA by conveniently producing and sustaining the image of the national enemy through the portrayal of the Arab/Muslim men and thereby revealing a lot about the cultural roots of the American foreign policy. It is through manipulation of the technological aspect of modern culture that popular cinematic language of the US

became a political instrument. Borrowing the terminological language of Arjun Appadurai one can say that deft handling of the technoscope, by the US has led to its complete domination over the ideoscope<sup>21</sup>. The cultural campaign that was fine tuned in the aftermath of the Cold War had begun much before the Gulf War 1991. To be precise, it began in the Vietnam War year. The failure of Vietnam was turned into a victory of the USA in West Asia. The defeat of Vietnam was overwritten by the visual industry with the culture of hostility which was carefully crafted by the American government since the 'oil shocks' and the Islamic Revolution 1979 to cushion a group of strategic-political move towards West Asia which unfolded over a series of developments in the region.

As Vietnam War became a losing affair by late 1960s and more and more controversial reports poured in of military high handedness by the US forces the general opinion was gradually turning against a protracted battle against Vietnam. In the meanwhile the heat was on the rise in the Israel-Egypt border. For a period in late 1960s, the American public opinion was seized of the unfolding events between Israel and its Arab neighbors. When finally Israel secured quick victory in the June 1967 War, the stature of Israel as a warrior nation went a few notches up in the American public opinion. The massive victory by a major strategic ally of the US was perceived by the American establishment as welcome relief. The Israeli strategy was regarded as worthy of emulation. The fight in the region was thought to be a victorious and just campaign as opposed to the campaign in Vietnam. American involvement in the Arab-Israel conflict was regarded as<sup>22</sup> support for a 'good fight'. The culture factory of Hollywood depicted American

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<sup>21</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", *Theory Culture and Society*, 1990 cited in Andrew Barry, *Political Machines Governing a Technological Society* (London, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Melani McAlister, *ibid*, p. 155 -197.

attitude towards Vietnam and Israel very differently. While films like *Platoon*<sup>23</sup> (1986) showed the futility of war in the backdrop of War in Vietnam. Films like *Black Sunday* (1977) and *Delta Force* (1986) turned Arab-Israel conflict as a zone of American concern where violence could be a just resort. Over the past two decades, USA has grown to regard the West Asia as adversarial terms. A unique flick in this process was *Delta Force*. In the film, a plane-load of mostly Western and mainly American citizens are hijacked by Arab terrorists as the plane takes off from Athens airport. The hostage are finally rescued by an American commando team known as the elite Delta Force led by Captain McCoy (Chuck Norris). The cinematic interventions as portrayed by *Delta Force* turned West Asia into a zone of American military activism. Thus a long cultural process was started to introduce the critical significance of West Asia to the American public opinion. Cinematic West Asia became the salvation ground of the reputation of the American military might after its debacle in the early 1970s. Transition of West Asia from a screen enemy to real hostile opponent of US was thus covered by the cinematic arm of the US culture.

### **The Siege (1998): Reflection over the Military Solution to Terror**

Great military machines require larger than life opponents to rationalise their existence. Military machines do not consist alone of the military arm; its military might in supplemented by cultural might, political scruples and economic muscles. The total military might can be achieved by total mobilisation of all the mentioned

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<sup>23</sup> Such dualistic treatment has been a permanent feature of films that deal with the American experience in Vietnam and West Asia. While Vietnam is a cause of painful introspection, West Asia is a reason for alarm; the former is constantly pushed into a dark cellar of memory through films, while the contemporaneous nature of the latter is emphasised by the same. As a result of the distantiating of Vietnamese experience there is no cause for worry from that former enemy. Sadly that is not true in case of the latter.

fronts for military ends. United States has achieved – by virtue of its superior technological innovations – a very high degree of coordination between all the different arms of the total military might. The creation of the image of an enemy ‘other, that began as project in the last years of the Cold War continued unbroken throughout 1990s right up till the events of 9/11, 2001 and continues unabated thereafter. As a result of the cultural campaign the face of the enemy was not unknown to the American public opinion. The Arab, Muslim enemy became consistent feature of the action films of Hollywood who hammered home the racial, linguistic and religious identity of the new post-Cold War enemy. As time elapsed, it became progressively clear that the specter of Islamic terror can not be countered with the massive military strength of the USA. The exasperation became pronounced after the first attack on the World Trade Centre in 1993 when terrorism of the Islamic variety left a permanent impact on American society. The exasperation caused by the elusive nature of the clever enemy was brought out well in *The Siege* (1998).

The subject matter of the film was very relevant to the political necessity of the liberal democratic polity of the USA; but, to do so it used the same old stereotypes of the irrational Arab/Muslim enemy built by earlier movies like *Black Sunday* (1971) and *Delta Force* (1986). *The Siege* dealt with the theme of hard earned civil liberties in the United States and cautioned that fighting external enemies should not become an excuse to stifle these precious liberties. Its thesis was totally divorced from the one made by out and out action flicks. By first showing multicultural identity of the USA, where the Arab/Muslim population is on the rise, this movie said that application of military strength might not bring solution to a situation when Islamic terrorism would pose an immediate threat to

the USA. Instead of resolving such a crisis, military might could ignite both the domestic and the external spheres of the USA. *The Siege* (1998) said that such a transnational crisis is best resolved by building trust and mutual confidence. But the film revealed the current understanding of the problem of Islamic/Arab terrorism in its narration of the story. At one point in the film when Palestinian suicide bombers start staging successive bombings of public utilities the government goes out of its way to ensure security of its citizens. It does so by suspending civil liberties of the American people. The film shows a truly multicultural society would negate its own foundations by compromising its own essential freedoms.<sup>24</sup> The response of the US to the 9/11 showed that the critique of the racist nature of the American state in *The Siege* was not disseminated among the target audience. The excessive violence of the US military since 9/11 shows the critique of the American state in the *Siege* was not sufficient to convince the establishment of the futility of strength. In one scene the film showed the entire male population of the Arab-American community is hauled up like a huge and unpredictable herd of some ferocious animal and confined within a large fenced up enclosure. The treatment meted out to the Arab-American male of nearly all ages showed that there was a gap between the American understanding of the Arab culture and vice versa. The treatment justified the image of the Arabs as some insane people who should.

The treatment of the Arabs showed that the superpower like any other modern state is willing to treat disobedient sections of its population as madmen deserving confinement, rather than sit down to have a dialogue with them. The cinematic treatment of the Arab Americans can be extended to the ongoing turmoil

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<sup>24</sup> McAlister, *ibid*, see p. 265.

in West Asia too. States have often branded those it fails to deal with as insane. As Michel Foucault says in *Madness and Civilisation*, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Paris, nearly one-tenth of all the arrests made consisted of the “insane” a category that consisted of the excessively freedom loving or those regarded as self destructive individuals<sup>25</sup>.

So, there is this visible gap which has expanded due to the wrong application of solution. On the one hand, the domestic world of the USA is progressively becoming multicultural by relying on dialogue and interaction; on the other such an approach is completely missing in the American military treatment of West Asia. This, as the above discussion would show is a result of the indoctrination of the masses to the militaristic notion of the American state which has left them incapable of differentiating between its strategic and cultural vision.

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<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London, 1989), p. 61.

## **CHAPTER – II**

### **DESTRUCTION AS A SYMPATHETIC SPECTACLE : CREATION OF THE AMERICAN VICTIMHOOD**

Our existence revolves around the images from the world around us. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the visual world has expanded to assume global proportions. Televisions, films, rapidly multiplying mass media generate numerous images daily that mobilise, enrage and please people in various degrees around the world. The age of literature stands transformed into the age of visuals. Contrary to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when books were the means to visions, 21<sup>st</sup> century places the human civilisation in a unique position where vision is guided by the projected truths and interpretations through a number of medium. An individual, otherwise free, may not enjoy freedom of ideas in such a condition when a privately owned media houses, films are the principal shapers of ideas in the world. The various arms which produce images together form a matrix that exercise control over human sensory perception. Needless to say images floating in the info-media have the capacity to inform and orient the viewer to a particular position. Such is the power of the electronically and digitally projected images today that it can win serious differences of opinions by subtle coercion of the world of information and culture. This in short is the most refined exercise of hegemony as defined by Gramsci. In the last chapter it was shown that control over the cinematic image production arm gives the superpower the capacity to mould the opinion of the world without blood letting. In this chapter we shall see how the American position in the post-9/11 era became the most visible and felt through the exercise of various arms of the image production factory.

Perhaps, a useful way to begin this exercise would be to accept the fact that the moving and still images do carry a language which is often left without critical exposition by the busy consumer of television and other arms of the culture machine. Thanks to the development of technological aspects of civilization, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has given a series of lingering images. The ghostly look of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the aftermath of the atomic bombing by Enola Gay of the US Air Force was followed by a series of equally haunting images from American engagement in Vietnam. All of us are familiar with one of the many painful images from Vietnam that shows a group of peasant children fleeing with incinerated clothes skin, naked, after a napalm bomb had landed on them. At times, a single photograph is sufficient to form an informed image, at others a string of photographs do the job better. It is a pity that the defining moments in world history are not always accompanied by defining photographs. We do know as textbooks of history would want us to that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World War started with the assassination of the archduke Franz Ferdinand of the house of the Hapsburg of Austro-Hungarian Empire, and German invasion of Poland respectively. Historians however, do not have striking images of those epochal events; these days thanks to the presence of the image making facilities such events are accompanied by equally compelling photographs.

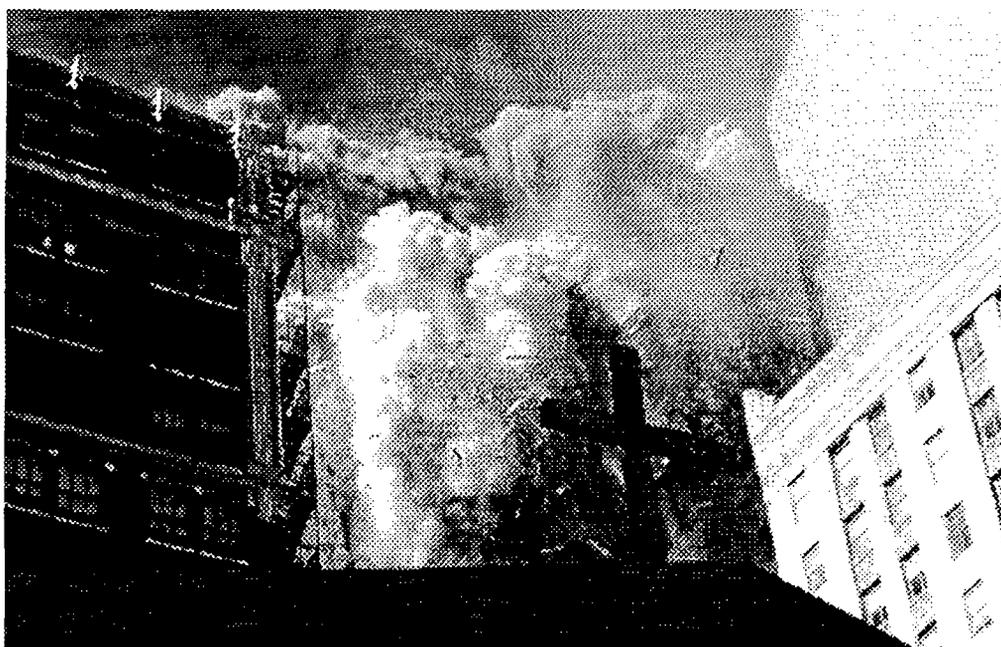
The deadly devastations of 9/11 were captured in video cameras which were telecast worldwide almost simultaneously. Such was the scale of the image of destruction that prominent newspapers worldwide chose to give the photograph of imploding World Trade Centres prominence over written words<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *September 11, 2001* (Kansas City, 2001) [This source is a collection of newspaper frontpages of September 12, 2001].

An epochal act of destruction was accompanied by a significant photograph which conveyed the nature and impact of the calamity. The photograph spoke louder than thousands of words. It deserved the prominence it got worldwide. The photograph in question is significant for other reasons too. Here is a photograph that had bearing upon the foreign policy of the USA and its efforts to convince the world of the necessity to resort to the same.

**Picture 1.1:**  
**9/11: Faith collides with Fate and Fortune**



Note: The south tower of the twin-building icon implodes at 9:59 am less than an hour after being hit by United Airlines Flight 175 in the background after the attacks as a church nearby stands as if in firm resolve. This widely circulated image also signifies the way people looked at religion and gathered in churches for common masses and prayers and sought an explanation from the power above for the catastrophe that befell them. On the other hand this also signifies the perspective adopted by the Conservative Republican government to respond to the attacks which regarded it in theologically loaded terms. It can be proved that a photograph becomes an image when it emits meaning in a multipolar manner. In other words a single photograph can be read in plural manner with both positive and negative meanings attached to it. That is the significance of an image of as momentous an event as September 11, 2001.

## Picture 1.2<sup>2</sup>

### **Clash of Civilisations?: The Haunting Image and Huntington's Idea**



Note: Please note, the light of the early morning hours stands dimmed to a shade of dusk in this photograph that shows one of the last moments of the twin towers standing after they were hit by planes loaded with jet fuels and passengers meant for long haul flights. A number of meanings can be read into this photographs: on the one hand it does show the inhuman nature of the modern city where it's populated not by visible people but by titan-like buildings, within whose entrails small individuals lose their identity. That is perhaps the root of the spectacular nature of these photographs. Nowhere can one find the sight of mangled and destroyed remains of the thousands of people who perished in the attacks as if their death too was hidden by the huge buildings which used to hide them while they were alive. In this episode, the loss of the human lives becomes known to us only in numbers while people are compelled to mourn the demise of the building. The loss of human lives is overrun by the loss of workable buildings. We mourn the loss of centres of financial power of the New World than the victims of the attacks.

Let us now look at the huge opinion that can be mobilised in an instance by telecasting these moving images which were actually aired non-stop for many days following the attacks. The scale of destruction is so gigantic that it humbles the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://256.com/gray/thoughts/2001/20010912/pictures/attack/>

haughty human spirit that created it. No doubt the government felt almost compelled to assume a military posture because such images can be countered by an “equal and appropriate” “response”.

**Picture 1.3<sup>3</sup>**

**Title: “All that is solid melts in the air”**



Note: The above juxtaposed twin photographs show the stark reality of modern urban existence. Like many of the philosophical moments that one encounters in the American architectural marvels like the Golden Gate Bridge and the Statue of Liberty, both of which basically creations of modern steel and iron era were designed more to inspire awe among the watchers of the mighty transatlantic power than appreciation for their aesthetic value - of which they have little - the first photograph in the left speaks of the immense pride of the urban landscape of New York. Suddenly deprived of that pride the photograph in the right seems to tell a story of confused desolation that gripped the world as it searched for a more meaningful existence in the wake of such unexpected diminution.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://256.com/cgi-bin/pix/?gray/thoughts/2001/20010912/pictures/attack/016\\_m.jpg&nc&nb](http://256.com/cgi-bin/pix/?gray/thoughts/2001/20010912/pictures/attack/016_m.jpg&nc&nb)

Picture 1.4<sup>4</sup>

**Title: Narrating Pain, Stitching Narratives**



Note: Stitching memory into culture. The above quilt is an instance of typical American way of memorialising personal loss. The quilt provides a symbolic fabric to absorb the sorrow and trauma of the catastrophe and makes it a part of the national culture.

In other words, the photograph of 9/11 served multiple purposes. First of all it reminded the American people of their loss, secondly, the destruction itself became a symbol of the immense, almost inhuman nature of American power; thirdly, it became an ideological tool; fourthly, the image became a part in the dominant cultural discourse on its own.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.firchouse.com/links/9-11\\_Tragedy/Memorial\\_Pages/](http://www.firchouse.com/links/9-11_Tragedy/Memorial_Pages/)

## **Destruction as a Spectacle**

Images of destruction of life and property in warfare were regarded the sad privilege of soldiers and commanders. The sight of mindless destructions that war brought with remained the exclusive preserve of those who caused them. Naturally therefore, the pictures of battlefield always had been of great curiosity to the masses keen to know how the wars which changed their lives looked like. Images of carnage became available to the masses from 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The Mexican War from 1896 to 1848 was one of the earliest wars to be photographed. Those photographs were however totally different from the ones being generated currently or those of the Vietnam-era. The photographers could not capture the war in motion; they merely reached with their cumbersome equipments in time to cover the funeral of a soldier. The grace of the fallen hero was all that could be photographed<sup>5</sup>. From daguerreotype process to video photography of 21<sup>st</sup> century the image factory indeed has come a long way. What however has not changed over all these years is the sensation, awe and sense of despair and at times disgust that these photographs have continued to provoke among the viewers. These images always cause pain to the living who fail to reconcile themselves to the unnecessary death of so many productive people; and then there are those who feel that the photographs themselves are nothing but an act of excess on the part of the photo-editor and could have been prevented from reaching the wider audience. When Mathew Brady, an American Civil War-era photographer exhibited his photographs of the dead in the war in New York in 1862, he attracted a lot of emotions for his work which continues to mark the image production capacity of

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<sup>5</sup> Martha A. Sandweiss, "Dealing with the Images of Carnage", *International Herald Tribune*, 8 April, 2004, p-6.

these individuals<sup>6</sup>. From those days of almost primitive war photography to post-9/11 era photographs stand for rapid technological change and sophistication of techniques and change in mass attitude to large scale killings like war. As a result the anti-war awareness in 21<sup>st</sup> century is considerably higher in the world today than it was in 19<sup>th</sup> century public opinion. But sadly, all that technological improvement did not eliminate the space to use the images for creating more similar images. In short, these powerful images have been used by the state to justify its actions.

This chapters sets out to examine the image of destruction of 9/11 and what it meant for the world at large. Betraying the irony of free photography's usurpation by the state for its purpose, the 9/11 era is also an era marked by heavily manipulated use of the images. To make thing, difficult, today, the news media, thanks to embedded journalism is not free to photograph all that it wants. But the most important and almost unavoidable worldwide sight of the WTC attacks could not be controlled by any authority. The imploding towers became the first sights of a new war which did not occupy a particular tone or distinguish between the combatants and the non-combatants; it was a global war as it spanned almost the entire globe and its diverse cultures; it became a war that started by raging first in peoples' minds. What added a particular quality to the images from this particular episode was the destruction on the American soil. Destruction of world's most powerful buildings definitely provided more visual edge over, say, a hut being bombed in later American campaign in Afghanistan or the ethnic conflict in Rwanda in 1994. Clearly there is a politics of visuals in the way photographic campaigns are managed. Some sights are more important than the rest. While

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<sup>6</sup> Martha A. Sandweiss, *ibid.*

photographs from Rwanda, which ultimately led to a blot on the affairs of the international community,<sup>7</sup> were not acted upon, similar fate could not be meted to the images that exploded on to the surface from the events on 9/11, 2001. The events of 9/11 deserved to be acted upon not only because they were dastardly attacks that killed thousands of innocent, productive men, women and children of all age and many nationalities, massive reaction to 9/11 was called for because it was the most visible image of a tragedy the world has seen in a long time: it was a *spectacular* tragedy that “demanded” justice.

Destruction and death as spectacle has a long history. When destruction is brought fourth in full public view creating horror, awe, shock, dismay among the assembled or watching crowd, it turns into a spectacular display of human capacity to wreck havoc. The destruction of 9/11 had many a dimensions<sup>8</sup>. For some people it was a moment of spiritual atonement, for some it was case of terrorism whose impact was heightened by bad architecture of their towers; few like David Harvey<sup>9</sup> believed that the implosion of the World Trade Centre was an act brought forth by the nature of the capitalist movement in our world. Without disputing these interpretations, it can be added that the events of New York on 9/11 that finally started the “War on Terror” was also a highly cinematic moment. The sense of disbelief with which the people of all countries watched the trembling towers spoke volumes about the event itself. It was the cinematic, spectacular, almost dark and macabre entertaining quality of the falling towers, which is also celebrated in films of the Hollywood action genre that made the events rather

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<sup>7</sup> David Bryer, “Ten years after the Rwanda Genocide”, *International Herald Tribune*. 14 April, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> See Sharon Zukin and Michel Sorkin, eds., *After the World Trade Centre: Rethinking New York City* (New York, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

movie like. Much before New York fell to the terrorists, U.S.A. along with those of the rest of the world had already seen numerous similar acts of light and sound in *Independence Day*<sup>10</sup>(1996), *True Lies*<sup>11</sup>(1996) etc. The events of 9/11 were like the opening shots of *Delta Force*<sup>12</sup> where an equally tragic attempt to rescue American hostages held by the Islamists in post-1979 goes horribly wrong. There in the opening sequence of the film the audience are treated with very loud pyrotechnique on screen as a refueling tank collides with an aircraft setting the entire helicopter fleet afire. The hero of the film captain McCoy narrowly escapes incineration like many of his colleagues few of whom are saved by the brave man himself<sup>13</sup>. That tragic moment however, as the subsequent trajectory of the film showed was just the beginning of an arduous journey to culminate in the victory of Captain McCoy over the Islamist enemies at the end of the hijack drama. It is here necessary to realise that, as subsequent developments in Afghanistan and U.S.-led invasion of Iraq showed the unbelievable tragedy of 9/11 was not the end of the

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<sup>10</sup> *Independence Day* is relevant for its projection of the assumption that the leadership of the superpower is necessary in affairs starting from fight against mean terrorists to evil aliens. What really strikes one is that destruction here does not get a humane depiction. It is dehumanised by highlighting the pyrotechniques of falling buildings. The message conveyed is that everything in the land of the superpower should be big, full of fury and sound as if such a thing was worth eagerly awaited for. In 'real' life however such events were far from being entertaining. In turn the message that goes out is that a big attack should get a bigger response. Such a subtle projection of all consuming culture of conflict that is the hallmark of the 'War on Terror' can be directly linked to the genre of movies built by those discussed here.

<sup>11</sup> It is no coincidence that right when planes were ramming into buildings in New York a major Hollywood star like Arnold Schwarzenegger was awaiting the release of his film *Collateral Damage*. The film itself became a collateral damage of the terror attacks when its release was stalled in the wake of the mega-violent event in New York. Quite a lot of people were surprised when Arnold Schwarzenegger was elected as California's Governor barely two years after September 11. The usual refrain was that the winning candidate had no political experience. In reality as an action hero Arnold Schwarzenegger made a fortune out of bashing America's "others". Even in this movie he chases terrorists in the role of a firefighter. His brand of politics projected on screen was very close to the variety carried by the USA post-9/11. He in fact set the example through his cinematic exploits while America merely had to follow compelled by the circumstances. That way he was not exactly a non-political player as was made out during the gubernatorial elections.

<sup>12</sup> Both the visual sequences of *Delta Force* (1979, Islamic Revolution) and the falling WTC Towers (9/11) represent events that are numerically etched into the living memory of the USA. Both the film and the terror attacks on New York bring forth visual memories and calendar dates.

<sup>13</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley, 2001), p.226. Also refer to *Delta Force* (1986).

story. Like the storyline of *Delta Force*, 9/11 too marked the beginning of a storyline of a new era of international politics, war and devastation. 9/11 became a signifier of a greater reality because of its massive viewership which added to its special visual quality. It was on the T.V. screens where the seeds of a new era were being sowed.

In recent memory in the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan in absence of television sets banned by the Islamic regime, execution of the adulterous and criminals were often carried out in football stadiums full of eager citizens<sup>14</sup> for quick dissemination of the stern message from the Islamic state. An event becomes a spectacle only by ensuring its wide visibility among the subject audience. A spectacle usually generates its own audience who in turn ensure its long life in public memory. Michel Foucault in the first chapter of *Discipline and Punish*<sup>15</sup> titled "The body of the condemned" narrates the public execution of a man:

On 2 March 1757 Damiens the regicide was condemned 'to make the *amende honorable* before the main door of the Church of Paris', where he was to be 'taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt, holding a torch of burning wax weighing two pounds'; then, 'in the said cart, to the place de Grive, where, on a scaffold that will be erected there, the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with sulphur, and, on those place where flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his ashes thrown to the winds<sup>16</sup>.

Needless to say the horrible punishment meted to the criminal in this case was more for the collected curious onlookers than for the criminal himself<sup>17</sup> as nobody could withstand such pain for too long. In other words the punishment as much as

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<sup>14</sup> See *The Mirror* (U.K.), June 20, 2002 and *Beneath the Veil*, Channel 4, Tuesday 26, June, 2001, a documentary by Carla Garapedian.

<sup>15</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth, 1977), pp .3.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, *ibid.*, p. 309.

its display was meant to shape public opinion to the will of the state. The latter in the present context of the 'War on Terror' has used the indelible images from 9/11 to call the American nation to duty and curtail their rights. It is well known that the events of 9/11 were the outcome of a conflict between the state and non-state actors. But the incidental outpouring of images which were meaningful byproducts of the act went to those factors like public opinion that basically mobilise the American state. Use of the image of death and destructions, a modern phenomenon, is common between 18<sup>th</sup> century France and 21<sup>st</sup> century USA as both have tried to use such images for domestic and international policies of their respective states. While French monarchy ruled with an iron hand with the aid of the "spectacle of the scaffold" the USA ensured by repeated use of 9/11 photography that the people stay 'connected' to the course of action of the post-9/11 aggressive American foreign policy and strict surveillance policy at home. It is thus that 9/11 became a great 21<sup>st</sup> century tragedy on the American soil which had to be counted and recounted by the American people. 9/11 became a spectacle slowly with due assistance from the information machinery and the Western media. Destruction thus became a spectacle almost in the way the French did it as mentioned by Foucault in the paragraph quoted above.

### **Media and the creation of American victimhood**

Arguably 9/11 happens to be single most destructive event on not merely on American soil but also in the entire West in recent history. But this single act of destruction became a force on its own; this, is an example whose equal can not be seen in many similar and greater images of destruction during the World War II. The tumbling twin towers became a cultural marker, a phenomenon unparalleled in the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of conflicts.

That, this destruction instead of becoming a swansong for the unipolar international system became a celebration of its unilateralism is a reflection of the power that the culture machine and its various arms like the media and contemporary arts have come to wield. The power of 9/11 photography, both still and moving, came from the descriptive fact that they gave out little on their original political and cultural meaning. Compared to many other instances of aerial terrorism which usually involved lengthy negotiations with the hijackers this incident was rather pathetically inarticulate as if the hijackers neither had the time nor the desire to talk to the audiences of their mind numbing acts. In a unique twist of events the terror strikes on American soil did not result from an inter-state conflict. As a result there were no opponents to take credit for the destructions which were regarded as immoral and grotesque worldwide. As a result the meanings that flew out of that day of carnage laid unattended by their real creators as none could come forward to claim and call the moment as one of their glory; resultantly they were immediately monopolised by the creators of the dominant discourse in the West: the state, the tele-media, and the conservative sections in the academe. Uncontested.

*“Photography is a tool for dealing with things everybody knows about but isn’t attending to. My photographs are intended to represent something you don’t see<sup>18</sup>.”*

The image of 9/11 was not an image that famous photographer Emmet Gowin studied by Susan Sontag would prefer to capture. It was the kind of widely circulated image that went, rather uncontested to the West and became a hollow and flaccid signifier due to overkill. At this point, it is necessary to comprehend the

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<sup>18</sup> See Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, 1977), p. 200.

importance attached to 9/11 which flows from its overpowering presence in the cultural sphere. The role of the Western Media in actually terming the world as post-9/11 needs accurate comprehension to understand the main motivators behind the aggressive American foreign policy following the incidents in New York and Washington D.C. As it is apparent, the American administration stretched all the sympathy it received for the loss of thousands of innocent lives on American soil and expended it on its 'War on Terror'. In short a government that is democratically elected has started pursuing an offensive and explicitly militarist foreign policy at large around the world. The self-evident contradiction was sustained by the culture of American victimhood that the images of 9/11 have successfully built up. The subsequent campaign showed that America knew how to be a gallant victim and how to suffer pain in grace and that it could turn the table on the cowardly<sup>19</sup> attackers.

It were the media and the 'experts' who set the tone for the creation of a resurgent America, quite like the USA post-Pearl Harbour, wherein the United States hurled its full might towards Japan till its urge for revenge was satiated. In hindsight, it appears that global sympathy for the US and the American interpretation and understanding of the nature of the challenge added fuel to the American hegemonic ambition in the world order. In effect U.S. hegemony that was less pronounced during the years preceding 2001 became an unabashed aspect of its neo-conservative foreign policy. But the American state did not and in fact could not do it all alone. It enlisted the very active support of the media in this

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<sup>19</sup> "Life on the Home Front", *Time*, 1 October, 2001, p.12.

regard to exploit the image of 9/11 and create a corresponding image of the USA as a seeker of justice for itself and for the world at large<sup>20</sup>

Post-9/11 the role of the visual media has attracted a lot of critical attention<sup>21</sup> but not enough attention has been paid to understand the evolving nature of the media in the unipolar world where it serves the critical role of the informer, analyser and pleasing critique: all of which are linked in the single thread of narrow, chauvinistic nationalism. The media by its sheer monolithic nature became the intellectual of the state which kept the steam up of the American campaign. It is the Gramscian notion of non-autonomous intellectual at the mercy of the state which appears more relevant to explain the openly subjective role of the media immediately after 9/11 till the Iraq War, rather than the Mannheimian notion of intellectuals as unmoored thinkers<sup>22</sup>. The performance of the media during the post-9/11 days betrayed the bare fact that the so called autonomy of the Western visual media was a mere myth; it was not as Karl Mannheim believed, a *relatively*<sup>23</sup> classless stratum; nor is the post-9/11 media what Weberian language termed as “socially” unattached intelligentsia (*freischwebende intelligenz*)<sup>24</sup>. Contrary to Mannheim, Gramsci believed the intellectuals are divided in traditional and organic intellectuals, two classes who are more or less similar in purpose but dissimilar in the scale of functions and origins. By traditional intellectuals, he regards those who perform a not so prominent role to perpetuate the dominant structure. The “organic intellectuals” on the contrary play more important role to

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<sup>20</sup> See Aijaz Ahmad, *Iraq, Afghanistan and the Imperialism of Our Time* (New Delhi, 2004), p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> Lillie Chouliaraki, “Watching 11 September: The Politics of Pity”, *Discourse & Society* (London), vol. 15 (2-3), No2-3, March/May 2004, pp.185-198.

<sup>22</sup> See Richard Wyn Jones, *Security Strategy and Critical Theory* (Boulder, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London, 1960), pp.137-138.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Mannheim, *ibid*, p. 138.

help the dominant order: In the “post-9/11” days the Western media has become the organic intellectual trying to shore up the fortune of the unilateral superpower. To understand the role that media and the culture machine plays in generating notions supportive of U.S. militarism will become clearer with little aid from Gramsci himself:

The relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production is not as direct as it is with the fundamental social groups but is, in varying degrees, “mediated” by the whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are, precisely, the “functionaries. ... the intellectuals are the dominant group’s “deputies” exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government.<sup>25</sup>

The Western media in the past few years have set the standard for media practices everywhere. The shortfalls in the intellectual capability of the media were removed by “commentators”, “experts” and “analysts”. As a result the media became the inhouse representative telling and analysing the story to the world. Indeed the media has progressively behaved like a “deputy” of the overlord whose “direct relationship” with the real policy making elite is hidden by a veneer of tactic of shallow criticism. The relationship between the Western visual media and the U.S. policy makers has become such an open secret that it does not need to be “mediated by the whole fabric of society and by the complete of superstructures”; no wonder the Western television channels and newsmagazines remain a continuous saga of bomb explosions, massacres and such other bad news<sup>26</sup>. It is surprising to see how even the leading mouthpieces speak the language of victory and knows nothing of resolution of the conflict. No wonder the “war” goes on without an end in sight, without addressing either the critical issues in the Muslim societies or the American unilateralism in the world at large. The media in part is

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<sup>25</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks* (London, 1971), p.12.

<sup>26</sup> “No Easy Options”, *Time*, 19 April, 2004, pp. 14-20.

part of the problem, and, the more one peers into it to look for answers for the burning issues, chances are the greater would be one's chances of floating away from correct answers. The uncritical jingoistic tone of the media since 9/11 poses serious questions about its intellectual abilities. That indeed is a frightening news in a world where televised images are the primary source of news, views and information. Performance of the media in the aftermath of 9/11 shows that its supposed objectivity is a myth and enlightenment that its supposed to lend us actually comes laden with a great deal of irrationality and war-mongering that worships power and a powerful response to the destabilizing aspects of a fast integrating world. In this era of globalisation, the media is the first frame of the commingling of culture, people and market, but, the media, especially Western media does not have the maturity and the autonomy of thought and action to separate itself from the narrow statist interest of the unilateralist United States.

The extent to which the American media had accepted the founding tenets of the conservative notions of the American project became clear immediately after the terror attacks on 9/11. The duality in American media was as apparent as the same in the American government. Telling were the photographs that appeared on newspapers all over the United States a day after 9/11. The disaster predictably created unforeseen unity among the American people – at least that is what the newspapers reflected. Needless to say the world had not quite seen something like the terror attacks. The reaction to the terror strikes showed that there were broad similarities between the ideas of the media and that of the state. The conversion of the American media to the language of the dominant discourse of the neo-conservative discourse was complete.

A cursory survey of the front pages of 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2001 indicated at what was to follow. *The Indianapolis Star* announced, rather loudly through a picture that the homeland was under attack. The photo-essay accompanying this chapter shows a number of front pages of prominent American newspapers. Together, all the headlines narrated a tale of the evolution of idea of American nation as blessed by God, its national memory and the unambiguous declaration of a good “war”. The Morning Extra carried by *Kalamanto Gazelle* of Michigan said: “Our nation saw evil”; *The Daily Mississippian* said : “One Nation Indivisible”; Like *Kalamanto Gazette*, the *Spokesman – Review* of Spokane– Washington repeated what the George W. Bush had to say about 9/11 : “ A New Day of Infamy”, evidently all that could be said about 9/11 was expressed best by the President and that could not be bettered by any one else. Though President George W. Bush became a truly national and governmental spokesman denouncing the attacks, it was not actually what he said as a president that is significant here. The language that Bush used to express his and his country’s grief, anguish and pain carried the added meaning of how USA views itself and those which it thinks carried out the attacks. In expressing his anger at the unexpected attacks George W. Bush borrowed the word “infamy” from another chapter in American past. It was F.D. Roosevelt who first used the word to condemn the unexpected Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour in 1941<sup>27</sup>. Apart from the suddenness of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 there are more similarities between that day and the attacks n Pearl Harbour. Both of them, as we now know were invitation to the massive military might of the USA. Pearl Harbour also stands for the streak of resilience in American character; in moments of national crisis invocation of the symbolism of

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<sup>27</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, “Life During Wartime”, *Time*, 24 September, 2001, p.72.

Pearl Harbour signifies that setbacks are reversible. Sudden misfortunes like 9/11 can be rolled back by a national unity of purpose and collective resolve.

Another statement of President Bush said a lot about the nature of polity in the USA today. The President, who is the most theologically inclined American President in recent memory said that his “nation saw evil” in the acts of 9/11. That the fight was being perceived between the good and the evil was apparent. Such statements created the impression that there was a religious meaning behind the terrorist attacks which should be studied as Islam as Christianity. Such statements did not help the subsequent American campaign at all. That apart, the allusion to Pearl Harbour and calling upon a symbolism of apocalypse have other significance here. Pearl Harbour as opposed to the spatial location of Vietnam is a symbol of possible victory in war. Though the critics of USA’s foreign policies would like to show 9/11 as a lesson for its past actions<sup>28</sup> and would prefer to regard the events thereafter as a throwback to the debacle of Vietnam,<sup>29</sup> the American establishment chose to look at this most recent attack in terms of the discourse of victory shaped by the victorious American experiences in the battlefield and its construction in the sphere of visual narration through successful films and documentaries that have dealt with various aspects of that fateful campaign . A little deeper reading of the pre and post-9/11 visualogy shows that the American cultural sphere had already constructed the image of an adversary in the Islamic/Palestinian/Iranian suicide bombers and terrorists defeated by the American forces. In a pre-nuclear weapons world Japan was regarded a devious but winnable enemy. That roughly was the estimation of the Islamic enemy which is yet to acquire the nuclear edge, and therefore is far from acquiring a deterrence. In short, this ruthless enemy too is

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<sup>28</sup> “Sacrificial Warriors”, *Time*, 24 September, 2001, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Cait Murphy, “Digging in for the Long Haul”, *Time*, 8 October, 2001, p.49.

winnable because like the Japanese of the World War II era it too committed the ultimate mistake of attracting the dormant ire of the USA. In that way both the Japanese during the World War II and the Islamic fundamentalists of 2001 made the strategic mistake of underestimating the American strength and its desire to use the same. The identity of the Arab/Islamic enemy was also shaped by the depiction of the Arab 'other' in virtually the entire array of visual culture stretching from Halloween parties, popular children's cartoons and of course the popular Hollywood movies that were later almost vindicated by the grim passport photographs of the nineteen hijackers on 9/11. As it has become known Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism has long been institutionalised in the USA through uninformed campaign sustained mostly and surprisingly by the vital arms of culture like the primary education system<sup>30</sup>. There were, therefore visual proof of the weakness of the clumsy Arab enemy vis a vis the USA. As shown in *Delta Force*, Capt. McCoy gives up his firearms as he confronts the leader of the hijacking team, Abdul. In the last scene of the film as the hand to hand mortal combat showed there was no need of sophisticated weapons to kill the leader. Bare hands of Capt. Mc Coy equipped with knowledge of lethal martial arts were enough to defeat and kill Abdul in the final moments of that confrontation<sup>31</sup>.

As pieces of the religious musings drafted by the terror masterminds were recovered from the rubble of the imploded WTC complex<sup>32</sup> and the mug shots of 19 Arab-looking young men were detected among the passengers of the aircrafts which were used as guided missiles on the morning of 9/11, 2001 the identity of the enemy was more or less settled. So was the ultimate outcome of such a battle

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<sup>30</sup> [www.adc.org/index.php?id=283](http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=283)

<sup>31</sup> Melani McAlister; *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> "Cracking the Terror Code", *Time*, 15 October, 2001, pp. 32-36.

between such unequal enemies. That the battle would ultimately be an American war became known from its initial moments. Culturally attuned to American victory in the celluloid depictions of the Arab/Islamic rivalry with the USA, the USA was sure this too would be a “good fight”<sup>33</sup> where little was to be lost while a lot were to be gained. Subsequent outcome showed that the war, instead of turning winnable was progressively becoming painful.

The myth of American victimhood, be in Pearl Harbour or 9/11, 2001, were pregnant with new opportunities, new promises which prevented such catastrophic events from turning into curtain calls for American supremacy.

By its historically verifiable performance USA showed that it capitalised on global sympathy to turn tables on the attackers. Loss of lives on 9/11 was different from the projection<sup>34</sup> of America as a victim of terror. While the former was a tragic fact, the latter was an official policy. This chapter devotes itself to uncover the myriad ways in which images best representing the ideas concerning 9/11 constituted the next leg of American policy towards West Asia. Thus we come to the issue of rejuvenation of American hegemony by using the language of 9/11 for West Asia in particular and the world in general. The “good fight” is an argument to undo American victimhood of 9/11. The fight in undoing victimhood spins out the net of hegemony. The next section takes a look at the unfolding scheme of hegemony.

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<sup>33</sup> Melani McAlister, *ibid.* pp. 155 -197.

<sup>34</sup> See “Roots of Rage”, *Time*, October, 2001, pp. 42-44; and Don Belt, “The World of Islam”, *National Geographic*, p.76.

## **Unfolding Global Hegemony of the US in the Context of 9/11**

Its unexpected nature aside 9/11 was regarded as an exogenous assault on the US by the post-cold War Arab-Islamic adversary. This line of argument<sup>35</sup> has characterised the perspective of the decision makers in the USA.<sup>36</sup> A finer-grained analysis would show that the cultural atunement of the USA had long perceived such a catastrophic event coming from the Arab-Islamic adversary in the post-Cold War world. It can be concluded from this argument that as an event 9/11 was definitely unexpected but it was not unthinkable as the prejudices which erupted soon after were soon in the making within the domestic cultural setting. In short the conflict had a pre-constructed cultural setting. As American response to the terror strikes showed, the USA had for long been undergoing the necessary cultural atunements to fight its present enemies. Revealing this, the 'war on terror' did not unfold into an unconventional terrain like, Pakistan<sup>37</sup> instead it resumed on the ground where USA had already engaged the enemy before i.e. Afghanistan and Iraq. Given the dramatic nature of the images of 9/11, it was felt among the American masses that what followed after the terror had hit the homeland was a new official policy. In fact the post – 9/11 policies proved to be a continuation of the post-Cold War policy towards West Asia, albeit in a vigorous manner. Keeping the long cultural training in view it can be said that American unilateralist position

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.adc.org/index.php?id=283> [ Keeping the dissemination of neo-Orientalist images through the arms of American entertainment and primary education system the image of an adversarial Arab is very easy to conjure up in the minds of the masses, young and old alike]

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/04/08/rice.transcript/> [ Condoleeza Rice in her statement before the 9-11 Commission said that the U.S. administration had been anticipating intense hostility from Al-Qaeda ever since the Republican government came into power. According to Rice, "freedom-hating terrorists declared war on America and on the civilised world" long before 9/11. In a sort of unconscious vindication of the cultural roots of U.S. foreign policy traced by Melani McAlister (ibid.) she in fact goes back to the heydays of Iranian-backed religious terrorism in West Asia in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the attacks on U.S. marines in Lebanon in 1983.]

<sup>37</sup> See Condoleeza Rice's statement to 9-11 Commission in the cited website.

of self-help is not entirely a result of the anarchical nature of the structure of international politics. There was a strong internal processual play of dynamics that groomed the US to firm up its global hegemony by exploiting the unexpected events like the one on 9/11.<sup>38</sup> The seeming distinction between the Hollywood-ian cultural project of Otherisation of the Arab-Islamic world<sup>39</sup> and the post-9/11 developments should not blind an observer to the latent links between the two. Predictably, in the aftermath of the spectacular images of WTC attack the gullible public opinion of the USA was not in a position to read the finer details of the relation between American popular culture and American response to 9/11.<sup>40</sup> Arguments that tried to paint 9/11 and subsequent American response to it as a fulfillment of prophecy of 'clash of civilisations'<sup>41</sup> often neglected that they were merely generating consent for America's plan of repressive global hegemony, by mobilising support at home as precondition. The American masses started to feel the necessities of the impending war as their government started curtailing civil liberties; increased surveillance nationwide and implemented stricter rules for immigrants. As the USA started offering the argument that "we have to destroy liberties to save them"<sup>42</sup> it created a pliable domestic base that would generate support and legitimise its global mission of hegemony, what is problematical is that the global and domestic actions are being justified by citing their long term

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<sup>38</sup> Alexander Wendt makes a distinction between anarchy of the international structure on the one hand and internal process on the other in "Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics", *International Organisation* (Cambridge MA), 46 (2) (Spring) 1999, see pp.391-425. This line of argument can be used to show that internally manufactured cultural implements play a major role in pushing the state to a certain direction in its international arena.

<sup>39</sup> Melani McAlistar, *ibid*, see pp. 125-153.

<sup>40</sup> Doris Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics* (Washington D.C. 1997) [Graber observes that because of disinclination to foreign affairs the masses are easily swayed by televised dramatic images in the USA.].

<sup>41</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order* (Viking, 1996, New Delhi), see p. 209.

<sup>42</sup> See Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *9/11 In American Culture* (New York, 2003). pp. 21 - 41.

positive effects on the health of liberal democracies themselves. Such are the price of hegemonistic ambition of the unilateralist superpower<sup>43</sup>. Half the job of securing support for the response of the USA to the perpetrators of the crime of 9/11 was done by the image of destruction itself. Such was the power of the towers that one letter to the editor said:

Everyone who witnessed the devastation, in person or on television, became, in his or her own way, survivor. Each of us will live out the rest of our lives with the memory. Someone came into my living room and killed a part a part of me.

Noel Montricchio, Ghent, Belgium<sup>44</sup>

As post-9/11 days rolled by USA's reactions to the terror attacks showed its transformation into a self-help actor in the face of growing international anarchy. As a sign of things to come *Time* magazine published a list of threats to American security. The lethal list included smallpox germs, anthrax, sarin nerve gas, poisoned water reservoir, intestinal parasite such as E. coli, Car, truck and backpack bombs and nuclear weapons. American administration was gearing to allay these threats by curtailing liberty to counter all these threats. Needless to say the USA was disciplined in the days following 9/11. To that end the fear of the Arab/Islamic enemy, images of 9/11 and cultural stereotype of the enemy in Hollywood – all of them – transformed the American social sphere and left it ready for a global offensive. It is the reconfiguration of the founding principles of the USA that the roots of its present hyperactive policy in the region of West Asia can be discerned. Following Wendt's argument of internal social change and identity formation influencing foreign policy, it can be said that unfolding American hegemony in West Asia has cultural roots in American popular films and the 9/11

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<sup>43</sup> Evan Thomas, "The Vietnam Question", *Newsweek*, 19-28 April, 2004, p. 31.

<sup>44</sup> See *Time*, 8 October, 2001.

photographic culture of the electronic and print media that found an opportunity brought forth in the shaky days after the terror attacks on the American mainland. The terror strikes themselves would not have stood out on the basis of exhibition of their epochal significance for long had that not encouraged unilateralism by the US. 9/11 therefore is not the most important image of our era. Arguably, the equally, if not more important images like in Afghanistan and Iraq are not often showed to the viewers across the world. With the passage of time, all the sound and fury that it placed before the world, would fall short of ensuring continued significance of that day of infamy. Because, by then many other events many times more powerful than 9/11—would have grown on the memory of rubble in New York. In long run 9/11 will be a distant setback in USA's race for unilateral cultural language across the world.

## CHAPTER – III

### THE ‘NEW ARAB’ AND THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER: ESSAYING NEO-ORIENTALISM

Visual culture as a shaper of public opinion in the USA in the pre and post-9/11 days was anticipated and elaborated by Edward Said in *Orientalism* back in 1979. Cultural representation of the Muslim Arabs had attained a new negative dimension inspired by the colonial European stereotypes, after the post-1973 ‘Oil shocks’ delivered by the Arab states opposed to Israel.<sup>1</sup> Said followed what was happening in the dominant cultural narrative of the USA. In a reflective paragraph Said exposed how representations in the cultural sphere had constructed the public image of the “evil” Arab. According to Said the modern Western cultural preoccupation of the Jew as an evildoer had now shifted to the “new” Arab:

...after the 1973 war the Arab appeared everywhere as something more menacing. Cartoons depicting an Arab sheik standing behind a gasoline pump turned up consistently. These Arabs, however, were clearly “Semitic”: their sharply hooked noses, the obvious reminders (to a largely non-Semitic population) that “Semites” were at the bottom of all “our” troubles, which in this case was principally a gasoline shortage. The transference of a popular anti Semitic animus from a Jewish to an Arab target was made smoothly, since the figure was essentially the same.<sup>2</sup>

Evidently US policy in West Asia has remained unchanged over the past 30 years. From 1973 to 2004 American involvement in West Asia has followed an upwardly mobile curve. The signs detected by Said in 1979 have flourished and created the logic of longstanding conflict. Visual representations, like in the action flicks from Hollywood and the role played by the media have ensured that the region of our

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<sup>1</sup> See Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945- 2000* (Berkeley, 2001), pp. 134-135.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New Delhi, 2001) p. 285 - 286.

interest continues to be seen in inimical terms by the public. The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 did not happen in a discursive vacuum. It was the logical outcome of the formation of the national discourse.<sup>3</sup>

The invasion of Iraq and the ensued conflict stand on the pillars provided by events, individuals and culture – in short the reasons that reasons which are pushing the ongoing conflict to become a permanent fixture of the American foreign policy<sup>4</sup>. In short the seemingly irresolvable nature of the conflict comes from the simplistic division of the camps into “good” and “evil” which have found resonance through the utterance of President George W. Bush and the leading lights among the Islamic fundamentalists. Such fights definitely spring from the irrational and mythical interiors of religious nationalism. Such simplistic ideas did find wide acceptance among the early Americans who were zealous about populating the New World with their immigrant Christian community. Among other things these early communities believed in the battle at Armageddon<sup>5</sup> where Satan is finally imprisoned; at the end of that battle Christ returns to the earth to rule for thousand years. However, Satan frees himself at the end of the millennium and is, finally defeated and destroyed in the apocalypse<sup>6</sup>.

Such dichotomous descriptions of the roots of American nationalism have been resurrected, albeit in different forms, in the confrontationist work of Samuel P.

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<sup>3</sup> McAlister, *ibid.* [McAlister relates the ideological and ideational build-up in the cultural sphere of the U.S. with the explosive outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991. I similarly try to establish links between the cultural projects of 1970s and 1980s and the events and arguments prior and since 9/11 which finally culminated in the present tragedy in Iraq.]

<sup>4</sup> Roger Cohen, “If Kerry ‘looks French’, look for an ugly fight”, *International Herald Tribune* (Bangkok), April 3, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> In recent years American film industry in a reflection of its parent society’s affection towards a religious lifestyle has started producing films with theologically loaded terms like *Armageddon* (1998), *End of Days* (1999) etc.

<sup>6</sup> See Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York, 1995), pp. 9-10.

Huntington<sup>7</sup>, visual representations in the films, and the American media. Present American policy of hot pursuit is guarded at various fronts by non-military apparatus like culture, public opinion, philosophy and policy-all framed in a way to discourage resolution and provoke passion.

The simultaneous otherisation of West Asian Arabs and Islam with American military offensive in the regional powers comes from very intimate American involvement with the region. In order to understand the geneology of neo-Orientalism as it appears in the post-9/11 days, it is necessary to see what Said remarked about the conception of Orientalism:

...Orientalism derives from a particular closeness experienced between Britain and France and Orient, which until the early nineteenth century had really meant only India and Bible lands.<sup>8</sup>

Preoccupation of the American films that celebrate and champion a cult of violence for the ever evolving image of the Arab enemy, the post-/11 crackdown on the "Arab-looking" people and Iraq war, all of it, draw from deep American dependence on Arab oil and the relevance of the Arab-Israeli conflict to the domestic political equation of the USA. That way, the geographical distance between the USA and the West Asia is undone by concerns built by the dominant conservative political discourse of the Right in the USA which finds takers in all spheres of American lives. The reason that the Arab is under assault from all arms of the American power structure is traceable to the American dependence on the Arabs - both strategically and politically. Very close political-economic dependence has bred a new relation of power that draws from the cultural-literary

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, , *Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order* ( New Delhi, 1996), p. 33 [this page reveals that the U.S. intellectual elite have come to believe that there is an inescapable dualist nature of international politics in the post-Cold War world].

<sup>8</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New Delhi, 2001), see p. 4.

matrix of Orientalism of the era of colonisation. That is short sums up the arrival of neo-Orientalism.

It is through neo-Orientalism that one might understand the real essence and implication of 9/11 and its aftermath. By the logic of culture examined so far 9/11 can not be regarded as a single event; it was the culmination of layers of events and actors as it continues to remain. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln have rightly pointed out that:

... “9/11 was not and is not a single event. It is a sequence of experiences and discourses. Its meanings are constantly moving, unfolding, month by month, back and forth from the personal to the political; from stories in the media to political; criticism, from the right and the left”<sup>9</sup>.

### **Construction of the New “Orient”**

The path of civilisational evolution of both the U.S. and the former European imperial powers were different from each other; Europe was the land of industrial revolution and Enlightenment, whereas USA was relatively a new player in the affairs of the world. Like many other differences their individual conception of the ‘Orient’ too differed from each other. The ‘Orient’ of Europe was thought by the Europeans to be situated close to their borders; the ways and means of coming to terms with the ‘Orient’ of European imperial powers was described as *Orientalism* by Edward Said. Contrary to the European notion American cartography located its ‘Orient’ to the shores of Japan & China – Far East in general. Yet, barring<sup>10</sup> the years of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, American public opinion declined to attach ‘Oriental’ qualities to Japan and the rest of Far East. Despite its bad behavior

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<sup>9</sup> See Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *9/11 in American Culture* (New York 2003), pp.xvii.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Said, *ibid.* pp. 1.

Japan was not 'Orientalised'.<sup>11</sup> As the inheritor of European dominance of world affairs, USA slowly started looking favourably at the terms established during the era of colonialism and imperialism. As events unfolded across the expanse of 20<sup>th</sup> century, West Asia became for all practical purposes the 'Orient' of the USA. Establishment of the modern state of Israel on 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1948 and ensuing Arab-Israel conflict, the Cold War ensured that West Asia remained the most difficult part of American foreign policy. This volatile interaction left indelible marks on both the USA and the region. Edward Said pointed out: "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience." Similarly, by the end of the nearly fifty years of Arab-American tepid relations experts like Samuel Huntington started to describe Arab/Islamic civilisation as the opposing camp which defines what USA stands for. It is by its opposition to all that the Arab world stands for that the contours of the American mission could be better understood.

While the American civilisation had little similarity with the Arab culture, Judeo-Christianity drawn from the Old Testament had a great deal to draw from the Holy Land, which is the Israel of Bible. Both American geography and history speak volumes about the biblical vision of the puritan pioneers of the American nation. It is now learned that the early British settlers to the American land wanted to name their settlements after biblical cities and towns. Consequently, contemporary USA has a "Jericho in Alabama, an Eden in Arizona, a Samaria in Idaho, a Hebron in North Dakota, a Lake Sinai in South Dakota, a Jordan in Illinois, a Zoar in Massachusetts..... a Sodom in Ohio, A Bethlehem in

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<sup>11</sup> Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S.-Japan Relations* (London, 1997), see p. 128 [U.S.A.'s relation with Japan was marked by imperial rivalry and militarism. There was a qualitative difference between U.S. hostilities towards the imperial Japan and post-Cold War West Asia].

Pennsylvania, a New Canaan in Connecticut and a Goshen Country in Wyoming.”<sup>12</sup> Such was the enthusiasm over the Holy Land and the Hebrew language that those students at the University of Harvard who were unable to translate the Bible from Hebrew to Latin had dark prospects in the seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup>

A lot has changed since those days. Today, those early eccentricities are missing, but there are novel links to the Holy Land. While Israel remained the source of solace for spiritually inclined population of the Christian America, the Arab/Islamic opponents of Israel became a constant source of threat as their political radicalism endangered supply of petroleum and petroleum products from West Asia to the USA.

Once again, we have to seek assistance of Edward Said to chart the way the USA finally adopted Europe’s Orient as its own while leaving the threat from Far East in the cold storage of its past. Describing the extent to which European economy and life was dependent on West Asia and North Africa Said said:

The Orient is an integral part of European *material* [italics in the original] civilisation and culture<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, West Asia today constitutes a very vital segment of the material civilisation and culture of the USA. By 2004, oil had gained the dubious distinction of influencing both American politics and economy. Influence of oil in American life has grown steadily since 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Development of oil industry in West Asia was founded upon a policy of concessions granted to Western companies. Needless to say these major players kept oil prices down that benefited

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<sup>12</sup> See Edward Bernard Glick, *The Traingular Connection: America, Israel and American Jews* (London, 1982), p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Bernard Glick, *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Edward Said, *ibid.* see p.2.

their parent economies enormously. Rise of Arab nationalism, Soviet influence and anti-West sentiments post-1948 saw greater Arab mobilisation around oil. As a result of realisation of the importance of oil, the Arab oil-producing states alongwith Venezuela founded the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1961. Weaponisation of oil was complete in 1973 when after the Yom Kippur war; OPEC countries imposed an embargo on those countries which supported Israel. USA was the prime target. Thus dawned the realisation that the political domination of the USA on the world stage was contingent upon free and fair availability of energy resources located far from American shores in a politically volatile region.<sup>15</sup> Dependence breeds both affection and affliction. In the case of American dependence on West Asian energy it has seen more of the latter than the former.

The cultural project that more or less coincided with the occurrence of the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and continues till today is typically a throwback to the days of classical Orientalism. Since “Orient” was the bed of resources upon which West cultivated its development, Said said:

Orientalism, then, is knowledge of Orient that places things Oriental in class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgement, discipline or governing.<sup>16</sup>

Orient had to be *scrutinised* and *studied* because it had to be *disciplined* and *governed* for its optimal exploitation. I would argue here, the problematic behaviour of the Arab/Islamic states in fact prompted the vilificatory cultural project in the visual arts like Hollywood movies and the media which aimed to

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<sup>15</sup> See Avraham Sela, ed. *Political Encyclopedia of Middle East* (Continuum, N.Y., 1999), see pp. 768-778.

<sup>16</sup> See Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, (New Delhi, 2001), see pp. 41.

study the region and create generalised ideas about it so as to render its domestic constituency pliant to government's policies. This development is as close a Western policy could come to classical Orientalism in late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The “New” Orient and the “New” World Order**

Just as the Cold War ended with an unexpected series of events, new threats started appearing in the horizon. Along with the new threats came the change in the jargon of international politics. Though the Cold War lapsed, its language did not. After a brief period marked by jubilation and hope for peace the language of binary opposition marked its return. Totalitarianism and democracy, peace and war, and, such other distinctions which were hugely popular among the members of the political class during the Cold War marked quick return during the early post-Cold War years.

The new threat, as a reminder of past rivalries was between the forces of integration and fragmentation in the post-Cold War era.<sup>17</sup> While integration was represented by globalisation of market capitalism, information revolution and the irreversible changes that they brought forth,<sup>18</sup> disintegration referred to that sundry bunch of individuals, cultures, religions and other such bodies capable of putting spokes in the new project. The world was back to the door of simplistic generalisations between good and bad. But one aspect of the fast emerging animosity was clear: it would not appear in the old troublespots; they would appear “elsewhere”. Post-World War II Germany was unified and reformed; Russia too

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<sup>17</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, “Toward The post-Cold War World”, *Foreign Affairs* (New York), Spring, 1991, pp. 102 – 103 and 104.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World* (London, 2000), [Oft-cited in this dissertation, this small but powerful reflection on the nature of globalization is a concise dictionary of all the changes sweeping the planet in recent years].

was trying to discover its new found location in the democratic map of the world. This time around, it was predicted the zones of conflict would be new, unexpected but not unthinkable.<sup>19</sup> And the roots of this round of conflicts were predicted to lay hidden within the social norms and customs in the diverse countries of the world on an unstoppable train to integrate with each other. In short, familiarity much sought after, ultimately was to breed contempt.

The New World Order was thus born with uncertain enemies of the leader of the “free world” whose fast appearing portents predicted their impending arrival. As already shown in Chapter 1 the seat of enemy did not lay vacant for too long following the demise of the USSR. The project of stereotypification of Arab/Islamic culture that began after the 1973 War continued on its own momentum to explode upon the world after the Gulf War of 1991. Ever since, the cultural representation of the Arab in popular American action flicks like *True Lies* (1994) became a vindication of the evil Arab ruler typified by the ruthless and adventurous regime of Saddam Hussein. The culture industry in the US and the media soon discovered the civilisational conflict between Islamic West Asian Arabs and liberal democratic USA and its allies. The potent project of simplistic representation of the Arab/Islamic West Asia and its vilification in dominant organs informing and shaping American public opinion since the end of the Cold War has produced a far refined replica of “Orientalism”. Neo-Orientalism is the ideological and cultural apparatus of the New World Order. This phase, that is neo-Orientalism, is marked by an over-abundance of the images observed by Said way back in 1978:

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<sup>19</sup> Edward Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (Oxford, 2000), see pp. 397 [Writing the fate of the urban space in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century Soja shows that while old conflicts like the Cold War have vanished the new and more unpredictable conflicts like the crisis like financial instability in the South-East Asia, race, communal and ethnic riots and genocide had appeared across the planet].

In newsreels or newsphotos, the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures. Lurking behind all of these images is the menace of *jihad*. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world.<sup>20</sup>

This dissertation argues that with its capacity for fast dissemination of information and views neo-Orientalism has undercut the ground of opposition to imperialist policies of the USA and neutralised its potential popular base both inside and outside in the international arena. As the US comes under increasing economic and political challenge from other evolving democracies and fast developing economies, its success in the Cold War appears to suffer from the uncertainties of post-Cold War era. While its “victory” in the superpower rivalry was more or less convincing, no one knew how long would that last. Fearing for the safety of its continued dominance of the world stage and keeping in mind the emerging crisis tendencies one scholar had cautioned that what many are calling as an era of American supremacy would soon prove to be nothing more than a mere moment in the timescape of the world.<sup>21</sup>

In the age of globalisation and global leadership of the USA it was amply clear that the system that was created by the superpower was fast proving to be ephemeral beyond imagination; and the challenge did not merely flow from the rise of powers like China and the regional blocks like the EU but also the unstable market which showed repeatedly, most notably in 1999, its fragile nature. In short United States could not go back to its isolationist sleep thinking with the end of the Soviet Union the task of securing the world for democracy and freedom had been accomplished. There was no mechanism which would allow USA to withdraw and

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<sup>20</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, (London, 1978), p. 287.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise”, *International Security* (Cambridge: Ma), vol. 17 (1993), (4), pp.5 – 51.

enjoy its victory in the Cold War on its continent. Its fate had become integrated to the future of the world. Its dominance in the world defined both international politics and economy. In short, the USA had to be continuously on guard if it had to preserve its position on the top of the structure of international politics and prevent it from breaking into a chaos.

Already by 1991, signs were visible that an integrated Europe would spell an end to the decline of that continent that began with the World War II. To contain such a world with its plural compulsion a lot of new tactics had to be devised, many of which would apparently be unrelated to the norms of international politics. In 1991, congratulating his troops on their spectacular victory in the Gulf War I American President George H.W. Bush declared that American troops had “kicked” the Vietnam syndrome out<sup>22</sup> and that their action pronounced the establishment of a New World Order.<sup>23</sup> In other words the New World Order would be led by a superpower free from self doubt and lethargy. What however was left unsaid was: what would be the new cultural norms of this new structure. However, one aspect of this new political-economic-cultural and military reality was clear: the norms, irrespective of their function and duration of service, would be laid down by the USA, the new superpower in their entirety. It was also evident that different norms would have to be devised for different fields of operation. For ex. The norms of economic domination would be different from that of political and military domination, and so forth. But more important however was to tie all these different treatments in a single strand. By this analogy of strings it can be shown that there was virtually little distance between the American policy

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<sup>22</sup> Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, eds., *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*, (New York 1998), p.263.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (London, 2003), see p. 258.

towards West Asia post-Cold War and its behaviour in the global financial market and the projection of the Arab and Islamic characters in popular channels of entertainment and information.

Here it is necessary to understand the janus-faced policy of military containment and political domination of the world followed by the USA since early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Monroe Doctrine<sup>24</sup> gave first indication of the future foreign policy of the USA. While in the field of political-economy United States has consistently espoused the virtue of rational economics and free market, in the field of military might it has remained a hyperactive player over the past one hundred years or so. The market has remained one of the partners in the scheme of making the USA a superpower. Driven by market the arena of visual culture too became a part of the same project. Despite assistance from these arms American dependence on its military might has been more overt. Even after nearly a century and half of free market economy United States was badly jolted by the economic meltdown of 1999 in South-East Asia. While generally it was believed the markets are vulnerable to strange behaviours and crises, certain radical capitalist theorists of economics have said that instability and market crashes are part of the capitalist system and one living in a capitalist system should take such minor fevers as granted.<sup>25</sup> Hyman Minsky's adventurous prescription has been rejected by the more sober economists. It was understood that as far as the market is concerned man can only speculate. The U.S., the leader of the free market has shown from the very beginning that though the market is a good system it can not be depended

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<sup>24</sup> Guy Poitras, *The Ordeal of Hegemony: The United States and the Latin America* (Boulder, 1990), see pp. 3-6.

<sup>25</sup> Hyman Minsky, *Can "It" Happen Again? Essays on Instability and Finance* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1982), cited in Robert Gilpin, *The Challenge of Global Capitalism* (New Jersey, 2000), see p. 139.

upon always in total exclusion of other factors. Therefore since the days of the New Deal, there was a massive emphasis on expansion of military capability of the U.S.A. What in 1930 was motivated by the presence of external actors like Nazi Germany has now become an inherent part of the American policy.

Reliance of the USA on its military might is not all that informs the story of the making of the superpower since the demise of the USSR. Apart from the fluctuations of the global market there were other snowballing forces of opposition to the unipolarity of the world politics. Cold War left a few disturbing debris behind. One of them was the rejuvenated European economy. During the Cold War years integration of European camps was regarded a political goal but the end of Cold War turned this political success into an economic success story. This economic success story in turn packed all the potential within it to unsettle the unipolar world order in the long run.<sup>26</sup> According to Gilpin it was economic regionalism beginning from 1980s onwards that started weakening the “integrated global economy”; in other words the “integrated global economy that is what existed in the 1980s and the 1990s was primarily tended by American interests. Arrival of more players, such as the economic regionalists like the EU lobby and the tough Japanese bargainers etc., dealt a blow to the “global economy”.

It is therefore not possible to deal cultural representation of the West Asian inhabitants and the larger political-economic behaviour of the American interest in a compartmentalised manner because doing that would mean neglecting the bigger dynamics behind such cultural constructions. What does a structural leader in international politics do when under threat from systemic anomalies and contain damage? It mobilises other sub-structural forces to monopolise and embolden its

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Gilpin, *ibid*, 193-94.

resources of strategic importance to its position, most importantly, oil. It is evident therefore that right from the early days of the post-Cold War era the upcoming problems were revealing their faint outlines to the futurist observers of American politics. That the negative cultural representation of the Arab-Islamic people in the films and the media peaked and touched a new unbridled high was not guided by direct government policy. They were products of a cultural discourse built assiduously over the past many decades that gained great intensity after the 1991 Gulf War when the brave American soldier was reborn. In short working within such a cultural perimeter the violent anti-Arab fare of Hollywood ensured that they too did whatever was necessary to perpetrate the position of victor in the Gulf War in 1991. Here thus was a unique cohabitation of culture and economics: on the one hand popular culture justified control over West Asian resources on the other the economy awaited the benefits from the total usurpation of the strategic oil reserve under the West Asian soil; on the one hand visual culture narrated a violent contemporary struggle on the other economy waited to benefit from the cultural warfare. But this rare alliance was not the first time that cultural politics helped economic priorities. To highlight this *entente* this chapter announced the novel cultural politics at the outset: neo-Orientalism.

A whole lot of cultural change started unfolding in a very surreptitious manner since the day the USSR expired. But before the culture of vilification could take root political trends showed that the poisonous fruits of the Cold War era were not going to disappear from the world. Years of intrigue, treachery, and superpower doublespeak had sowed the seeds of the nature of the post-Cold War days. In short yesterday's Arab and Islamist friends were fast turning into liabilities before turning into enemies and global terrorists. Across the Islamic world the

secular fighters had been discredited as their tactics as was represented by the PLO and its leader Yasser Arafat were not yielding the expected results. The fall of the secular resistance in the Occupied Territories of West Bank and Gaza opened the path of religious movements across the Muslim world<sup>27</sup>. The decline in secular leadership created a surge of Islamic fundamentalism that coincided with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The post-Cold War era saw the formerly CIA supported Mujahideens from across the Muslim world who once fought in Afghanistan, turn against their former financiers. The culture of civilisational violence that Hollywood started showing mostly without mentioning the close rapport that the American agencies had with the violent fundamentalist Islam was fast becoming a reality in the international sphere where states were now pitted against transnational non-state actors. Soon America's worst fears came true. The terrorists this time were nothing like any of the Islamic terrorists that the US had so far seen in its usual habitat of Palestine-Lebanon -Syria or Libya triangle. As *Time* reported after the first bombing of the World Trade Centre on February 26<sup>th</sup> 1993, the new terrorist who swam through the currents of international conflicts and immigrated to the West was the "epitome of the modern terrorist, a self-made commando pursuing a homemade agenda to disrupt Western civilization."<sup>28</sup> The terrorist attack that till Oklahoma bombing by Timothy McVeigh on April 19, 1995 remained the worst terror strike on American soil was the work of what is euphemistically known as the "Afghan veterans"<sup>29</sup> The so called Afghan veterans posed a grave threat to all the opponents of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan because what they perceived as the American reluctance to go it all the way down

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<sup>27</sup> Rema Hammami & Salim Tamari, "The Second Uprising: End or New Beginning?" *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Issue 118 (Berkeley, Ca.), winter, 2001, pp. 5-25.

<sup>28</sup> "The Secret Life of Mahmud the Red", *Time*, 4 October, 1993, pp. 31-32.

<sup>29</sup> "The Afghan Connection", *Time* *ibid* , p.40.

to overthrowing the regimes of their countries of origin whom they perceived as un-Islamic. Though Western diplomats were in disagreement, the Egyptian governments regarded the out of work Afghan veterans as the biggest security threat to its state.<sup>30</sup> That the new enemy was basically not a “self made” fighter and that he was fed and financed during its formative years by the USA itself was an uncomfortable truth that the USA found difficult to swallow. As a result cultural representation of the Arab terrorist in films like *True Lies* (1994) would often show their rage as an irrational reaction to the New World Order stemming from some inherent flaw in “their” civilization and culture. For instance almost all the people linked to the first bombing of the World Trade Centre in 1993 were from countries which were pivotal in defeating Soviet plans in Afghanistan. Pakistan and Egypt contributed huge untrained manpower to the CIA bank-rolled Afghan mission. As a result young disenchanted Muslim/Arab men came back to pose threat to their respective regimes now as fully trained mercenaries. The man responsible for planning the WTC bombing in 1993, Mahmud Abouhalima was an Afghan veteran from Egypt who had immigrated to the USA. Ahmad Ajaj, a fellow Afghan veteran and co-accused was from Pakistan. This is one similarity between the perpetrators of the first attack on 1993 and the last attack in 2001 that needs to be attended to while understanding the fact that the United States was not an uninvolved bystander who was hit by the stray vengeance of the terrorists. Both the attacks were planned and executed by citizens or former residents of the regimes friendly to the U.S.

USA was by now in the midst of a dilemma. On the one hand the Islamic fundamentalists it once used to fight the final phase of the Cold war came back to

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<sup>30</sup> *Time*, ibid.

haunt it and on the other it was refusing to acknowledge the fact that it had to address the much bigger issues like its own responsibility in spawning these forces and the repressive regimes in the friendly countries who urgently needed political reform to help prevent the scourge of Islamic fundamentalism any further. But a victorious USA still gloating over the spoils of the Cold War wanted to avoid measures that would take its soldiers into seemingly dangerous missions. Already Somalia had shown that the end of the Cold War did not automatically translate into a world waiting for liberative foreign policy of the United States. Sometimes, as Somalian experience showed, even a simple peacemaking mission could turn into a deadly trap costing American lives and rubbing off a bit of the glory the superpower had acquired at the end of the Cold War.<sup>31</sup> It is evident today that the post-Cold War concern of the USA in international affairs was only an affair for public relations and did not mean anything substantial. As a result success eluded U.S. intervention not just in Somalia but also in Haiti in 1994, two operations that were both covered in controversy. While the USA busied itself with small operations its foes came ashore and the real nature of the state vs. non-state actors became clearer. It was also the time when some of the most expensive anti-Arab films and animation films were made that went on to become huge hits. Even the highly entertaining Disney animation film *Aladdin* (1992) became popular by romanticising the apparent ruthless and barbaric Arab character. The 'new Arab' was a very new creature to the American establishment. His reach extended from West Asia to the U.S., he could show up anywhere at will, because he was part enemy and part friend, part romantic and in part pragmatic and a part betrayer and part betrayed. It was actually in a very short period of time that the brave Afghans

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<sup>31</sup> "In and Out of the Tide", *Time*, 25 October, 1993, p. 15 -18.

and the Arab *mujahideens* glorified in *Rambo III* (1988) starring Sylvester Stallone as the real friends of the USA, became the despicable maniacal killers in another action hero Arnold Schwarzenegger's *True Lies* (1994). The years of production of these films shows that just in less than a decade the Afghan/Islamic holy warrior had become a dreaded Arab/Islamic terrorist in the West's visual memory. The fast deteriorating image of the unpredictable devious enemy helped in the overall project of global domination of the USA which was to keep the supply lines of vital energy resources alive and well from West Asia to the American coast irrespective of internal political developments in those states. The problem was that by nearly a half-a-century long policy of containment and intervention first initiated by the Eisenhower Doctrine on January 5, 1957, the USA had become a structural adjunct to the West Asian political process. As already stated West Asia at present occupies a very important region of the American psyche; the same is true in case of America's place in the political process in the Arab countries.

To deduce financial and geographical inference from cultural representation is not the most usual practice in international politics which is still in the grip of the monopoly established by the realists and the neo-realists. It is fairly recently that the strings of international politics have been sufficiently relaxed to admit a few post-positivist debates and challenges to the established theoretical precepts. The conceptual structure enumerated in the Introduction to this dissertation and the subsequent efforts to this point has followed what can be called a postmodern approach to the reality of the international politics. The attitude of the postmodern theoretician is that of disbelief and cynicism towards metanarratives. This work too has sustained the critique of the theoretical undergirds of the New World Order by a continuous deconstruction of given structures.

In order to achieve that the barriers of disciplinary territories have been breached a number of times to relate visual culture with national and international politics and economics. Similar interaction is perhaps necessary to establish the role and function of as subtle a subject as visual culture on human affairs in international politics.

It is evident by now that while economics is the heart of the American enterprise, politics is its right hand while culture, especially visual culture of films and photography constitute the equivalent of the superpower's nervous system. The culture machine situated in Hollywood reflects the economic desire of the state that has been built on the historical dependence of the USA on West Asia for both its economic and strategic requirements. It is worth repeating here that, in such a world where everything was supposed to have begun anew after the end of history, end of metanarratives and metathemes, little skepticism over the new actors are in order. The New World Order and its neoliberal economics have an unpronounced but audible relation with the cultural project that has been critiqued in this work. Despite claims of end of meta-narratives and the like the massive cultural projects that filter down to viewers of Hollywood action films and American war photography stand as witness of a scheme that is nothing short of a metanarrative in its global reach and civilisational scale. This cultural discourse offered through images and accepted by uncritical global viewership of American entertainment industry form a rhetoric of cultural domination that informs the New World (Dis)Order.<sup>32</sup> Keeping the relation of 'Orientalism' to European colonial occupation of greater part of the world in 19<sup>th</sup> century in view, it may be said with fair amount of certainty that the visual cultural discourse concerning West Asia

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<sup>32</sup> Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, (London, 1992), p.251.

and Islam is a cultural tool akin to its predecessor of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The much trumped up novelty of every other dogma of this era basically equals old wines in new bottles, therefore this cultural discourse too should aptly be termed as 'neo-Orientalism'.

Like every other new incarnation of old legends, neo-Orientalism differs from its 19<sup>th</sup> century apparition in a significant way. It is its capacity to delude a huge portion of the global population by its constructed projections in a very short period of time that neo-Orientalism differs so totally from Orientalism of yore. Thanks to the fast transmission of images across the world the products of the American entertainment industry and the media can reach the whole world in a single moment creating almost uniform opinions in as disparate a region as Alaska and Allahabad. More importantly neo-Orientalism is also against those less powerful people in its host society. The pioneers who came to the British colonies in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were not always necessarily the brightest of the British society; they merely had access to the tool of power and policy that shaped both their and their colonial subjects' destinies.<sup>33</sup> Neo-Orientalism similarly is being shaped by only a handful of people who are sitting on a mountain of power and finance capital. For them igniting a war perhaps is nothing even if it costs a section of their less fortunate countrymen. Sergeant Michael Pederson was one such less fortunate soul. After his death Sergeant Pederson's mother appears in the anti-war film *Fahrenheit 9/11* by Michael Moore that was honoured with the topmost award of Palme D'or at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival. Lila Lipscomb, the mother overpowered by grief reads out her son's last letter the viewer. The letter spoke of an anguish that a soldier fails to quell on realizing that he is being utilised

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<sup>33</sup> See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New Delhi, 2001).

alongwith scores of his less privileged colleagues to advance the interests of a few in the upper echelons of power back home. The ruthlessness with which neo-Orientalism treats the outsider in West Asia is undiminished even in its treatment of its own people. The threat that such a culture of politics poses is summed up by the director of *Fahrenheit 9/11* himself when he reflects over the selfless service of the armed forces personified under the present dispensation of George W. Bush in White House when he says:

*They serve so that we don't have to. They offer to give up their lives so that we can be free. It is remarkably, their gift to us. And all they ask for in return is that we never send them into harm's way unless it is absolutely necessary. Will they ever be trust us again?*<sup>34</sup>

Moore's cynicism over the US-induced cycle of violence in Iraq may have found widespread acceptance in a section of the American population during 2003-2004, but that however would be insufficient; because, in order to uncover the cultural mainsprings of such unnecessary conflicts, it's their hidden motivations that should be unmasked first. Otherwise the whole fabric of trust underlying international relations would be corroded. A world without trust would soon implode on its ageing frame.

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<sup>34</sup> Frank Rich, "Beautiful Minds and Ugly Truths", *International Herald Tribune*, May 22-23, 2004.

## ENCLOSURE: THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

The Chancellor of JNU, Dr. Karan Singh in his inaugural speech to the Annual Hridaynath Kunzru Memorial Lectures of the university made a comment on the recent features of visual culture being provided to the tireless television viewers; according to him, in these disturbing times of post-9/11 era, the least that the filmmakers and television channels could do was to refrain from glorifying violence and gore and refrain from airing such programmes that cater to the base tasters. Sadly, for us that is not happening. Instead more and more films were being made not to entertain the viewers but to horrify them. Such is the perverted nature of today's entertainment that it remains incomplete without stereotyping, grave digging and spectacular and pyrotechnical violence. Entertainment, in short, will come to us through the prism of horror and exasperation. Dr. Singh said that the makers of such visual products should realize we can do without such fiction as our lives are already flooded with disturbing images from the real life unfolding worldwide.

The Chancellor was right in pointing out before the gathering that human existence had suddenly become a collage of visuals of all degrees, where facts resemble unimaginable fiction and fictions resemble aestheticised copies of cruel facts of life. Indeed life has become an unmoving screen where violence, poverty, malnutrition jostle with each other in an unstoppable narrative that is sucking life out of the world's future. Rarely have the world's leading players been so inanimate; the visual world is indeed the "weapons of mass distraction".<sup>1</sup> With the dynamics of the international politics assuming such a sophisticated and subtle form, it is no wonder the discipline has failed to come up with a comprehensive

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<sup>1</sup> Shashi Tharoor, "Weapons of Mass Distraction", *The Hindu*, 20 June 2004.

module to suggest a possible resolution to the ongoing undeclared World War III. Though sections of the scholastic community and experts tend to perceive the post-9/11 conflict in terms of State vs. non-State players<sup>2</sup> where the non-State agent once nourished by the state has decided to go after its former master; there appears to be more to the story than is being discussed. A little awareness of the world around us would unwind the show that the 'War on Terror' or *Jihad* is not being fought between the State and non-State actors alone; instead it is the human mind itself which is the battleground of this conflict. In that way this war is more widespread than previously experienced wars as it is raging in the mind of the people. This war is one such existential conflict where the humanity participates at an individual level because ultimately it is about gaining control over the human mind.<sup>3</sup> No wonder both the USA and the *jihadi* Al-Qaeda and its off-shoots are depending heavily on a wide array of visual mediums from films to television and the Internet. The crucial arena occupied by the visual regiment seems to have been realized by both the illiberal fighting machine of the US and the Web-savvy Islamicists. Any idea of resolution of this conflict should therefore take into consideration the visual culture of the international politics as it is this which has direct access to the mind and imagination of the world. Genuine talk of resolution of this conflict should therefore begin by critiquing the projection of the conflict in the visual medium and honestly unearthing the hidden dynamics behind such an interpretation.

Bereft of such an incisive approach the world seems totally enclosed within the cycle of violence. It is with this aim to assert the nature of conflict-obsessed

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<sup>2</sup> K. Subramanyam, "Passing of a President: Dubious Legacy of Ronald Reagan", *Times of India*, pp.4.

<sup>3</sup> "The Battle For Hearts and Minds", *Time*, 22 October 2001, p.34.

international community that the conclusion of the dissertation was titled as Enclosure. There lies the justification for this exception. Enclosure here is the announcement of the end of this dissertation as much as a comment on the state of international political actors today as they stand engaged in a mortal combat within the enclosure of mindless violence. Here therefore I make a case for thinking anew the project of the visual in the new century.

Why the visual? Because as a war that has so far not seen commanders talk to each other directly, the post-9/11 conflict is indeed a novelty imposed upon the unsuspecting world. In a world where enemies do not talk to each other through megaphones, chances are the ongoing conflict will drag on to periods deep in the future. Does that therefore mean that this is a war between two camps of people impaired by the absence of the five senses? The answer of course is NO. There is a language through which the West and the Islamic fundamentalists have been speaking. We simply have to look around ourselves to vocalize that language. The West has been using the visual media rather actively in its pursuit of domination of the East for the past many years. Surprisingly, the new challenger too has been rather an innovative user of the visual media if its strategic use of videotapes and websites are an indication of this capability. However its intervention in the visual culture amounts to mere pin pricks before the overwhelming presence of visuals generated by the USA in particular and the West in general. Therefore the effort of pointing out the language therefore directs us towards the U.S. generated media, films and other images, because it is this visual culture that has become the language of war. A dialect of resolution of conflicts therefore will have to grow within this visually rich depiction of the Other of the West. That would find an appropriate beginning by deconstructing the project of neo-Orientalism writ large

in the Hollywood-centric visual culture of the West. It is on the movie screen and the screen of the TV that the great 'epistemic violence'<sup>4</sup> takes place. Therefore no talk of conflict resolution in the present violent international scenario can neglect the neo-Orientalism prevalent in the visual culture of our world. It is therefore the much needed infusion of a new ethic of reconciliation and mutual accommodation into the visual culture that will inaugurate a new language in the field of visual culture that will make it possible to turn the media<sup>5</sup>, films and professional photography into facilitators of the much needed dialogue between civilisations.

As visual culture becomes a huge battlefield it is difficult however, the path or the plan to be taken to create the new visual language of reconciliation. While there is no dearth of Allied/American military excesses in Iraq, the Islamic militants are fast becoming expert users of the visual paraphernalia. By the end of June two American and a South Korean civilian had been beheaded under the spotlight of the video camera. The executions were telecast worldwide in all their aberrant details with the help from sympathetic Websites. The Internet has emerged as a low cost visual weapon of the resistance fighters in Iraq and the rest of the Arabian Peninsula. Such acts of course cause a great deal of fear in the mind of people and their worldwide visual telecast fans fear and horror of violence further. But as already noted use of the Internet for spreading the political message

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<sup>4</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can The Subaltern Speak?", in Bill Ashcroft and others, ed., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London, 2003), pp.26-27 [Spivak notes that 'epistemic violence' is a weapon with which the European scholars have defined their continent's Other as a mere shadow of their conception of the Self which is designed to represent Europe. This violence, according to her unfolds within narrations in fields as diverse as "law, political economy and ideology of the West". She cautions and critiques the radical criticism pouring out of the academic complexes of the West stating that their criticisms of the Self would end up further empowering it rather than weaken its exploitative qualities which are mainly directed towards the 'Other'. By borrowing this concept from Spivak I have tried to show that such a violence goes on also in the visual sphere which constructs West Asia replete with Orientalist stereotypes which is ultimately defeated or eliminated in frame after frame of films, photographic coverages at a virtual level and produces the language of domination which one finds apparent in the visual culture or the U.S.-led image production industry of the West.]

<sup>5</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *ibid.*

of the Islamic guerrillas is not so significant compared to the use of the media and the film industry by the American arm of cultural reproduction. Definitely as the master of the visual age it is the USA that has been the champion of electronic media's alliance with its war machine. It has tried time and again to establish a satellite channel that would serve as a spokesperson of its views in West Asia. This ambition was fulfilled with the launch of Al Hurra channel.<sup>6</sup> With the launch of this channel US administration has found a very useful mouthpiece to the people in the region. One anomaly however is that though the channel in question criticizes the regional regimes for lack of freedom, suppression of democratic aspiration of the people and excessive state control over the media, it itself is the recipient of \$62 million in financial aid from the State Deptt of the U.S. govt. Now, the contradiction of receiving huge amount in financial grant from the U.S. Congress and appear critical of state interference in the media can be explained by the statement that this is a marriage of convenience because the big bombs must be coupled by big image-generating factories in the unconventional conflict raging worldwide.

The Western visual media is not alone in recording the contemporary events of importance. In recent months there have been films like *Live From Baghdad* that have presented a cinematic version of the Iraq campaign of 1991 in the context of the contemporary conflict albeit from a Western perspective. Cinematic presentation of contemporary international developments is not a very common trend, but there has been transcended in recent days too; such is the compulsions of the latest war. Timing of the telecast brought the film closer to public attention quickly. It was a depiction of real life challenges faced by the

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<sup>6</sup> [www.weeklyindependent.com](http://www.weeklyindependent.com)

CNN's team of reporters during the 1991 Gulf War. The political significance of the live coverage of that event that ultimately created the phenomenon of "live coverage" was left unaddressed by the film. *Live From Baghdad* showed the triumph of a handful of individuals as they telecast live images of a war from a territory that is hostile to their country of origin. Such difficult acts in the face of hostile official censorship, armtwisting and other forms of non-cooperation, of course stands out as great success; however, even more significant was the fact that through that single act of intrepid journalism CNN gave body to American hegemony for the post-Cold War era apart from beginning a new era in television journalism. It can be stated with guarded certainty the signature of American era in international politics could be found in the CNN's reports from the battlefield in Iraq.

The real American success in 1991 War was therefore the intensification of the information warfare to a higher level by successfully narrating the war from Iraqi soil from a partisan perspective; the 'shock and awe' of the U.S. military might was directly a product of that tradition of warrior culture of visuals, the most famous frame of which being the greenish Iraqi anti-aircraft guns chasing fruitlessly the Allied jets over the sky of Baghdad.

The events of post-9/11 days especially in Iraq are fit followers of the 1991 War because this is a single cycle of violence ignited and sustained by the discursive violence described above. It is not possible to expect message of conflict resolution from the images of violence, perhaps, that is why the American hegemony of the West Asian region has been simultaneously a visual project and a violent scheme for they are entwined. A survey of the impact of visual project upon the American masses and the world at large must therefore look at the larger

questions of the nature of the visual culture and its links that has provided a very wide portrait of discourse to this dissertation and evidently the temptation to dip into that water has been impossible to resist in these pages.

One important lesson that one learns by an overall survey of the visual culture of the Western world is that there are other forms of language apart from its spoken and written manifestations and that the visual language is equally vulnerable to flaws as the structure of the real language or *langue*<sup>7</sup> carries the anomalies within it. Conflict thus is encoded into the body of the language and in the context of the present dissertation, serious thoughts of its resolution should appropriately begin by a study and critique of the power and partisanship of the language of the visual culture.

There are a number of similarities between Orientalism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the present era in terms of the latent motivations to politics. Edward Said tells that the statement of Arthur James Balfour regarding British presence in Egypt on June 13, 1910 was supported by two aspects of imperial authority, that is, knowledge and power.<sup>8</sup> Similar ideas come to mind when one is faced by the image of Secretary of State Gen. Collin Powell holding a vial of white powder and trying to convince the UN Security Council of the necessity to disarm the WMD capabilities of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The latter developments showed that the WMDs were not on the ground in Iraq and that Iraq and effectively been disarmed since mid-1990s. Then what was the basis of General Powell's conclusions in the UN Security Council? Clearly, apart from the

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<sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London, 1977). See p. 28 [Barthes says: "*real language* [langue]" is "*intelligible only if one has learned the signs*" He distinguishes *langue* that is 'real language' from the 'photographic language' or *langage*. My contention is that it is futile to blame the imageries because they ultimately follow the 'real language' of the dominant political discourse. Thus the real critique ultimately lies at the door of the hegemonic power discourse in the world that finds honest reflection in the culture of photography and imageries, both moving and still].

<sup>8</sup> Bill Ashcroft et al, *ibid*, pp. 1.

differences of time and space Colin Powell was very close to Balfour in essence of his declarations. Powell too spoke on the basis of his authority founded on the pillars of knowledge and power, both of which were generated by the active machinery of the visual culture of the West.

### **Invented geography as a case for war**

The Iraq campaign of the U.S.-led war machinery has materialized simultaneously with a similar campaign in the virtual fields of the T.V. and movie screens. During the first phase of the conflict the U.S. took upon itself the task of liberating the Iraqis from the grip of the evil regime of Saddam Hussein which apart from suppressing the popular will of Iraq was irresponsible enough to manufacture Weapons of Mass Destruction, the US authorities said. Such a self-proclaimed and totally uninvited campaign for liberation was unforeseen in the annals of the world's history. The rhetoric in the run up to the invasion was amazing to say the least. The question is how does the superpower assume that a particular country is waiting to be liberated by dint of its exercise of military might. The ground for such seemingly impossible rhetoric was prepared by the image of the irresponsible Arab in films and the media that was discussed in the Chapter 1.

The Iraq war was launched on the newly invented territory of West Asia. The post-Cold War days saw a particular intensification of (e)vilificatory campaign of the West against the Arab lands. This particular piece of geography was very much a project of the visual culture that facilitated the growth of the rhetoric of the invasion. Due to the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 and the mounting American casualties in Iraq the anti-Arab tone of U.S. visual industry assumed a shriller proportion. As a result nearly all aspects of Arab/Muslim life is being portrayed negatively in the public sphere; so much so that even the *muezzin's* call

for prayer has drawn parallels with war cries.<sup>9</sup> Here in the Iraqi project of the U.S. armed forces lies the quiet alliance of memory and geography through the visual culture. While President Bush's campaign has drawn repeated comparison with British expedition in Iraq in 1920, Iraq itself was not a very distant from the imaginative minds of the US. Apart from *Exorcist* there were many other instances where the Hollywood portrayed the Arabs and especially the land of Iraq in military terms. For example even in the 1940s the Arabs were portrayed in Hollywood films as skyjackers and murderers threatening the U.S. and a movie titled *Adventure in Iraq* showed U.S. forces bombarding Iraq.<sup>10</sup> This dissertation has tried to show the immediate visual pre-text to the Iraq War 2003 but as examples cited in this page show this is merely an intensification of a very old cultural project of American animosity towards West Asia. The ongoing American campaign shows that the visual culture of the US is neo-colonial in nature that draws from its memory of describing the people of West Asia in negative terms. Like the work of the biblical scholars who also were the accidental inventors of the history of ancient Israel<sup>11</sup> the torch bearers of the cinematic culture and the electronic media too have performed the similar role of a facilitator in the West Asian project of the USA.

As the 'transfer' of power took place on 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2004 from the USA the final shape of the map of Iraq and the direction of the American enterprise there remains far from clear. What however remains clear is that in an environment when the image of the enemy is firmly etched in the collective memory of the respective camps of the participants in the conflict, chances of resolution of the

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<sup>9</sup> Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Real Bad Arabs", *Cineaste* (New York), Vol. 28, No.4, Fall 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Suhair Majaj, *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Keith J. Whitelam, *ibid.* [Please refer to the footnote in p. 34 from Chapter 1].

conflict are far from materializing soon. The kind of retributive visual culture in practice in the USA and the latest spree of beheading videos of the insurgents of the Islamicist groups sustains an atmosphere antithetical for conflict resolution. It would be impossible to dream of resolution when people are inundated by disturbing images from Iraq. The recognition of the power of images in the American campaign in Iraq has come from none less than the philosopher Francis Fukuyama.<sup>12</sup> According to Fukuyama the image of the hooded Iraqi prisoner at Abu Ghraib is fast becoming the iconic representation of the war in Iraq overcoming the powerful image of the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein on April 9, 2003. The widespread condemnation of those images revealed the hollow moral foundation of American invasion of Iraq despite all rhetorics. Such images betray a poor management of the war. Though supportive of U.S. initiative against terrorist activities, Fukuyama disagrees with a great deal regarding the neo-conservative decision makers in the present Republican administration in White House.

A solution to the present phase of the crisis will come by careful rejection of the culture of confrontation projected through the visual media in the world today. Such a process shall be the first step towards the elimination of the extraordinary form of violence with its extraordinary roots.

It is time to close the dissertation, but before that it is necessary to address the issue with which this concluding comment began. Accordingly, it is necessary to raise the question: what is the nature of the Enclosure within which mankind increasingly finds itself? Perhaps it is not within the ambit of this dissertation to discuss the question directly. But still this question is complicated enough to merit

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<sup>12</sup> "The Thinking Man's Trumpet", *The Sunday Times Magazine*, June, 27, 2004, pp. 45-50.

a mention in the conclusion. This researcher has tried to probe the bigger picture behind everyday international developments that unfold in the movie halls, TV screens and news photography, leading to the conclusion that the visual culture of our age itself is polluted with the granules of violence which it expertly disseminates across the world; now comes the real issue: if the walls of the 'Enclosure' are made of the visuals of violence and neo-Orientalism, what exactly is the total nature of that compound. Without dismissing the phenomenon itself, let it be noted here that the essence and nature of that prison is globalisation. The neo-Orientalism critiqued here springs from the fast dissemination of images and preponderance of the West in the 'image world'.<sup>13</sup> Emergence of Neo-Orientalism proves the widely accepted observation that the whole process of globalization is congenitally deformed by a severe crisis marked by "underprovision of global public goods" such as peace, security and financial stability".<sup>14</sup>

The political-economic structure of neo-liberal globalization is the larger playfield within which the language of neo-Orientalism finds its visual expression. Neo-Orientalism is the language of globalization to perpetuate its present uneven character to undated future.

But how long can the human civilization go on by turning each other into objects of conquest and hegemony because such a system simply disfigures both the tormentor and the tormented. The victory of unilateralism is the defeat of fairplay, justice, and the structures of conflict prevention and resolution that grew

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Sontag, *ibid.* p. 153.

<sup>14</sup> Inge Kaul, and others, eds., *Global Public Goods* (Oxford University Press, 1999), see p. xxi. See also, Anthony Giddens, *ibid.* pp. 34 [the biased nature of the international trade regime led by rule-flouting TNCs and MNCs earned the dubious sobriquet of "global pillage" from Giddens who rather quickly dismisses all talks of "global village"].

after much bloodletting in the international arena. Man once again has welded a chain to tie themselves to bygone era. Let us reminisce Rousseau here:

Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they. How did this change come about? I do not know. What can make it legitimate? That question I think I can answer.<sup>15</sup>

In this dissertation it was observed that the 'chains' have acquired indeed much nuanced forms and attempts were made to show how they have sought to become legitimate.

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<sup>15</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and The Discourses*, G.D.H.Cole, trans. (London 1993), pp. 181.

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*Delta Force* (1986): Famous Israeli war film maker Menahem Golan wrote and directed this Hollywood action epic.

*Dracula* (1931): One of the first horror films with global audience from Hollywood *Dracula* was directed by Tod Browning

*Exorcist* (1971): William Friedkin directed this landmark horror film. Friedkin's film was chosen for his depiction of Iraq's ancient ruins as the place of origin of the villain of his movie: the Devil

*Independence Day* (1996): This sci-fi /action film was directed by Roland Emmerich. His forthcoming film is intricately linked to West Asian-North African history; titled *King Tut*, it would deal with young pharaoh Tutankhamen's struggle to reclaim his dead father's throne. *King Tut* would be released in 2005.

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