

Filling the Gap: American Studies at the University of Tehran

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Abstract

American Studies is a well-documented tradition that was initiated by the United States government outside the country as a part of US public diplomacy efforts during the Cold War. On the other hand, it also has its roots in twentieth century United States academia. Hence, like the much older tradition of Oriental studies, this interdisciplinary field of inquiry has its roots in 'the West' and this by itself has significant implications with regards to the nature of the production of knowledge in this area of study as well as its broader social, cultural, and political implications. It also seems that strong similarities exist in the American exceptionalism existing in much of American Studies and the Eurocentrism pervasive in the much older field of Oriental Studies. This is important to keep in mind when attempting to understand some of the reasons why the University of Tehran chose to initiate what is officially North American Studies, but what students and colleagues at the university usually call American Studies.

Keywords: American Studies, Orientalism, Exceptionalism, Iran

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Introduction

Oriental studies is a field of study which has come under strong criticism in the last few decades of the twentieth century both in parts of western academia, but more importantly from “Oriental” scholars. Orientalism often includes “Near Eastern” and “Far Eastern” societies (two terms that reaffirm the Eurocentrism imbedded in this field of study) and it describes the various schools of thought and methods of investigation through which Europe came to know ‘the East.’ According to critics it was and still is through this discourse and its construction of knowledge that the West has been able to legitimize and maintain its hold over the supposedly uncivilized ‘Other.’ A major and repeated feature of Oriental analysis in all its various forms is that it constantly confirms the thesis that the Orient is primitive, despotic, mysterious, exotic, and incapable of self-government. However, Orientalism should not be looked upon as simply the rationalization of colonial rule. Far more important, it seems, is how it knowingly or unknowingly justifies imperialism and colonialism even in advance of their actual manifestation.

Foucault sees Orientalism as a discourse and a severely bounded area of social knowledge or “heavily policed cognitive systems which control and delimit both the mode and the means of representation in a given society” (Gandhi, 1998: 77). It is a series of statements, through which the world can be known, as it is not recognized by simply analyzing objective data. Its recognition is brought into being through discourse, which is ideologically loaded, but independent of individual will and judgment. According to critics, discourse is the

system of thought by which dominant powers establish spheres of 'knowledge' and 'truth', and it is through such discursive practices that religions, races, cultures, and classes are represented. The idea of representation is usually based upon a notion of being faithful to the original. However, representation is largely interwoven with many other things besides 'truth'. Representation is a phenomenon created by writers, intellectuals, artists, commentators, reporters, travelers, politicians, as well as others working within similar discursive formations.

This perspective permits critics to consider numerous 'Western' texts, from apparently separate intellectual disciplines such as politics, media, history, linguistics, and literature, among others, as belonging to a single discourse called Orientalism. What brings these texts together is the common culture and ideology intrinsic to the discursive practices through which they produce knowledge about the Orient. These discursive "practices make it difficult for individuals to think outside them – hence they are also seen as exercises of power and control" (Loomba, 1998: 39).

It is often the case that orientalist modes of thought and representation are actually able to survive contact with the reality on the ground with which it often seems to be at odds with. One reason for this may be that the need for creating an overall consistency in discourse may constantly prevent the realization of objective analysis as well as commitment to 'truth'. The stronger the discourse becomes the longer it lives, and the better it is able to bring about consistency within its borders. This is helped through the continued repetition and adaptation of its motifs.

An important aspect of Edward Said's *Orientalism* is that it explains the methods through which 'the Other' was constructed by the West as its barbaric, irrational, despotic, and inferior opposite or alter ego. It is a type of surrogate and underground version of the West or the 'self'. What may be even more significant is that through its position of domination, the West is even able to tell the 'truth' to

non-Western cultures, in this case the Orient, about their past and present condition, as they are capable of representing the Orient more authentically than the Orient can itself. Such a 'truthful' representation not only aids the colonizer or imperialist in justifying their actions, but it also serves to weaken the resistance of 'the Other' as it changes the way in which 'the Other' views itself.

I. Myth and Symbol in American Studies

The US has an image problem globally but the problem is especially acute in the Middle East. The expansion of political Islam, resistance and anti-Americanism in the so called "geopolitics of terror" poses a "threat" to the US interests in the region. In this context US academic presence is perceived as a vital tool for strengthening values exemplified by Americans to enhance public diplomacy with the native populations. Educating the so called "moderate" generations of young Muslims that are not "obsessed" with notions such as American imperialism and colonialism is one of the important reasons for promoting American universities as well as American Studies programs by the US government in the region.

In the eyes of many colleagues working on (North) American Studies, this field of study is influenced by the idea of American exceptionalism. In other words, much of the knowledge produced in American Studies, as in Oriental Studies, often reaffirms the belief that the West, or more specifically the United States, has a legitimate right to maintain its hold over a supposedly less civilized 'Other.'

"American exceptionalism" and the "American Century" seem to have been the two driving forces for American Studies programs both inside and outside of the United State (Edwards & Gaonkar, 2010:1). Both perceptions, closely linked together, assume a world mission for America to spread liberty and democracy.

Accordingly the first and maybe the most enduring methodology in American Studies is the "myth and symbol" approach, primarily drawn from literature and history and developed

in texts such as *Virgin Land* by Henry Nash Smith and *The Machine in the Garden* by Leo Marx. According to these scholars certain recurring images and themes can be found in American texts and literature that promoted and glorified American exceptionalism.

According to Donald Pease, after the Second World War, US American Studies scholarship was regarded as a kind of cultural diplomacy tool that exempted it from subordination to "foreign" knowledge productions about the United States and that rendered U.S. American studies scholars immune to the scholarly influence of "non-American" students of American studies (cited in Edwards&Gaonkar, 2010: 48). During the Cold War Americanists took an explicit rhetoric of American exceptionalism into academic formations. The "myth and symbol" approach toward American Studies has been criticized considerably since the late 1960s and 1970s (Rowe, 2010:28). A significant reason for the criticism was US foreign policy during the Vietnam War and its consequences that had disillusioned many Americans with their myth and symbols. Giles Gunn considers the myth and symbol school "an overly timid and elitist white Protestant male enterprise which tended to reinforce the dominant culture rather than critically analyze it" (Wise, 1979:312). According to Lasch this method perpetuated nationalistic myths of American uniqueness, which reflect the degree to which many historians have become apologists for American national power (1968: 323).

By the early 1990s U.S. Americanists called for careful attention to ways that gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, region, and class as well as chronology condition their generalizations. The new American Studies is also claimed to be attentive to US history of traditional imperialism and neo-imperialism (Rowe, 2010:7). Transnational American Studies emerged as a reaction to and a solution for the univocal approaches of American Studies inside the United States. Though the transnational American Studies claimed to be inclusive of different nations, cultures, and peoples to transcend the limitation of

“national American imaginary,” the trend is still more Eurocentric and mostly dominant by European American Studies scholars than those who come from the so called East.

The exceptionalist approach toward American Studies seems to be still dominant in many Middle Eastern American Studies programs, supported by US State, for practical reasons. Djelal Kadir maintains that:

Just as America and American Studies were defined by the Marshall Plan in Europe at the end of World War II, America and American Studies are being defined even as we speak by the martial role the current US regime has scripted for itself as its political *raison d'etre* in the Middle East and in the rest of the world. (D'haen., Giles, et al: 2005: 25).

As Kadir mentions after September 11, 2001 American exceptionalism in American Studies has turned into a meta-agent of a new American Studies. According to Kadir, Bush's governance inaugurated a new paradigm of U.S. American Studies to call attention to:

The disciplinary exceptionalism of the US American Studies; in this way American exceptionalism both referred and regulated the form of knowledge produced about the US American Studies is, indeed, very much a discipline in the strongest Foucauldian sense of governmentality. It is so to the point of having disciplined the practitioners of American Studies to deny that their practice form and are formed by discipline (ibid: 147)

II. American Studies Programs in the Middle East

American Studies programs in the Middle East are relatively new; except for Turkey which has the oldest program since the 1950s, other programs in Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Iran almost all have been founded after the turn of century (Yousef, 2006: 151). The programs are often supported by the U.S. State Department through funds and personnel either supplied indirectly

(via the Fulbright Programs) or through formal affiliations with the United States Information Agency, U.S governmental institutions and embassies. For example the American Studies program at the University of Jordan⁽¹⁾ (since 2000) and Al-Auds University⁽²⁾ (since 2002) have strong connections with the Fulbright Program. Since 1985 The United States Congress has constantly supported the American University of Cairo and later the American studies program by passing a legislation that provided for the establishment of a trust fund at the American Embassy in Cairo⁽³⁾. The American Studies Center at the University of Bahrain enjoys extensive support from the US State Department for exchange programs, scholarships and educational aid⁽⁴⁾.

One important point that should be taken into consideration is that American Studies programs in the region differ widely in their nature, structure and the purpose of establishment. Presenting a monolithic picture all American Studies programs in the West Asia as American state agents would ignore some genuine attempts made by both Middle Eastern and American scholars in the field as well as the active and intelligent Middle Eastern students that are educated in these centers.

Hypothetically the expansion of American Studies in the Middle East would challenge and depolarized the American Euro-centric vision of the United States; this becomes more critical when one considers the historical military presence of the US in the region and the subsequent anti-American feelings among most of the native people. The Middle Eastern students of American Studies would probably not look at their history from an American prism but to contextualize their knowledge through their own experiences and the reality on the ground. While usually such programs with their roots in Western forms of knowledge use western theories, concepts, methods and analysis, the “localization” of American Studies in the region can still challenge the dominant discourse and pursue alternative knowledge.

III. American Studies in Tehran

The 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution with its anti-imperialist stance was regarded by many western countries as the beginning of “Islamic fundamentalism” in the region with political power. For the United States “the political change had transformed Iran from a staunch ally into one of the most intractable opponents of the United States in the region and beyond” (Hass, 2004: viii). Since then “the revolution is a political prism through which the two countries view each other” (Litwak: 2000: 158). Iran is the only country in the region which has no formal relations with the US.

Establishment of American Studies program in Tehran University was an academic response to a political entity, which had a hostile history toward the post-Revolutionary Iran. Considering the important role and increasing presences of the US in the Middle East region, Iranian academicians at the University of Tehran decided to found a center that according to the head of the program, not only does it have the potential to create a better understanding in Iranian society of the U.S., but it also provide an opportunity for the distinctive understanding of the U.S. that is relevant to American Studies program in general.

The idea of North American Studies as a university degree program is surprisingly new in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The idea surfaced fourteen years ago (2003), and the establishment of the department itself at the University of Tehran’s Institute for North American and European Studies (INAES) occurred about twelve years ago (2005). Thus, while political and military conflict with the United States is nothing new to Iranian politics and society, as the United States has for years constantly threatened the Iranian public with war, sanctions, embargos, and blockages, the need for aspecialized academic study of Iran’s most significant political and military adversary was only recently realized.

This does not mean that academic work related to the United

States was previously nonexistent in the country. Significant work was already being done at different Iranian universities throughout the country in different university departments such as History, English Language and Literature, Political Science, International Relations, Social Sciences, and Performing Arts among others. In addition, there were numerous academic and non-academic think tanks, centers, and institutes that carried out research and held seminars on issues related to the US. However, an interdisciplinary program that focused on the United States was completely new. The American Studies program in Iran seems to pursue two broad goals: first to generate knowledge and educate expertise for practical reasons; second to have a cultural approach toward a formerly politicized entity.

When the idea of establishing INAES was first put to the University of Tehran, the response was mixed. While many colleagues supported the idea, others believed that the establishment of such an institute and more importantly an American Studies program would serve to reinforce the ideology of American exceptionalism and ultimately do more harm than good. Some of the more senior professors believed that interdisciplinary programs of this nature (and in general) are of little value if not meaningless and that the establishment of the Institute would be a waste of resources. However, a group of academics firmly believed that because of the importance of the United States, Iran needed academic expertise that included American history and society. This group believed it was important to have young men and women trained in the field who would then move on to jobs in the public and private sectors, with an adequate understanding of a country whose political and cultural force is undeniable.

Many non-Iranian scholars and specialists, almost always western colleagues, are surprised that there actually is an American Studies program in Iran. They sometimes assume that the “authorities” and Iranian government officials present the main obstacle to such a program. This, it seems, has a lot to do with the

dominant discursive practices on Iran in much of the “West”. It is probably for the same reason that a few western colleagues have enquired whether the students in the program are fed with anti-American rhetoric. Ironically, almost all of the texts and articles used by colleagues in their classes have been published in the US. Some American colleagues have even gone further and have stated that Iranians do not have the ability or the understanding to produce knowledge in this field. They believe that Iranians are not in a position to adequately comprehend the complexities of American society nor are they able to analyze the United States “objectively”. The reality, however, is that Iranian “authorities” and officials did not pose any obstacle to the establishment of INAES or (North) American Studies. In fact, they were quite supportive. On the other hand, in 2010 two former senior US government officials who worked in the George W. Bush administration’s National Security Council spent a few hours with our students of American Studies and were highly impressed. Upon returning to the United States they wrote:

We particularly want to say how impressed we were with the graduate students in American studies with whom we had the opportunity to spend some time. University admissions in Iran are done on the basis of competitive national examinations. Those Iranian students who end up at the University of Tehran are among the brightest young people in the country. But, beyond their obvious intelligence and talent, the graduate students in American studies impressed us with their seriousness and determination to explore their subject as deeply as possible.

One of our favorite moments came when two female graduate students (most of the graduate students we met are women) asked us for advice. The two were preparing for an exercise in one of their classes, in which students would—in English—hold a mock U.S. congressional debate about health care reform legislation. These two students were tasked to represent the Republican side

of the debate. They had already done extensive research; they were, for example, aware of editorial differences among CNN, MSNBC, and Fox in these networks' coverage of the health care debate in the United States. But, while these two students had the opportunity to talk with a couple of American political analysts, they wanted to deepen their understanding of the nuances of conservative argument about health care reform in the United States (Leverett, F., & Leverett, H. M., 2010).

The University of Tehran MA program in North American Studies takes two years to complete and a PhD program was initiated in 2010. In addition, the majority of the MA and PhD students have been female. The fact that the program is interdisciplinary, has allowed students from a variety of academic backgrounds and with different interests to enter the program and enrich it. The program has had student who had previously obtained degrees in Political Science, English language and Literature, Sociology, International Relations, Social Communications, and even in fields such as Chemistry, Physics, Engineering, and Accounting. The differing academic backgrounds themselves encourage a plurality of perspectives, in addition to the fact that it reveals the popularity of the program. However, the complexity of attitudes towards American Studies and particularly the United States cannot be explained simply by the different academic backgrounds of our students. As visiting professors have discovered, attitudes towards the US are extremely complex and diverse (Edwards, 2007, pp. 415-424).

It is important to point out that the reason why the North American Studies department was established within the framework of the Institute for North American and European Studies, was to insure that academic research at the University of Tehran doesn't fall into the same troubled waters of Oriental Studies, by creating a monolithic 'Other' or a 'Western Studies' program where very diverse peoples and nations are often lumped together. Gradually, after the establishment of the North American Studies department, the

Russian, French, British, and German Studies departments were also created. It was partially for this reason that INAES ultimately evolved into the Faculty of World Studies, since which Indian and Latin American studies programs, Iranian Studies, French and German Studies, etc. have also been initiated. Of course, there were other reasons too, the study of non-western countries and regions were rapidly becoming more important and also world studies would encourage students and colleagues to refrain from a Eurocentric or exceptionalist approach in their academic work.

Professor Amy Kaplan in a famous anti-exceptionalist essay titled 'Left Alone with America', which was written in response to Perry Miller's preface to his *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956):

Kaplan proposes three paradigm shifts for new work in American studies, built around signal absences: the absence of the study of culture in historical accounts of American imperialism; the role of empire in the study of American culture; and the absence of American studies within postcolonial studies. The essay was and is a monument in the reconfiguration of American studies as it grappled with the end of the long cold war (Edwards & Gaonkar, 2010:9).

Contrary to the claims made by a small number of Americans about the inability of colleagues in Tehran to objectively and competently study the United States, and what implications that may have for the study of Iran in the US, the significance of the North American studies program at the University of Tehran is at least partially linked to the fact that it attempts to deal with these absences in an academic fashion.

Contrary to the claims made by a small number of our American colleagues about the inability of colleagues in Tehran to objectively and competently study America, the significance of the (North) American studies program at the University of Tehran is at least partially linked to the fact that our program attempts to deal with these absences in an academic fashion.

Despite the program's success, there were and are still a number of issues with which needs attention: one of the most important ones has been finding academics who are both capable and interest in working in this particular field. They needed to be able to teach in the English language as all courses in the Department of North American Studies are taught in that language. Naturally, for a few years the department had to rely heavily on academics from different departments and faculties as well as colleagues from other universities.

Hence, the goal was to establish a North American Studies Department that would have its own full-time academic staff and thus be able to gain a degree of independence from other departments. While the University of Tehran has many exceptional academics, only a small number of them are interested in or capable of teaching in English. Even more significant is the fact that only a handful of scholars specialize in fields specifically linked to this particular field of study. For example, there are a number of excellent historians, but none who specialize in the history of Mexico, Canada, or the United States and who are also comfortable with teaching in English. However, over the years the faculty had the fortune to find a number of qualified academics who could meet the needs of the program. The objective of having an independent department has been largely achieved and most courses are now taught by full-time members of the department.

Another problem is dealing with is the existing difficulties for students to travel to the United States, Mexico, or Canada, which is obviously important for better understanding North America. Part of this problem is because of the poor relations with the US government and part of the problem is because of the sheer distance and cost of travelling and accommodation.

IV. Perceptions of the Students

In order to grasp how Iranian students of American Studies view the

US as well as the program's approach toward North America a questionnaire was distributed through email among 60 students and graduate students from both programs⁽⁵⁾ (MA and PhD). 58% of the students responded to a questionnaire consists of both close-ended and open-ended questions. In the closed-ended version, respondents were provided four options; in the open ended questions students had no limitation in responding to the questions.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts: in the first section students were asked about their views toward the United States' current government, foreign policy, culture and its people in general. The questionnaire also consisted of several questions on Iran-US relations in particular. The second part was mostly focused on the North American Studies program at their university. Students were asked about ideas that they had developed during their studies at the faculty and their motivations for participating in the program. They were also asked about the courses they found more interesting.

V. Findings

74% of the students had either a very unfavorable (26%) or somewhat unfavorable view (48 %) toward the US current government (Obama) while 26 % of students expressed either somewhat favorable (22%) or very favorable (4%) views toward the US current government. When students were asked about their views toward US foreign policy negative views were higher with 81% of respondents having either very unfavorable (46%) or somewhat unfavorable views (35%). On the other hand 19% of the respondents had had somewhat favorable (11%) or very favorable view (8%) toward the US foreign policy.

The students approach toward the American people and culture was significantly different with 77% of respondents having either very favorable (24%) or somewhat favorable (53%) views toward the American people. 23% of respondents though expressed unfavorable views toward the American people. Student perceptions toward

American culture was different with 67% having either very favorable (15%) or somewhat favorable (52%) views. 33% of students held either very unfavorable (3%) or somewhat unfavorable (30%) views toward the American culture.

Asked about their views on having more cultural, educational and sporting exchanges with the US, 89% of students favored such relations either strongly (48%) or somewhat strongly (41%). On the other hand about 12% of students either opposed it strongly (5%) or somewhat strongly (7%). When students were asked how important they think the nuclear program is for Iran 92% maintained that it is either very important (74%) or somewhat important (22%) while 4% stated that the program is not very important.

Student perceptions toward the American Studies program was also interesting. When asked if their perceptions toward the US changed since they began their studies at the faculty, a majority of students (76%) stated that their views toward the US became more balanced. 14% said that their views had become more positive and 10% became more negative.

Four open-ended questions were asked in order to allow respondents to include more information about the program; there were no limitations in answers to the open-ended questions and often students provided more than one answer.

In the first open-ended question students were asked about turning points in the history of Iran-US relations. The most frequent answer mentioned by 55% of students was the 1979 embassy takeover. 30% of the students stated the 1953 coup that was led by the CIA, 26% the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, 22% the sanctions on Iran by the US government, 22% the nuclear stand-off between the two countries, 18% the Iranian passenger airliner that was shot down by the US in 1988 in the Persian Gulf, 16% Bush's "axis of evil" as opposed to Iran's "dialogue among civilizations" which was referred by 8%.

When students were asked about images and symbols developed

regarding America during their studies 45% of students referred to an American interventionist and aggressive foreign policy which revolves around American exceptionalism and the concept of manifest destiny. 37% of the respondents referred to the multi-layered culture of the US and the creation of a collective identity. 29% referred to private ownership and the American dream. 25% referred to racial discrimination and 22% of students referred to US double standards on issues related to democracy. 18% of the respondents referred to the powerful US public diplomacy across the world that has been successful in creating an appealing image.

When students are asked which course(s) of the American Studies program they have found more interesting 44 % of students mentioned history courses, 37% ethnicity, 33% American civilization, 33% foreign policy, 15% cinema, 11% cultural studies and 11% US governmental structure.

The last open-ended question was on motivations and reasons for choosing this field of study. 37% mentioned US status as a major power in the international arena as the main reason for choosing the field; 22% expressed a desire to develop a more comprehensive and academic approach toward the US. 22% mentioned their interest in cultural aspects of the United States. 22% referred to the language proficiency prerequisite as an important factor in choosing the North American studies program. 15% of students stated that the multidisciplinary approach of American Studies is what made them interested in the program.

VI. Implications and Observations

One significant point that should be taken into consideration about teaching and studying area studies programs in general is the historical record of the target country toward one's own country, the historical and cultural memory of the people toward the target country and the present relations between the two countries which are all influential in shaping people's overall perceptions and understanding of one

another. In other words, area studies programs are inseparable from the past and present history of relations among countries. At the same time education can intensify or moderate previous perceptions and understandings of an area to foreign observers. This arguably becomes even more important in the case of studying the US in Iran. The history of relations between Iran and the U.S., historical memory and the present context are indispensable and inevitable areas of research.

Iran-US political relations are complicated and this complexity is reflected in the answers students gave when they were asked about turning point(s) in relations between the two countries. The fact that students could not mention at least one positive incident between the two countries is quite illuminating. The negative feelings is based on a long history of US government's interference and meddling in Iran's internal affairs that is not just limited to post-revolutionary Iran as it goes back to the 1953 coup. The present situation is no better considering the imposed sanctions that has turned the Iranian economy into a battlefield and presents ordinary Iranian as enemy combatants. Beside economic, trade, and scientific sanctions, the imposed sanctions on the Central Bank of Iran and the country's other financial institutions have disrupted even the purchase and transfer of medical supplies. These acts intensify negative feelings toward the US government and their policies among Iranian public in the long run.

Despite of the unfavorable views of the majority of Iranian students toward the US government and its foreign policy, their approach is quite different about cultural aspects of the United States and American people. 88% of students favored having more cultural, educational and sporting exchanges with the US either strongly or somewhat strongly. Cultural courses (such as ethnicity and civilization) are more popular than political ones. Nevertheless, cultural concepts (such as exceptionalism, American dream and manifest destiny) are among the most important for them in their

research, Therefore, while many students are eager to know more about the US culture, a critical look is visible here as well. This critical look challenges the “myth and symbol” approach of American studies. Student’s personal interests as well as the multidisciplinary approach of the program have arguably helped them to obtain a more comprehensive view about the United States.

Based on these findings the approach of Iranian students in the program toward the US is not holistic - an approach which makes no distinction between different layers of the US and assumes it as a monolithic entity. Holistics see a whole system, whether cultural, political or economics, as an integrative and inseparable structure (Ameli, 2007:52). On the contrary the students’ approach is distinctivist, which makes distinction between the different layers and aspects of the US. By making distinctions among cultural, political, social and ethnical aspects of the US, students have developed complicated and multi-layered perceptions toward the country. Unlike a holistic approach, distinctivism tends to have a more balanced and unbiased approach toward the “other”.

It can be argued that the North American Studies program in Iran has been able to enhance and balance student’s view toward the United States. When students are asked if their perceptions toward the US changed since they have begun their studies in the faculty, an overwhelming majority of students (82%) stated that their views toward the US have become more balanced and comprehensive.

Conclusion

According to Kadir international American Studies is witnessing dramatic scholarly transformations in which America’s role as sponsor of American Studies has changed to “a beneficiary of human resources and intellectual capital” (2005:14). He maintains that the new approach questions and demystifies American imaginary of the US and notions like the “American dream” and “American way” (ibid). Accordingly the critical approach of Iranian students, as

outsiders, can create an opportunity to help expand and challenge the dominant approach of American studies program. The approach of Iranian students toward the US is not a holistic one; on the contrary it is distinctivist, which makes distinction between different layers and aspects of the US. This enables students to develop complicated and multi-layered perceptions toward the United States. Unlike a holistic approach, distinctivism tends to have a more fair and unbiased approach toward other nations and cultures. While the materials used for courses in American Studies at the University of Tehran is, more or less, the same as those used in American Studies program in Western countries the context of education depolarizes and challenges the institutional and the intellectual hegemony of the US and Euro-centric social science and humanities disciplines. Students' attempts to understand and interpret social, cultural and political structures of the United States from a critical point of view have challenged the "myth and symbol" approach of many mainstream American Studies programs.

Beside the primary aims of the North American Studies program that were producing knowledge and expertise as well as having a cultural approach toward a formerly politicized entity, it seems that a third dimension has emerged which may not have had a direct relation with the initial intended goals of the program. That is by using Euro-American references, theories and knowledge Iranian students of American Studies have been able to contextualize and deformalize the dominant euro-centric approaches of American studies programs.

Notes

1. Marianne Craven (May7, 2012), *Seeing Fulbright in Action in Amman, Jordan*. Available at: http://blogs.state.gov/index.php/site/entry/fulbright_amman_jordan
2. Beside Fulbright, Al-Quds University and Brandeis University are engaged in an intercultural partnership that links an Arab institution in Jerusalem and a Jewish-sponsored institution in the United States. The program was supported in its early stages by nearly \$1 million funding from the Ford Foundation. Available at: <http://www.brandeis.edu/aqu/about/index.html>
3. *The American University in Cairo online catalogue*. Available at: http://www1.aucegypt.edu/catalog02/geninfo/university/Financial_Support/financial_support.html
4. Embassy of the United States in Manama; *Tomorrow's Leaders Scholarship Program*. Available at: <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/leaderscholarship.html>
5. Some of the questions are taken from 2007 poll by World Public Opinion entitled "Public Opinion in Iran and America on key international issues. Available at: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jan07/Iran_Jan07_rpt.pdf. See Also Seyed Mohammad Marandi's "Iranian Perspective on American Studies" (2009).

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