

THE VISUAL DIVIDE:
ISLAM VS. THE WEST,
IMAGE PERCEPTION IN CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXTS

by

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ABSTRACT

Do two people, coming from different cultural backgrounds, see the same image the same way? Do we employ technologies of seeing that embed visibility within relentless cultural and ideological frames? And, if so, when does visual difference become a tool for inclusion and exclusion? When does it become an instrument of war? I argue that we're always implicated in visibility as a form of confirmation bias, and that what we see is shaped by preexisting socio-ideological frames that can only be liberated through an active and critical relationship with the image. The image itself, albeit ubiquitous, is never unimplicated - at once violated and violating; with both its creator and its perceiver self-positioned as its ultimate subject.

I follow a trace of the image within the context of a supposed Islam versus the West dichotomy; its construction, instrumentalization, betrayals, and incriminations. This trace sometimes forks into multiple paths, and at times loops unto itself, but eventually moves towards a traversal of a visual divide. I apply the trace as my methodology in the sense suggested by Derrida, but also as a technology for finding my way into and out of an epistemological labyrinth.

The Visual Divide comprises five chapters: Chapter One presents some of the major themes of this work while attempting a theoretical account of image perception within philosophical and cross-cultural settings. I use this account to understand and undermine contemporary rhetoric (as in the works of Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis) that seems intent on theorizing a supposed cultural and historical dichotomies between Islam and the West

In Chapter Two, I account for slogan chants heard at Tahrir Square during the January 25 Egyptian revolution as tools to discovering a mix of technology, language and revolution that could be characterized as hybrid, plural and present at the center of which lies the human body as subject to public peril. Chapter Three analyzes a state of visual divide where photographic evidence is posited against ethnographic reality as found in postcards of nude and semi-nude Algerian Muslim women in the 19th century. I connect this state to a chain of visual oppositions that place Western superiority as its subject and which continues to our present day with the Abu Ghraib photographs and the Mohammed cartoons, etc. Chapter Four deploys the image of Mohamed al-Durra, a 3rd grader who was shot dead, on video, at a crossroads in Gaza, and the ensuing attempts to reinterpret, recreate, falsify and litigate the meaning of the video images of his death in order to propagate certain political doxa. I relate the violence against the image, by the image, and despite the image, to a state of pure war that is steeped in visuality, and which transforms the act of seeing into an act of targeting.

In Chapter Five, I integrate the concept of visuality with that of the human body under peril in order to identify conditions that lead to comparative suffering or a division that views humanity as something other than unitary and of equal value. I connect the figures of der Muselmann, Shylock, Othello, the suicide bomber, and others to subvert a narrative that claims that one's suffering is deeper than another's, or that life could be valued differently depending on the place of your birth, the color of your skin, or the thickness of your accent.

Finally, in the Epilogue: Tabbouleh Deterritorialized, I look at the interconnected states of perception and remembering within diasporic contexts. Cultural identity (invoked by an encounter with tabbouleh on a restaurant menu in Orlando) is both questioned and transformed and becomes the subject of perception and negotiation.

This work of many years is dedicated to the women of my life:

To Amira,

with my appreciation and apologies for all the times that daddy
couldn't play because he was busy with "homework",

To Leila,

so she may continue to see beauty in everything,

To Sarah,

who already knows that critical argumentation has its benefits,

To Hannah,

so she may know how endless are passionate pursuits,

To Beth,

with love and gratitude for a partnership of enlightenment and tenderness,

To my mother, Afaf,

so she could see that her hard work finally paid off,

And, to the one who taught me everything about life,

my grandmother, Shahriban,

no mythology could contain your story ...

no word could express the feeling.

Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

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INTRODUCTION

We are cornered by visuality. Not only that we have a need to be seen and to count, but also that **what** we see structures who we are and who others are. The eye is quick to classify, isolate, and reconstruct meanings in what it captures. This dissertation is concerned with the question of how meaning gets constructed and deconstructed within cross-cultural contexts, where the image becomes an instrument of power, a technology for affecting social, political, and cultural relations.

My inquiry attempts to ask the following questions, do two people, coming from different cultural backgrounds, see the same image the same way? Do we employ technologies of vision that embed visuality within relentless cultural and ideological frames? And, if so, when does visual difference become a tool for inclusion and exclusion? When does it become an instrument of war? I argue that we're always implicated in visuality as a form of confirmation bias and that what we see is shaped by preexisting socio-ideological frames that can only be liberated through an active and critical relationship with the image. The image itself, albeit ubiquitous, is never unimplicated—at once violated and violating; with both its creator and its perceiver self-positioned as its ultimate subject.

In a context where essentialist constructs like “the West” and “Islam” are used abbreviately, I take as a starting point a set of images, photographs, video footage, cartoons, and news stories in order to investigate the image, how it functions, how it communicates meaning, and what happens as it is perceived. By deconstructing these images and their implications, I find

that I am left with a trace of hands that touched the image and eyes that viewed the image, and as such the image is re-structured and altered.

I follow a trace that takes the shape of a dichotomy between “Islam” and “the West.” In this dichotomy, the image is implicated in its construction, instrumentalization, betrayals, and incriminations. The trace sometimes forks into multiple paths, and at times loops unto itself, but eventually moves towards a traversal of a visual divide. I apply the trace as my methodology in the sense suggested by Derrida, but also as a technology for finding my way into and out of an epistemological labyrinth. As such, I find myself applying an ad-hoc methodology that is more concerned with movement, observations, and making connections, as opposed to grand theory making. The search is intended to be reflective not only of a new research culture brought about by hypertext and the Internet, but also of the nomadic movement of the immigrant, the circulation of the postcard.

In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler draws attention to what she describes as the “issue of framing.” She explains that the question of framing is both epistemological and ontological in that it addresses the question, “What is a life?” Butler points out that if the answer to that question is “selective” in that only certain individuals or groups are deemed to have lives worthy of living according to “certain epistemological frames,” then, it could be said that certain lives “do not qualify as lives, or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives.” (Butler, *Frames* 1)

In the *Visual Divide*, I will work on conditions where a division of who is deemed worthy of living and who is not is a question practiced in visibility. I will investigate whether these epistemological frames are affected by visual difference, cultural identity, or other factors.

However, those who are not seen as worthy of living, who are acceptable as collateral damage, enemy combatants, and others with undesirable visual signifiers, may assert a “will to visibility,” which they may violently deploy until they are seen, and seen as humans whose lives are worthy of living.

The selectivity of where people stand relative to visibility and suffering is a cause of unease and humiliation for many around the world, specifically in the Muslim World. One may witness this sense of “double-standard” applied within contexts where cultural difference is markedly visual and where visual difference is perceived as an instrument of power that aims at incrimination and destruction. I argue that much violence could be viewed as an over-determination of this “will to visibility,” which may have manifested itself in the violent spectacularity of the terrorist attacks of al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001. When the question of visibility is perceived to have been assaultive, as in the comic images of prophet Mohamed, which were viewed as a visual insult against the religion, or when it shows up in the form of sexual humiliation as in the abu Ghraib prison photographs, the reaction to this visual assault and assault on the visual becomes the cause of much anger and violence. Almost in unison, one witnesses a remarkable and simultaneous rejection of visual difference in many countries where the public display of an Islamic visual identity is seen as a cause for concern and reprobation. One would count as instances, the hijab ban in France, the minaret vote in Switzerland, and the controversy over the building of an Islamic center in Manhattan. Could this duel of one image countering another be seen as a war of images, where the image is used an instrument of war?

My attempt in this work is to expose the image, and by extension spectacularization, as a vehicle for meaning, which is at once manipulatable and manipulating, and which has become a site for contention as well a weapon of choice. Like most weapons, this one aims at causing pain and humiliation on as many adversaries as possible. By exposing the workings of the image, I wish to invite a critical relationship with the image not as a sacred evidentiary proof, nor as an unreliable system of knowledge, but as a way of interrogating one's existing prejudices and biases in relation to the image.

I am conscious that the track that I follow in this research has already been paved by the work of Edward W. Said in his masterwork, *Orientalism*. Said changed the course of modern cultural studies (or founded it) by locating the Orient, as it is known to the West through travel writing, literature, and even academic writing, not in reality but in fantasy. Orientalism becomes the ultimate self-referential imagining of Westerners who have viewed the Orient as a feminized, virgin territory, with no ability or concept of organized rule and government; in other words, it is viewed as open and worthy of Colonialism. Drawing upon the work of Michel Foucault, Said was successful in showing how this act of imagining the Other is a tool of power, in as much as it fixes the other in the fantasy—itself a tool, a techne, to subordinate and control the Oriental as an object of fantasy and colonial interest.

In the *Visual Divide*, however, I attempt to stray from Said in a few points: for one, I am unable to confirm that the West's Orientalist gaze is at all consistent and comprehensive. Although, the later Said makes it clear that there has always existed a "counter culture" that did not conform to the (dichotomous) official narrative, the criticism against his earlier work

(*Orientalism*) that it attempted to show a comprehensive and unwavering Orientalizing gaze of the West is not completely without merit. On the other hand, I also attempt to focus my research on the question of visibility—specifically in the form of photography and media images from the vantage point of the viewer’s consumption. Conversely, in *Covering Islam*, Said focuses on the media as a producer of images and hence on the power wielded by the media in controlling what people view and, therefore, how people think about the question of Islam’s relation with the West. Finally, it is important to confirm that there is indeed a counter-gaze to the “Oriental” that does not always act in a way that confirms the Orientalist view, but that is also informed by an equally totalizing view of an “imagined-West.” In that sense, my work strives to **continue** the conversation started by Said (and picked up by many others) by bringing it to a contemporary state of the image under neo-Orientalist conditions.

Of those who have continued Said’s conversation, my work has been mostly informed by the post-colonial writings of Homi Bhabha, specifically in his treatment of mimicry and hybridity. I quote from Bhabha’s work as he explains the legacy of Frantz Fanon within a resistance vocabulary that is at the same time anti-colonialist but not necessarily nationalist (in the view that Fanon’s work went beyond a strict understanding of what is national identity while affirming the need for anti-colonial resistance).

The question of mimesis and alterity, tackled by Bhabha, is also paramount in the works of Mark Taylor (*Alterity*), Rene Girard (*To Double Business Bound*), Michael Taussig (*Mimesis and Alterity*), and others. The concept of one’s desire to be seen and count as a person is steeped in the performative act of mimicry. Taussig locates this desire in the graphic representation of an

image (of others) that remains as an unconscious desire, even as it is performed publicly.

Taussig's anthropological study of the South American Cuna tribe shows how the tribe adopted a set of wooden figurines, which seem to represent white colonists. When asked about the similarities, the Cuna deny being aware of the figurines' reference to representing a white person. In a way, the Cuna were representing themselves as a mimesis of the white man without ever noticing the difference or the relation. I find in these figurines a call for the white man to "see" the local, but also to see the tribesman as a brother in humanity, a mimesis of the white man himself.

The Visual Divide also builds up on an understanding of spectacularization as suggested by Guy Debord (*Society of the Spectacle*) and further developed as theory in *Simulation and Simulacra* by Jean Baudrillard. Debord's emphasis is on the consumerist effects of modern capitalist society, while Baudrillard stretches the concept to its limit where technology has fully mediated and replaced contemporary (Western) life as such that we all now live in the "hyperreal" and the "Real" is no longer a possibility.

Connecting the above to an eventual progress towards spectacular violence, I seize on multiple instances where the image becomes a site of violence. I attempt to deconstruct these images not merely by tracing their semiotic and structuralist makeup but by also searching in the image (and its effects) for the way that an image functions, its construction, but also its reception. In other words, I search for a technology of vision that eventually is what imparts on the image its meaning.

In *The Visual Divide*, I attempt at making explicit how stereotypes are both constructed and exploited to propagate political doxa. However, while doing that, I am careful to point out the essentializing application of troubled and troubling generalizations such as Islam, Muslims, Arabs, terrorists, fundamentalists, the West, Western civilizations, extremists, etc., where these terms are often used as if they can refer collectively to a homogenous group of people with no difference or distinction amongst them. Clearly, one realizes that the application of such generalization is aimed at connecting a certain group with a limited set of descriptions that would abbreviate what the group collectively would stand for, and therefore, makes the group incapable of being anything different than that set of descriptions either as a collective or as individuals.

As this work is careful to point out the incredulity of referring to a group or a class of people as singular and homogenous, certain references in *The Visual Divide* may seem to refer to such generalizing terms such as the “West” or “Muslims.” I attempt to use these references from the perspective of the Other, as way of exposing that perspective, and such to reveal a general stereotype. In other instances, the use of these terms may just show the impossibility of navigating problematic topics, such the relation between “Islam” and “The West” without sacrificing certain specificity and clarity. If I were to have a choice between not speaking at all or speaking out while using these abbreviative terms, describing them as such and making clear my position relative to how they function, I would easily choose the latter.

Similarly, I faced a question of working on early-twentieth-century postcards of nude and semi-nude Algerian Muslim women. How can one expose the anthropological fallacy of these photographs, by showing the incredulous opposition between the image and what one keeps in

mind about how Muslim women (is stereotyped to) look like, in a veil or hijab, etc.? Would the showing of these images be a second exploitation of these women? I found the answer to be similar to the one I found for the question of using essentializing terms: it's better that one communicate how these images are constructed than not to speak at all. Hence, I show these images, with reservations about such necessity, but I show them to illustrate the falsity of representation in the postcards, and to reveal a more sinister hand at play, which is the hand of the Western photographer as he rearranges the meaning of the postcard and actually places Western power as its true subject. I also show these postcards to highlight a visual condition where, photography, at the time a new documentary technology, was employed to reinforce the exact same Orientalist stereotypes, which had their origins in the creative fantasy of painters and artists for years.

The Visual Divide comprises five chapters: in Chapter One, Technologies of Seeing, I introduce the reader to the various themes to be discussed including what has been constituted as this false dichotomy between Islam and The West, and how one can trace the application of cultural stereotyping to visual difference. This chapter asks what happens when one "sees"? Is cognition a mental capacity that one uses by applying reason? Or are there other faculties that go beyond one's ability to "think" that are involved in the act of seeing. I attempt to tackle the questions of whether we unconsciously revert to established cultural frames that tell us the meaning of what we're perceiving? Are these frames embedded in visuality? Do they tell us who we are? And who "Others" are?

In Chapter Two, *The Sounds of the Revolution*, I account for slogan chants heard at Tahrir Square during the 25 January Egyptian revolution as tools to discovering a mix of technology, language, and revolution that could be characterized as hybrid, plural, and present at the center of which lies the human body as subject to public peril.

Chapter Three, *Colonial Gaze—Native Bodies*, analyzes a state of visual divide where photographic evidence is posited against ethnographic reality as found in postcards of nude and semi-nude Algerian Muslim women in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. I connect this state to a chain of visual oppositions that places Western superiority as its subject and that continues to our present day with the Abu Ghraib photographs and the Mohammed cartoons, etc.

Chapter Four, *The Boy Who Died Twice*, deploys the image of Mohamed al-Durra, a fifth-grader who was shot dead, on camera, at a crossroads in Gaza, and the ensuing attempts to reinterpret, recreate, falsify, and litigate the meaning of the video images of his death in order to propagate certain political doxa. I relate the violence against the image, by the image, and despite the image, to a state of pure war that is steeped in visibility, and which transforms the act of seeing into an act of targeting.

In Chapter Five, *The Martyr's Vision*, I integrate the concept of visibility with that of the human body under peril in order to identify conditions that lead to comparative suffering or a division that views humanity as something other than unitary and of equal value. I relate the figures of *der Muselmann*, Shylock, Othello, the suicide bomber, and others to subvert a narrative that claims that one's suffering is deeper than another's, or that life could be valued

differently depending on the place of your birth, the color of your skin, or the thickness of your accent.

The Epilogue, *Tabbouleh Deterritorialized*, looks at the interconnected states of perception and remembering within diasporic contexts. Cultural identity (invoked by an encounter with tabbouleh on a restaurant menu in Orlando) is both questioned and transformed and becomes the subject of perception and negotiation.

The Visual Divide attempts to pose (and answer) the question that if we were to agree with Judith Butler that life, all life, is precarious, and therefore, life, all life is worth living and worth protecting—then we could possibly recognize that precarity, as Butler says, “cuts across identity categories as well as multicultural maps” and as such, violence and suffering could be seen to also cut across all identity categories as well as multicultural maps.

One could point that some in the world may feel that their suffering is not perceived as deep as the suffering of others, or that certain violence against a certain community, group or ethnicity does not hurt as much as it does that other group, community or ethnicity.

In that sense, a certain suspect visibility, according to which one is not exactly being seen—or not being seen the way one wants to be seen, maybe viewed as a form of symbolic violence that remains invisible. Because of that invisibility, a counter violence is exercised by those with a will-to-visibility in order to correct an image or to assert a expose double standard that renders one’s life less grievable than another’s, or one’s suffering as deeper, more singular than another’s. This inability to be seen, or to be seen as someone whose life counts is exactly what embeds visuality with violence. By recognizing what Jacques Rancière describes as the

“heterogeneity of the opposite,” that certain images on their own constitute incomplete messages, and that only by being able to recognize the inherent lack of innocence of one’s eye that one is only able to truly see.

CHAPTER ONE: TECHNOLOGIES OF SEEING

An observer of the recent U.S. military involvement against the regime of Colonel Qaddafi in Tripoli, Libya will notice that the position of the United States could be described as one of reluctance and careful hesitation. Not only that the U.S. ill-affords a third military confrontation with yet another Muslim nation, but it is also difficult to ignore the history of the U.S. military involvement with that North African nation. A U.S. military movement towards Tripoli would have been a historical *déjà vu*—not of the Reagan-ordered bombing of Tripoli in 1986, but of America's first ever international military operation, which had attacked the shores of Tripoli in The First Barbary War (1801–1805). That (ad)venture has been immortalized and is repeated every day in the Marine's Hymn, the oldest official song in the U.S. military:

From the Halls of Montezuma,

To the shores of Tripoli;

We fight our country's battles

In the air, on land, and sea;

Not quite thirty years after Morocco became the first country in the world to acknowledge the independence of the United States, the U.S. military was already engaged in a war against a North African Muslim nation for economic interests but also with very visible religious undertones. In an almost Oedipal fashion, America was cutting its political ties with British rule, but in the same breath also asserting its own global power and through that repeating that historical blunder of mixing military power with religion.

The First Barbary War took place almost as soon as Thomas Jefferson was sworn in as president. The purpose of the war was to attack the ruler of Tripolitania (modern day Libya), Yusuf Karamanli, who had demanded that the U.S. either pay tribute or lose protection against pirates terrorizing ships in the seas off the shores of North Africa. The U.S. government had made a decision that it would not pay a penny of tribute but would rather fight with Karamanli. It is remarkable that Karamanli had declared war on the U.S. not through formal diplomatic channels but by the spectacular act of cutting down the flagstaff of the United States at the U.S. Consulate in Tripoli.

These historical parallels of an era that seemed to manifest a binary opposition between American and Muslim as opposing parties to a conflict steeped in cultural antagonism has been seized upon by many in recent years. In 2005, conservative writer Joshua E. London wrote a book entitled *Victory in Tripoli: How America's War with the Barbary Pirates Established the U.S. Navy and Shaped a Nation*. In this book, London calls the first Barbary War as America's first "war on terror." London carefully and profusely highlights imagined Jihadi dimensions to the Barbary War by portraying it as a religious war between Muslim terrorists (pirates) and Christian defenders of their commercial and marine rights (25). London quotes a story told by Jefferson about a meeting that he and John Adams had conducted with Tripoli's envoy to London Ambassador Sidi Haji Abdrahaman in March, 1785. Jefferson describes a fascinating response by Ambassador Abdrahaman in response to his inquiry about the reason that the U.S. needed to pay tribute. According to Jefferson, the ambassador's response was that, "It was written in their Koran, that all nations which had not acknowledged the Prophet were sinners,

whom it was the right and duty of the faithful to plunder and enslave; and that every muslim who was slain in this warfare was sure to go to paradise” (qtd. in London, 23-24).

One would note that it could be irrelevant whether this anecdote is accurate or not, or whether the ambassador’s statement reflects accurate teachings of Islam within historical and contemporary interpretations. What is of interest is how this statement has been taken then and now as a summary representation of the (threatening) cultural attitudes of a whole religion. A simple Internet search will yield numerous attempts at using this eighteenth century incident to call for a certain system of confrontation between the West (now represented by the U.S.) and Islam as a “civilization.”

While one may attempt to grasp these questions, it could be beneficial to define the understanding meant by using troubled terms such as the “West” and “Islam.” What do we mean when we say the “West”? Using a term as “the West” could be viewed as problematic not only because it denotes a seemingly fixed geographical location that points to another fixed geographical location from which it is assuming a permanent and immutable positioning, but also in that it functions as an essentializing reference to an idea, a culture that is equally definable, permanent, and immutable. And, if one is to consider the West as a literal geographic location, then it is west of what exactly?

In general, the term “the West” seems to have referred to Europe’s positioning in reference to the Mediterranean and then evolved to encompass a cultural reference to new areas that seem to share certain cultural traits with Europe. It may be quite interesting to note (as has been remarked by Benedict Anderson) that although many countries outside of Europe have been

populated by descendants of Europeans, as in Latin America and the Caribbean, one may note that the term “the West” only refers to countries like the U.S., Canada Australia, and possibly New Zealand (in addition to parts of Europe). Other countries like Brazil, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, etc., are not normally considered as part of Western culture. The reason as noted by Anderson is that this latter set of countries fostered “Creole” nations that mixed indigenous cultures with those brought in from Europe by the settlers. In that sense, Creole nations are found in those countries, where rather than shooting dead the whole indigenous population, the European settlers married them, learned their games, shared their food, and became one nation with them. Western countries, it seems, are those who have successfully annihilated any real physical or cultural role of the indigenous peoples, and, as such, recreated a new geography wholly in the image of their (Western) European ancestors.

So, has Europe been named as the literal geographic “West” by those to the east of the Mediterranean? We know from history books that Europe itself was named after a Phoenician (take that as Syrian/Lebanese) princess named Europa who was attacked and kidnapped, in a paramilitary fashion, by the Greek God Zeus camouflaged as a giant dazzlingly **white** bull. The word “Europa” could have also come from the Akkadian word “erebu,” as suggested by etymologist Ernest Klein. Akkadian “erebu” means: to go down, set (in reference to the sun) and may also be seen in the modern-day Arabic: “ghurbu,” meaning “the sun setting in the west.” Thus, Erebu, Europa, Europe all indicated the same thing: “west” from the perspective, the active gaze, of those who lost their daughter, their princess, to the white bull.

In Arabic, the word “west,” gharb, has an interesting derivative: “ightirab,” which describes the state of alienation, the condition where one does not belong. “Ightirab” also means the act of traveling and leaving one’s country. Although literally the word “ightirab” does mean to travel to the West, in effect it refers to the condition of leaving one’s home, even to the next large city over. “Ightirab,” then, is that sense of alienation the Arab feels when away from home but is doubly felt when one is estranged in a Western country. Further, the word stranger (gharib) also has its roots in the word for west (gharb). A stranger is a person who comes from the west.

But, what would make the West, Western? How did we get from Europa to a condition where a claim of Islam versus the West’ seems to denote comprehensible and defined dichotomies? Are these notions even comparable at all, since one refers to a geographical location while the other points to a universalist faith held by more than a fifth of all humanity?

Bernard Lewis remarks that the notion of a continent is a European invention. He claims that Europe invented the system of continents and, as such, it also invented both Asia and Africa (Lewis, *Islam* 3). In *Islam and the West* (1993), Lewis attempts to dispel any squabble over the asymmetry between the notions Europe and Islam. Lewis argues that this asymmetry is only superficial and that we, in the West, should not assume that Muslims have the same understanding that “we” do about what religion is. He explains that to Muslims, Islam is a way of life and a system of rules that govern not only religious affairs but also civil, criminal, and constitutional law. Conversely, unlike Christian churches, “Islam has no councils or synods, no prelates or hierarchies, no canon laws or canon courts” (Lewis, *Islam* 3). Therefore, Lewis claims, we cannot simply compare Islam to Christianity. A more accurate comparison would be

to counterpoint Islam with the earlier notion of Europe as “Christendom,” an empire, a civilization. Islam is no longer simply a religion, but a “whole civilization which grew up under the aegis of that religion.” (Lewis, *Islam* 4). Further, he says, “It is also something more, which has no equivalent in Byzantium. It is a political identity and allegiance, transcending all others” (Lewis, *Islam* 4). In treating this dangerous cocktail of political identity and theology as unique and uncontemporary, Lewis seems to ignore the many similar extreme right and fanatical religious movements that are witnessed throughout the world. One would wonder if Professor Lewis has not yet been invited to a Tea Party.

What Lewis describes is a frame of Otherness that brackets Islam in two images: It is not like us, and unlike Christianity, Islam is a politically-based civilization that is in competition with ours. Like most vulgar analyses of Otherness, this one immediately hints at a false binary and alludes to a unique oppositional placement, as if these positions are obligatory, unique and unrepeatable. However, the same description about Islam as a way of life could be said about Judaism, Sikhism, and other religions. On the other hand, one needs only to look at heated debates about certain domestic U.S. issues like abortion and gay rights to realize the role that religion plays in affecting political life in our own country.

The larger point that Lewis seems to be putting forward is one of effect. We need to be wary of Islam as a religious, politically motivated “Other” whose civilization has been in competition with Christianity (the West) for centuries.

Likewise, those on the Middle Eastern side emphasize the Semitic roots of Christianity as well as the geographic and cultural proximity of Europe to the Middle East. Could one view the

European/Eastern opposition as one not of total opposites, but more as one of likeness? Could this apparent division be viewed, in fact, as one of mimetic rivalry—similar, but not quite the same? This difference is not only a cause of uneasiness—it is also the cause for confrontation and correction and a desire for normalizing the Other. They are not like us, and if they don't become like us, we will normalize them. This Otherness is the aberration of an original that the Other is intent to correct. Bernard Lewis may have pointed to the need to both accept and correct the Other when he remarked that each of the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) look to themselves as the final word of God, and look with suspicion on those religions that came after, while tolerating those that preceded them. As such, Christians are accepting of Jews but suspicious of Muslims, while Muslims are accepting of Christians but claim their religion as God's final word (Lewis, *Islam* 6).

Lewis published an essay in *The Atlantic* in 1990 in which most of the ideas he later expounded on in *Islam and the West* were presented. The title of the essay is “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” and in it, Lewis attempts to provide a historical argument that explains the “why they hate us” argument—not paying attention to the whole fallacy of the reductionist and arbitrary notions of “they,” “hate,” and “us” as if these are notions that could be contained, and explained in singular and absolutist terms. Further, Lewis' attempts at stating the answer to an unasked question and foregrounding the terms “Muslim” and “Rage” already states an unmistakable ideological foundation for Lewis' argument.

Professor Lewis describes Christianity as a sophisticated religion that has been very American from its inception. He cites the advocacy in the U.S. of the separation between church

and state: “render ... unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things which are God's” (Lewis, *Islam* 179). He describes the ability to solve problems arising by the relations between religion and politics as uniquely Christian, not universal. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Lewis places a religion that he describes as “in its worldwide distribution, its continuing vitality, its universalist aspirations, can be compared to Christianity, and that is Islam” (“Muslim”). Although Lewis sporadically offers positive descriptions of Islam, Muslims, and the Muslim World, such statements are always qualified by a negative follow-up or a qualifier of some sort. When he is not engaged in that kind of rhetoric, Lewis resorts to abstractionist generalizations that treat cultures as homogenous and uniform. His description of Islam as a religion that “inspired a great civilization in which others besides Muslims lived creative and useful lives and which, by its achievement, enriched the whole world” is immediately followed by the warning that, “But Islam, like other religions, has also known periods when it inspired in some of its followers a mood of hatred and violence.” And he squarely positions his discussion in an imminent threat that is taking place right now and that intends to harm Western Civilization: “It is our misfortune that part, though by no means all or even most, of the Muslim world is now going through such a period, and that much, though again not all, of that hatred is directed against us” (Lewis, *Islam* 4-5).

When Lewis tries to show a brighter side of Muslims, it is strictly commensurate with how close they are to Western Culture. It is as if being Western or in the proximity of “Western Culture” is the measuring stick of rationality and acceptability. He states, almost condescendingly:

There are still significant numbers, in some quarters perhaps a majority, of Muslims with whom we share certain basic cultural and moral, social and political, beliefs and aspirations; there is still an imposing Western presence—cultural, economic, diplomatic—in Muslim lands, some of which are Western allies. (Lewis, “Muslim”)

Lewis describes 1,400 years of uninterrupted conflict and rivalry between Islam and Christianity, which he equates with the West and positions the U.S. as its current and final representation. But somehow as if by a sleight of hand, Lewis sustains the Muslim hatred of the Christian world (the West) and replaces it with a hatred now of the secular West. He describes Islam (and Muslims) as in a state of war against two enemies, secularism and modernism.

In conclusion, Lewis warns that we are “facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both” (Lewis, “Muslim”).

However, whereas Lewis argues against the West’s jumping to the same “irrational reaction against that rival,” (“Muslim”) his call of a clash of civilization was picked up by Samuel Huntington, who in turn offers a more radical and equally extreme solution to this imagined problem.

Huntington wrote an essay in 1993 under the title “The Clash of Civilizations?” (later expanded into book form), in which he proposed that “fault lines” between civilizations are going to replace the Cold War relations with the main confrontation taking place between

Europe, as a representative of Western Christianity, and Islam. Huntington was writing in response (or probably as a follow-up) to Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, in which the latter finds that the end of the Cold War and the failure of the politico-economic system of Soviet Communism signal the final triumph of the capitalist Western-style democracy. To Fukuyama, this stage also marks a culmination of socio-cultural evolution of humanity, or what he describes as "the end of history." We are in a determinist stage, which Fukuyama describes as "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." What Fukuyama was claiming is the end of ideology—or the end of the need for ideology, since there will be no need for any other political system outside of Western-style parliamentary democracy.

Huntington picked up this notion of the end of ideology, but he disagreed with Fukuyama about the triumphant end of history in the name of the Western capitalist system. To Huntington, the end of the Cold War will bring a new kind of conflict, the battle lines of the future shall be a clash of civilizations, where the "fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural."

Huntington defines seven or eight major world civilizations. These include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African civilization. He deems the most important conflicts to take place "along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another." The most serious of these conflicts shall be with the Muslim world.

Huntington defines civilization as “the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people” (Huntington).

Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Huntington seems to be tailoring his address to politicians and military generals whom he might have imagined to be in need of a new conflict (an observation noted by Edward Said, in “The Myth of Clash of Civilizations”). Huntington concludes his ominous predictions with an ominous word of advice to Western policy-makers (make that American) to set up a militaristic interventionist strategy that will forcibly indoctrinate other nations in Western values (presumably, capitalism and democracy). One may describe his advice as ominous because it has indeed been adopted by influential conservatives, particularly at the American Enterprise Institute (where he delivered his article as a lecture), and has been instrumental in guiding the foreign policy of President George W. Bush.

Stating his argument more clearly, Huntington says that the clash of civilizations “will require the West to maintain the economic and military power necessary to protect its interests in relation to these civilizations.” He further suggests that “Most important, the efforts of the West to promote its values of democracy and liberalism to universal values, to maintain its military predominance and to advance its economic interests engender countering responses from other civilizations” (Huntington). This dangerous combination of reducing the world to homogenous cultures with singular ideas about antagonizing the West and the suggestion of using military force to promote democracy has clearly been proven deadly in the case of the U.S. interventions

in Iraq and Afghanistan. But also, it has been equally false with the recent and current spontaneous democratic movements throughout the Arab world that came as a surprise, let alone requiring U.S. military forces.

If one is to find truth in Huntington's claims, it would be in his unabashed emphasis that spreading Western-style democracy on other civilization is not a desire to help other nations, but as an attempt to perpetuate a political and economic system that is made in the West's own image.

In "A Clash of Definitions", Edward Said refutes the fundamental basis of Huntington's attempt to make reductionist and sweeping summaries of dynamic, heterogeneous, and varied concepts such as "civilizations" and "identities." Said calls Huntington's work "a very brief and rather crudely articulated manual in the art of maintaining a wartime status in the minds of Americans and others" (69). Said points to what he describes as the "Orientalist gesture" in Huntington's "notion that civilizations are monolithic and homogeneous" (71). He finds that, like Bernard Lewis, "Huntington is a partisan, advocate of one civilization over all the others". Adding, "Huntington defines Islamic civilization reductively, as if what most matters about it is its supposed anti-Westernism" (71). What Said means by this last statement is to highlight the narcissistic idea in the West that all Muslims are obsessed with hatred towards the West and have no other issues except to think of ways to "destroy the West and bomb it and destroy the whole world," as Said remarked at a lecture entitled "The Myth of The Clash of Civilizations" at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in 1998 (4).

Said asks if this is the best way to understand the world; is the clash of civilizations where we want the world to be heading? (“Myth” 5) does not deny the existing of war and rivalries between doctrines and empires and that there has always been, and continues to be, those who define their “cultural identity” in what others are not. But, in offering a counter perspective, Said also explains that there are always two cultures, an official, mainstream culture made up of priests, academics, and the state. But there also are, in addition:

... dissenting or alternative, unorthodox, heterodox, strands that contain many anti-authoritarian themes in them that are in competition with the official culture. These can be called the counter-culture, an ensemble of practices associated with various kinds of outsiders, the poor, immigrants, artistic Bohemians, workers, rebels, artists. (“Myth” 7)

Said explains that representing cultures as homogenous and unchanging, “is to miss what is vital and fertile in culture” (“Myth” 8).

Indeed, one is hard pressed to see, in the aftermath of all the dichotomous interpretations of cultures, any moment in history, any place in the world that has not witnessed general interactions of multiple cultures on the level of travelers, merchants, troubadours, vagabonds, and others. Muslims have lived in Western societies for centuries and immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East have long become an essential part of the fabric of Europe and the U.S. So, why we still lay over them veil after veil of sleeper-cell rhetoric and an imagery of Otherness? Could it be that a fake national imaginary has been constructed with the purpose of portraying a conflict with Islam that has just materialized after the Cold War? Is there something

in the imagination that attempts to connect this falsehood with a made-up and simplified historical fallacy in order for the image to work?

Imagined Enemies

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson posits that a nation is an “imagined political community” (6). In his explanation of this imagination, Anderson describes a process of delimiting that creates the cultural and national attributes of a nation. This delimiting means the intentional (but imagined) exclusion of certain qualities, attributes, stories, as outside the community. (Anderson 7). In this imagination, Anderson claims, “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson 6). In other words, the very basis of a nation is founded on imagined relationships and attributes that may or not have had authentic relation to history or reality.

In a way, Anderson’s claims seem to confirm Edward Said’s earlier point. Anderson talks about “older imagining, where states were defined by centers, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another” (Anderson 19). In that sense, empires and kingdoms never quite had geographical or cultural “fault lines,” as Huntington would describe them.

Further, Anderson notes the many times in history when a nation’s army included many “foreigners,” as in the case Fredrick the Great (r. 1740-1786) (22). One can, at the same time, think of examples like the Crusades, where under the grand banner of the Pope, was also a congregation of many European communities, but likewise, the Ottoman army continued a military tradition where a conquering army will not only take over the land, enslave the men and

women, but will also employ the strongest of men to fight for the conquering Janissary army. This may be one of the cruelest ironies of military lore. Many in French colonial territories remember the ferocity of Senegalese soldiers serving in the French army enforcing colonial policies against fellow colonized. Was the colonized more ruthless against the natives than their colonial masters? Such stories abound in the narrative works of Jean Genet, Frantz Fanon, and others.

Anderson points out, at the beginning of his work, that a nation is a “fraternity that makes it possible... not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (7). As we just witnessed, the willingness to kill or die for a nation can incorporate others in that same process. Think of this weird dynamic as, seemingly, continued in the U.S. tradition of using non-U.S. citizens to fight in the U.S. military. For many immigrants, this may be the only way to become a citizen. It is a bloody gamble, a Russian Roulette, that one takes in order to be ordained as U.S. citizen. Like the Ottoman Janissary army, this state employs the service of “foreigners” to die for, and on behalf, its citizens.

Blue-Eyed Jesus

Anderson finds that imagined communities of nations replace religious communities and dynastic monarchies. He uses the example of visual representations of sacred communities to understand the changing modes of relating to the world that accompanies change in political systems (Anderson 22). His visual examples include similarities between the image of the Virgin Mary in a Tuscan painting and the merchant’s daughter; Christ resembles a Burgundian peasant. Anderson notes: “We are faced with a world in which the figuring of imagined reality was

overwhelmingly visual and aural” (22-23). In other words, imagined reality needed to be visualized for it to exist and spread. Imagined reality needed to be carried through visual representation to the outer limits of the realm for the limitation of the imagining to take place.

Anderson explains that the Medieval European mind, representing Christ or the Virgin Mary with Semitic, first-century features was “unimaginable because the medieval Christian mind had no conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separation between past and present” (23). For the Christian concept to be assimilated, Christ had to be one of us, a European, even looking like the local baker. A blue-eyed Jesus may conflict with historical reality, but is opted as a believable image, because he must look like one of **us**, and cannot look like one of **them**.

The idea of the image directly relates to the self and our understanding of the world, and, therefore, the image (as representation) can substitute for our understanding, or stand for the belief. One can detect a link of representation as a dynamic and its associated meaning-making to the current emphasis on, and intolerance towards, visual difference as witnessed in much of Western Europe against the visual manifestations of Islam, like the veil, head scarf, etc.

Imagining national identities has the capability of becoming pathologically bordering on the delusional when the image is the opposite of historical reality, like a blue-eyed Jesus or a topless Muslim woman in public. But then again, national imagination could border on xenophobia as it struggles to locate visual, aural, linguistic, or religious identifiers of difference within its populations for the purpose of exploiting these differences as a justification to expel a certain group outside the national imagination—the Japanese internment during WWII and the

opposition to building an Islamic center for Muslims in Manhattan—are just two of the most obvious examples. More recent examples include a consistent plan in the U.S. to exploit visual difference to mark whole ethnic groups as an aberrant Other that is a constant suspect, including an Arizona law allowing police to stop Latino-looking drivers to verify their residency status or Alabama laws requiring school teachers to inquire about the same of their students. Mostly this Otherness is imagined in a visual and sensory manner: “Others” look different, they smell different, and they sound different. This difference is not the kind that is a likeable, superior, individualistic type of difference. No. They smell bad, because of the spices in their cuisine; they wear veils; they grow long nasty dreadlocks, wear long winter coats and funny Russian hats; and you can never make out the accent of that Microsoft tech support gal. This is America, damn it! Speak American.

The Orientalist view of Islam is not limited to a reductionist and essentialist fantasy as described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, but it could be also constituted through ready-made cultural borrowings. In a lecture over Post-Colonialist theory at Yale University, professor Paul Fry questions how is it that German writings about the Middle East sounded very similar to those of French and British literature, even though Germans had no colonial interests in the Orient. Fry answers his own question by pointing out that “a certain mindset towards the third world dictates a certain way of structuring one’s thoughts about the third world.”

In a way, what Paul Fry was describing is a condition that German writers reflected an antithetical and essentialist Euro-centric view of the Middle East even when they themselves did not partake in colonialist actions there. The cultural and ideological underpinnings had already

established the nature of these relationships a priori. The European mindset has already been shaped by the effect of Colonialism and its effect on Orientalism.

Edward Said, himself, states that what is interesting about Orientalism is not only that it presents a fallacious depiction of the Middle East, but that it actually works its damage on the way the West views itself. He says, “[M]y real argument is that Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (*Orientalism*, 12). One can, therefore, find that the Orientalist fantasy could manifest itself as anxiety when the fantasy remains unfulfilled. In other words, when the Oriental does not conform to the Orientalist’s view.

The recent opposition, vast and vociferous, of many in the United States, to the planned construction of an Islamic community center in an area a few blocks away from the site of Ground Zero seems to fit in the above depiction of fantasy turned anxiety. Those opposing the construction of the building described it as “a monument to terrorism,” a hundred-million-dollars insult, a celebration of the murder of Americans, a monument to “their” victory (CBC Canada). Mark Williams of the conservative *Tea Party Express* was reported by CNN to have said the center was intended for “the worship of the terrorists’ monkey-god.”

Nevertheless, the building generated an outrage and an outpouring of emotion that was not directed against a conceptual abstraction like “terror” or even an “idea” such as Islam. The object of the outrage was very specific. It was against American Muslims. To the building’s opponents, Muslim Americans, as a group, are seen to be accountable for the crimes of the

Muslim terrorists of al-Qaeda on September 11, via almost the same displacement logic through which the Jews were held collectively responsible for the blood of Christ.

CNN's headline about the Islamic Center issue described it as a "battle." A conservative blogger who led the opposition to the building seemed to be laying a religious confrontation line between Ground Zero and Muslims. She was quoted by CNN as saying: "We feel that it is a cemetery and sacred ground and the dead should be honored ... To build a 13-story mega mosque on the cemetery, on the site of the largest attack in American history, I think, is incredibly insensitive." In another interview by CNN, the blogger states: "We feel it would be more appropriate maybe to build a center dedicated to expunging the Quranic texts of the violent ideology that inspired jihad, or perhaps a center to the victims of hundreds of millions of years of Jihadi wars, land enslavements, cultural annihilations and mass slaughter." One, at least, is comforted that she thinks that there was human life more than 6,000 years ago!

A poll in 2010 has shown that most Americans overwhelmingly opposed the building. Multiple polls on a nationwide, statewide, and New York City-wide basis indicated that the construction of the building was opposed by the majority of Republicans, Democrats, and independents. The only place where there is an overwhelming support to the building, interestingly enough, is in Manhattan.¹ Even more interesting is that the majority of people polled agreed that Muslims had the constitutional right to build the Islamic center at that location, but that they were against Muslims actually exercising this right. It is as if the constitution as a sacred and perfect legal document was abstract in its beneficence to all—except Muslims.

One would note that there were also those who strongly supported the building of the community center specifically at the location because of the “healing” it could bring to the nation. Of the many that held that belief were President Obama, Mayor Bloomberg, the majority of the citizens of Manhattan, and others.

However, one would note, on the other hand, this conspicuous generalization was quick to conflate the 9/11 terrorists with all Muslims worldwide and with American Muslims in particular. This generalization renders that Muslims, en masse, were either culprit, complicit, or at minimum tolerant vis-a-vis terrorism. Therefore, they had no right to be near the sacred grounds of Ground Zero. Some of those in support of the building were motivated by a need for healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Forgiveness in this latter sense becomes an act that comes after the acknowledgment of culpability and is granted by the more gracious, more powerful side.

One could understand the type of raw emotion and angry rhetoric displayed both at the construction site as well as over the media and in the polls that Americans hold Muslims at large, and by extension, the religion of Islam, liable for the actions of the terrorists of September 11; that the tie of terrorism to Islam was a reason to withdraw certain constitutional rights from Muslims. Could it be said that the construction of an Islamic center near Ground Zero was seen as a counter image by a hostile Other that is meant to compound and parallel those images of the destruction of the Twin Towers? Both buildings could be viewed as what Jean Baudrillard would describe as “singular objects of architecture” in their societal, cultural, and architectural roles, but also primarily as polarizing signs of ideology (*Objects*).

It is as if the building revealed a fissure in the American subconscious about the Muslim and the Arab. This fissure was disturbed by the question of the building, and, as such, brought to the surface feelings and positions that had hitherto remained deep in a collective unconscious.

The material significance of the Twin Towers pre- and post-September 11 has demonstrated that architecture indeed plays an ideological role as a hyperreality. In *The Singular Objects of Architecture*, Baudrillard finds that the World Trade Center is a “singular object of architecture” that translates the hyperreal even before it has become a site, equal only to Hiroshima, as a devastated architecture brought to rubble, an icon greater than reality (4). To Baudrillard, the Twin Towers not only communicated the political-cultural-economic geography of a great city; they also signified the almost post-apocalyptic verticality of the skyline of New York City but also the biological role of cloning (Baudrillard, *Objects* xi)—an image that W.J.T. Mitchell will also note in *Cloning Terror* (79).

In *Cloning Terror*, W.J.T. Mitchell points out to the abstract nature of the term “terror” in the U.S. declaration of a “war on terror.” Terror, here as a general concept and a metaphor for specific terrorist groups, has become a literal and real enemy to fight against. He says: The clone wars and the war on terror have combined in our time to produce the composite image of our time, the metapicture that framed the dominant imaginary of the Bush era. Both are metaphors that have become literalized, images that have become real (*Terror* 15). Even Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was quoted as confirming that this war “is absolutely real, it’s not a metaphor.” Mitchell’s point here is that by turning a real concept into an abstract one, by taking a metaphor literally, we’re pushing an image out of the imaginary and the virtual and turning it

into the unimaginable. When you do that, “very strange things happen,” he says: “Images tend to burst out of their frame, and wreak havoc on the world. The fantasy becomes real.” The first thing that happens is that your enemy loses all of its humanity, it becomes faceless, personless, subject to annihilation, collateralized, without the least sense of empathy.

This act of abstraction intends to do the opposite of spectacularization. There is nothing to see. No one to mourn. It is a scene beyond (permitted) imagination.

Conversely, Mitchell notes that the destruction of the World Trade Center is an act of iconoclasm. What the terrorists were seeking to destroy was a monument to capitalism and globalization—and they wanted to do it in a spectacular way, almost with a Hollywood quality to the size of the bang. Mitchell describes it as the “production of an image” (*Cloning*, 77). A war of images had to ensue, but the image that the U.S. Defense Department wanted to show had to be equally well-directed and controlled: a shock and awe punishment of our abstract enemies, whom we could not be identified with as humans, at least not like us.

If Islam (an abstraction) and Muslims (a generalization), by extension, are the enemy, what do we really mean by Islam? Many in the “West” conflate the notions of the Arab and the Muslim as synonymous. Clearly, there are more Muslims than Arabs; there are many Arabs who are not Muslim (Majority of Arab Americans have traditionally been non-Muslim). Nevertheless, from a cultural identity perspective, it is arguable that there may be an Arab identity to Islam or, if the reverse were true, that there may be a unique and Islamic identity to the Arab World, regardless of actual religious practices.

Nevertheless, the question of Islamic civilization was never purely about a singular cultural identity. Islamic civilization was always pluralistic even when its own state practices, or social conditions, were less than tolerant of others. The Islamic faith, itself based on principles of universality and declared ideals of social justice and racial equality has rendered Islamic history both a result and manifestation of multiculturalism. As such, adherents of divergent Islamic teachings, at certain times, stood in cultural opposition, but also in a harmonic involvement, with those of non-believers as well as believers of other faiths. In other words, the Islamic civilization, much like any other civilization, through what Edward Said describes as “counter-culture,” (“Myth” 7) has produced exchanges in history that have included travellers, bohemians, rebels, but also Assassins, Templars, explorers, and others. A culture is never pure and rarely simple. It is the product of both its most authentic interpretation of its core values as well as their exact opposites, the violations of such. In this context, one would consider a culture not only by the idiomatic fundamentals of its declared/adopted state principles (Islam) but also by the social and cultural practices of its citizens. The argument here is reminiscent of Edward Said’s remark quoted earlier that the social practices of the people have always been far from being dogmatic, but rather diverse and richly varied—never fundamentalist or purist.

Cultural identity, like race, could be compared to gender identity (Stuart Hall, “The Imaginary Signifier”). If one is to accept Judith Butler’s notion that gender is performative, could it also be said, derivatively, that the nature of cultural identity is performative as well? One can go further and state that gender norms are part of cultural norms, and this latter, more encompassing notion, indeed determines how and in what way one can appear in a public space.

Likewise, one may wonder since gender norms are traditionally dichotomous (boy/girl, man/woman), if cultural identity has been viewed dichotomously as well: (us/them).

Butler explains that conforming to (society's) sexual and gender norms is what determines who is legible, who can be considered a person (personhood), who counts as a subject, and who does not ("performativity"). Who counts as a life, who lives on the far side of established modes of intelligibility. We live and operate on lines that delineate and legalize the public and private lives of gender—exactly as these lines too define who is culturally acceptable, what kind of dress code, what kind of look, how thick is an acceptable accent, what headdress is fashionable or suspect.

The Visual Divide

The photograph is inscribed by an ideograph invisible to the naked eye, that only the "I" of the viewer can viscerally perceive it. In that sense, viewing a photograph becomes a somatic extension of the viewer's history, identity, ideology, and consciousness. If that is the case, why is it then that its meaning is built in a certain slant that clearly favors certain aspects while deliberately maligning others? The question remains: Where is the inscription? Is it in the photograph, or is it in the perceiver? Is this a dialectical relationship or one with prejudice and power?

The notion that the photograph (particularly in media settings) is inscribed by the visceral perception of the viewer renders meaning an impossibility outside the experience of one's identity. As such, the visual divide that demarcates the perception of images and imagination between Islam and the West constantly foregrounds visual difference as the ideographic

representation of something all too sinister. How has this imagination got to be constructed as adversarial? How and where does it manifest itself? And, can one speak of a system of perception that governs how images of Islam operate in a post-9/11 United States?

Could one say that we live in an image-world that the outer, the manifest (al-Zaher, in Sufi terms) is almost always **the opposite** of the inner or the latent (al-Batin)? Al-Batin is deciphered by an imaginary understanding of the ideograms that contribute to the imaginary making of cultural identity, which is itself defined by the “Other.” It is what the Other is not. To extend this analogy to its limits, one may also remark that Fascist tendencies have always surfaced to bolster similar imaginary definitions of cultural identities that are seen as visually different as well as the imagined identities of the enemy (Jews, Gypsies, Muslims, Aborigines, etc.).

Seeing is Not Believing; Believing is Seeing

If we were to leave aside the questions of art photography and the digital manipulation of images, can the photographic image still be trusted to communicate any meaning at all? Will two rational people looking at the same culturally-rich image have one or multiple understandings?

Descartes mistrusted the senses as the basis for making cognitive judgment. Seeing is not adequate to determine the nature of what is being perceived. In “Meditation Two” of *On First Philosophy*, subtitled “Of the Nature of the Human Mind; and That is More Easily Known than the Body,” Descartes introduces what was to be termed the Cartesian Dualism (between body and mind) and describes his famous “Wax Argument.” He notices that when he relies solely on his sensory faculties in experiencing something like fresh wax, he receives a certain set of data.

But when the wax is taken near the heat of a candle, it melts, and although remaining the same substance, his senses give him a different set of data. Descartes' conclusion, then, is to distrust the body and rely on the mind for true cognition. He says: "there is not a single consideration that can aid in my perception of the wax or of any other body that fails to make even more manifest the nature of my mind" ("Meditations").

In lieu of sensory perception, Descartes foregrounds "reason" as the only cognitive instrument. He constructs a system of knowledge that places thinking at the foundation of existence (*cogito ergo sum*) and therefore assigns to the "mind" the role of conscious reason that can distinguish knowledge from falsity—hence, Cartesian mind/body duality, which gives the mind (or the soul) primacy and control over the body (and therefore senses) ("Meditations").

Descartes' separation between the roles of the senses, emotions, and the mind has been challenged by many simply because it demarcates cognition and prioritizes the mind as the primary or exclusive site of cognition and thinking. Recently, neurologist Antonio R. Damasio challenged Descartes' duality in his work entitled *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994) on the basis that "thinking" is also a function of the body and emotions. The body, Damasio says, "contributes a content that is part and parcel of the workings of the normal mind" (158).² No matter how rational one thinks they are, Damasio argues, he or she still makes decisions that are influenced by "gut feelings" or what he describes as "Somatic Markers" (174). He defines Somatic Markers as "a special instance of feelings generated from secondary emotions. Those emotions and feelings have been connected by learning, to predict future outcomes of certain scenarios" (Damasio 174). Damasio connects this learning process to what

he describes as culture: “The buildup of adaptive somatic markers requires that both brain and culture are normal” (Damasio 177).

If Damasio is correct in his assessments, then much of the basis for certain cultural assumptions will need to be reconsidered. Not only is the traditional understanding that reason is a unique faculty of the mind that aids humans to perceive and understand in rational ways, but also that a gender that was traditionally derided for being emotional may not be different after all, or cultures that were described as incapable of rationality may not turn out to be inferior to those that are making the claim.

In *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Emmanuel Kant proposes a theory of perception that may refer to some of the genesis of Damasio’s thesis. According to Otfried Höffe in *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason: The Foundation of Modern Philosophy*, Kant suggests that cognition is based not only on our physical experience but also on concepts that we have developed a priori to the experience itself (105). Whereas Descartes has defined a clear separation between mind and body, Kant suggests that the mind (soul) is dependent on the body’s sensory faculties, and vice versa, that the body’s overall health also impacted the mind’s ability to think. In a way that foretells of current “embodied cognition” theories, Kant claimed that cognition was dependent on the body, since the mind was also dependent on the body (212).³

Later, Merleau-Ponty takes on this issue of perception in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) in which he speaks of objects as mirrors of their environment. Each object is subject to be seen from infinite perspectives. So, for one to account for that object, one needs to consider the physicality and form of every single possible perspective (Merleau-Ponty 350). In fact, he finds

that the act of seeing itself is “conditioned by a certain perspective” (Merleau-Ponty 82). In other words, one’s understanding of what one see is contingent upon one’s place (geography) and one’s a priori relationship with the object being perceived.

Merleau-Ponty developed the concept of the body-subject in which he took Kant’s concepts even further and considered the body as a “perceiving thing” (384, 409). Since the object being perceived changes based on perspective, it is the correlation of body and mind that determines the type of perception that takes place. Merleau-Ponty claimed that there is a primordial world frame that guides one’s consciousness and cognition. He further locates cognition in both space as well as a “primordial level” that is “on the horizon of all of our perceptions” (Merleau-Ponty 295). This notion is not only reminiscent of Bachelard’s work but also of the findings of Benedict Anderson that trace the makeup of certain ideological images and ideas in a community’s imagination far in this collective consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty develops the notion of the primacy of perception and as opposed to the Cartesian concept of cogito (431). Merleau-Ponty argues that “all consciousness is, in some measure, perceptual consciousness” (459). In doing so, he seems to position perception as parallel to consciousness and at the same time links cognition to primordial frames with thought positioned at a much lower stage.

The image, then, although a sign system guided by semiotic principles as explained by Roland Barthes, is nevertheless more than its semiotic significations. Not only is an image a cultural artifact that is culturally inscribed and culturally specific, but also its meaning may not be in the image itself at all. Ultimately, meaning may be a construct of perception—not of the

perceiver's mind alone but also of the perceiver's embodied cognition, which, in turn, could be influenced by its environment. In other words, in the perceiver's unconscious may be found to be a mode of thinking that is experienced physically and not merely through reason.

What is an image? Is it that transparent visual representation of reality that could be deciphered by reason? Is it a code system that requires deciphering and is understood in relation to reality? Is it a language, a system of signs that can be viewed as an arbitrary representational code only structured through ideology?

Gestalt theory treats perception not as a domain of the mind (reason) nor simply as the result of automated sensory data. Rather, according to Gestalt perception theory, people make meaning of the factual world not as an interpretation of sensory data through mental analysis but rather through an almost intuitive and subjective structuring (patterning) of perceived elements as a systematic whole. Perception itself is structured, ordered. Rudolf Arnheim is a Gestalt psychologist who spent a lifetime working on the issues of visually and perception. In an interview with *Cabinet Magazine* in 2001, Arnheim described signs and language as “established conceptual modifiers, they are the outer shells of actual meaning.” To him, “perception organizes the forms that it receives as optical projections in the eye. Without form an image cannot carry a visual message into consciousness. Thus it is the organized forms that deliver the visual concept that makes an image legible, not conventionally established signs.”

He adds:

... our perception structures and orders the information given by things into determinable forms. We understand because this structuring and ordering is a part of our relationship

with reality. Without order we couldn't understand at all. Thus in my opinion the world is not raw material; it is already ordered merely by being observed. (Arnheim)

According to Arnheim “different observers of one and the same thing see different things.” He relates this situation to “the fact that perception is indeed not mechanical reception of sensory data; rather, it is the creation of structured images that naturally depend on the personal experience of the observer.” Although Arnheim’s depiction and explanation may indeed be quite plausible, what he misses here is the possibility that the observer’s “personal experience” may itself be structured through mediated experiences and influenced by the media, second-hand told stories, myths, etc., all of which may be influencing the way that the observer structures perceived data. Nevertheless, Arnheim goes on to stress out that the perceiver (along with the perceived object) is indeed at the center of the process of perception. He asserts that “the observation of the world demands an interaction between the objective characteristics supplied by the observed thing and the nature of the observing subject.” (Arnheim)

Recent research in embodied cognition may render a fresh understanding of how we perceive images in light of the inadequacy of semiotic hermeneutics. This new view could reveal how images, through media propagation, become hypericonic and by doing so build a distance between the semiotic makeup of the image and its perceived meaning.

In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe the three major findings of cognitive science in the following three sentences:

The mind is inherently embodied.

Thought is mostly unconscious.

Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. (3)

The authors' thesis is stated as follows: "Reason is not disembodied as the tradition has largely held, but arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and our bodily experience." They go on to explain that "the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment." The authors link perception to reason: "The same neural and cognitive mechanisms that allow us to perceive and move around also create our conceptual systems and modes of reason. Thus to understand reason we must understand the details of our visual system, our motor system, and the general mechanisms of our neural binding" (Lakoff and Johnson 4).

Lakoff and Johnson dethrone reason as the exclusive property of humans (or should we say the "white male"?) and claim that human reason is "a form of animal reason, a reason inextricably tied to our bodies and the peculiarities of our brains" (17). Further, they state that our sense of the real is in fact a result of interactions between our bodies, brains, and interactions with our everyday environment.

To help situate this new knowledge, Lakoff and Johnson define cognitive science as:

... the scientific discipline that studies conceptual systems. It is a relatively new discipline, having been founded in the 1970s. Yet in a short time it has made startling discoveries. It has discovered, first of all, that most of our thought is unconscious, not in the Freudian sense of being repressed, but in the sense that it operates beneath the level of

cognitive awareness, inaccessible to consciousness and operating too quickly to be focused on. (Lakoff and Johnson 10)

In his more recent work, *The Political Mind* (2008), George Lakoff asserts his thesis of cultural narrative framing, through which we understand everything in the world. Lakoff argues that cultural frames are expressed through metaphors and are thoroughly political. Frames are what give meaning to perception. Framing is what drives cognition to the direction it interprets visualization, basically infusing meaning into what the eye sees.

According to Lakoff, “The same part of the brain we use in seeing is also used in imagining that we are seeing, in remembering seeing, in dreaming that we are seeing, and in understanding language about seeing” (39). In other words, our lived experiences, what we have seen with our own eyes, do not lie too far from our imagined narratives.

Lakoff refers us to “mirror neuron circuitry, which integrates action and perception” (39) to describe these circuits in the premotor cortex that fire when we either perform a given action or see someone else perform the same action. In other words, Lakoff says that the same two-way area in the brain that “fires” when we are receiving sensory stimuli, like perceiving an action (someone yawning) also does the exact same thing when we are doing the same action naturally (yawning). Mirror neuron circuits also enable us to predict certain actions when one sees a part of a familiar action. They also explain the way viewers can identify with certain events on TV or even Second Life. Events, whether they are generated by imaginary events or real actions, use the same brain structure and can indeed cross that same two-way path in the brain. Lakoff extends his thought to the perception of the 9/11 attacks that had caused a considerable amount

of horror and pain to those watching them on September 11, even to these who were thousands of miles away from danger. But he notes that the repetition of these images in the media well after 9/11 “have continued to arouse fear as well” (Lakoff 40). Interestingly, Lakoff adds that the horror associated with these images also extends to the language of fear that has become associated with these events. Words like “threat,” “terror,” and “attack” have become fixed in our minds as a total rhetorical package of fear. Lakoff notes that this makeup has not taken this shape spontaneously, but that the true fear and empathy that were caused on September 11 have been repeated to create a sense of fear “to political use” (40).

Giorgio Agamben takes the question of perception and the brain-body integration to richer levels of an image eco-system in his work *The Open: Man and Animal* (2004). In the chapter entitled “Umwelt,” Agamben draws upon the bio-philosophy of zoologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944). According to Agamben, Uexküll expressed “unreserved abandonment of every anthropocentric perspective in the life sciences and the radical dehumanization of the image of nature” (*Open* 39). Agamben explains that Uexküll suggested that there was “an infinite variety of perceptual worlds that, though they are uncommunicating and reciprocally exclusive, are all equally perfect and linked together” (*Open* 40).

Uexküll distinguishes between “Umgebung,” the objective space in which a living being exists and moves, and “Umwelt,” which is the environment-world that is defined by relevant marks, or carriers of significance—specifically to this living being. In other words, these living beings select to perceive only these marks that are of significance to their survival. As such, Agamben explains, “there exists a forest-for-the-park-ranger, a forest-for-the-hunter, a forest-for-

the-botanist, a forest-for-the-wayfarer, a forest-for-the-nature-lover, a forest-for-the-carpenter, and a finally a fable forest in which Little Red Riding Hood loses her way” (*Open* 41). Agamben (through Uexküll) describe these as “perceptual worlds,” each defined by their own carriers of significance.

Who Perceives Whom?

In the essay “Pornography, Nostalgia, Montage, A Triad of the Gaze” (*Reading Images*, 2000), Slavoj Žižek attempts to reposition the act of seeing in unusual ways that seem to offer new perspectives on the question of perception.

Žižek notes how in pornography, “the actor—as a rule a woman—in the moment of intense sexual pleasure looks directly into the camera, addressing us, the spectators” (223). We are pulled into the believability of the pornographic scene by connecting to the telling look of the actress looking directly at us. One may note that this technique of breaking the fourth wall and looking directly towards the spectators is part of the V-Effekt technique suggested by Bertold Brecht in his Epic Theatre. The objective of this technique is to break the theatrical illusion and surprise the audience into thinking of the actors, not as characters in a play, but as actors doing their job. In the pornographic film, the opposite effect happens: by looking directly at the camera, the actress aims are intensifying **the illusion**, as if she is inviting the spectator to get even more immersed in the action with her.

Žižek finds that this technique actually reverses the whole schema of subject/object in visual relations:

Contrary to the commonplace according to which, in pornography, the other (the person shown on the screen) is degraded to an object of our voyeuristic pleasure, we must stress that it is the spectator himself who effectively occupies the position of the object. The real subjects are the actors on the screen to rouse us sexually, while we, the spectators, are reduced to a paralyzed object-gaze. (“Pornography” 148)

In a way, this perspective utilizes and perverts the thesis proposed by Laura Mulvey in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) in its double reversal of the gaze turning the author as subject and objectifying the spectator. Thus, Žižek shows that the visual cultural object (in this case video pornography) may be constructed in a way that the relationship of production are reversed and mangled. In order for the effect to work, a perversion of the perception schema must take place (“Pornography,” Žižek 149).

Both what is shown (revealed) and what is not shown (concealed) constitute what Žižek refers to as a “limit of representability” which demarcates public and private space as subjects of visibility (by strangers). This “limit of representability” is traditionally observed in love scenes in films, melodramas, etc., whereby when at a certain point in the film, the camera moves off, or a part of the set is taken off focus, or the scene is edited to another, in a way that “we never directly see ‘that’ (the penetrating of sexual organs, etc.)” (“Pornography” 149). Žižek contrasts that to pornography where it “goes beyond, it shows everything.” When one trespasses that visual limit, Žižek asserts, then, “it always goes too far, i.e., it misses what remains concealed in a ‘normal’, non-pornographic love scene” (149). Žižek clarifies his point by stating that through

showing “the thing itself . . . we necessarily lose what we were after. The effect is extremely vulgar and depressing” (“Pornography” 149).

In fact, Jean Baudrillard makes a similar claim in “Violence of the Image” in his example of reality TV shows like “Big Brother”: “when all is given to be seen, there is nothing left to be seen...”

By applying the above scenario to news imagery, we are bound to come to the following observation. On the one hand, we find a general practice in the mainstream U.S. media of not showing graphic images of violence that depict scenes of death, blood, injury, etc. This practice could be seen as control over images from war zones and had culminated during the George W. Bush presidency when even pictures of caskets of fallen U.S. soldiers were prohibited from being captured or placed in U.S. media.

On the other hand, news media in the Middle East, Al Jazeera for instance, are notorious for airing once and again graphic images with fully exposed violence, the bodies of children bloody and torn, exploded buildings with leftover body parts, etc. The endless repetition of these images on TV only results in increased public outrage and frustration.

At first glance, it may seem that this contrasting programming policy is quite reflective of the cultural differences one finds easily in the “us versus them” dichotomy. Western media is rational and sophisticated and therefore will only air reasonable understated images of violence. Conversely, Al Jazeera’s Arab audience is emotional and irrational and therefore would require such sensational images to match their viewing dispositions.

If the above is accurate, then what explains the popularity (at least among young, right-wing conservatives) of websites that celebrate graphic violence through music and video against the Muslim enemy, like gotwarporn.com? What explains the popular success of violent vulgarity in intimate and domestic situations of daily shows like Jerry Springer? Similarly, couldn't one also see as equally horrific all the repetitive airing on mainstream U.S. media of the horrifying terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center, the collapse of the buildings as well as the giant explosion of white debris violently taking over the streets of Manhattan?

Is it possible that the U.S. media chooses to air images of violence perpetrated by others in order to reinforce an idea of a terrifying and primitive Other with the sheer purpose of creating and perpetuating fear of an impersonal and unidentifiable enemy? By not showing “the thing itself,” the terrorists are no longer individuals but a concept, an idea, an abstraction: terror, Islam, etc. Could this selection and infusion of imagery be seen as a shift or a skip in perception where George W. Bush could easily move a whole war from Afghanistan to Iraq (not to mention a complete cover-up of Pakistani and Saudi involvement), and where the blame for September 11 could almost seamlessly be redirected against the building of a American Muslim community center in Manhattan?

Al Jazeera may indeed aim to influence its viewers by showing “the thing itself”—the images of blatant violence, bludgeoned children, missing limbs, fire-hot bullets seen penetrating their young innocent little bodies. But as soon as we isolate this practice as a unique aberration that refers to certain cultural qualities, we partake in the construction of a false binary of an Other. But how different is this really from media practices on our own turf?

It is possible that the positioning of both Fox News and Al Jazeera as counter spectacles to each other may not be a matter of opposites but one of necessary consistency. The heterogeneous images of both polar opposites could be seen as contradictory perspectives but also as a collage of what Jacques Ranciere describes as “Misadventures of Universality.” The images of CNN or Fox news should be collaged with those of Al Jazeera not as interpretable single text, but as a system of relations involving seemingly opposing media, that disturb the most when they are put together. The montage of both sides will conflate the images that the spectator will see through the veil of inconsistency. The illustration used by Ranciere to explain this condition is that of the “image of the little nude Vietnamese girl shouting ahead of the soldiers on the roads of her wasted country could not go with the image of the American cosy interior without exploding it” (sic).

Ranciere describes this as “heterogeneity of the opposite” where montaged images play on the shock of heterogeneity and conflate two opposite worlds. The objective is that each of these worlds would reveal (through contrast) the hidden truth of the other, but also to conflate them in order to show that they could not go together.

The juxtaposition of the angry Muslim mobs in Afghanistan is necessary for the construction of the image of brave soldiers going to avenge the image of the Twin Towers being destroyed by eleven Muslims that have been now replaced with an abstract notion of terror. But it is when these images return with the mutilated bodies of children and caskets of American youth coming back home instead of victorious celebrations, that is when one image explodes the other. One needs the other for meaning to be discernible.

The problem of showing the angry brown mob in strange robes and long beards is that it is a convenient abstraction of reality as described earlier by Edward Said in his discussion of Clash of Civilizations. This one image (repeated in different settings, formats, etc.) is taken to represent a whole civilization (if we were to accept Huntington's terminology at all), in its entirety and as its consistent mode of living. Then, we (in the West) are invited to formulate cultural judgments based on it. The image of the angry Islamic mob is as innocent and telling as the ubiquitous images of a sexy Britney Spears or other Hollywood darlings that are seen in the rest of the world as authentic representations of the United States. Not only that not everyone in the U.S. (most people for that matter) look or behave like a Hollywood star, but also that these Hollywood darlings when seen in person do not look anything like their own pretty airbrushed, magazine shoots. Everyone knows that these angry demonstrations on the streets of Karachi are as played for the cameras, and possibly as stage-managed as any self-respecting runway show. The problem of perception goes a full circle from the nature of perception, to the cultural makeup of the perceiver to the medium of perception itself, where at every step of the way, each one of these elements becomes suspect.

In *Art and Illusion*, E.H. Gombrich speaks of the idea of the impossibility of "the innocent eye": "The innocent eye is a myth," (298) he says. We always come to the image with a certain set of knowledge, biases, and preferences. Gombrich emphasizes that when we step in front of a picture, we're always in a "state of readiness to start projecting, to thrust out the tentacles of phantom colors and phantom images which always flicker around our perceptions." (227). As such, one could say that one is less seeing what is being observed and more attempting

to fit what the eye sees within comfortable frames that are already familiar. According to Gombrich, "...what we call 'reading' an image may perhaps be better described as testing it for its potentialities, trying out what fits" (227). Our perception, therefore, could be said to be always guided by a prior set of personal and cultural 'readiness.'" If one is to accept Gombrich's argument that there is no innocent eye, could one, by extension, also contend that there are no innocent images?

What is missing, then, from the perception of the image is a conscious situatedness that acknowledges the perceiver's cultural make-up as well as the image itself as a constructed rhetorical tool; in other words, a critical and participatory involvement with the image. When the experience of images gets separated from its participatory function, its missing element becomes less that of its aura and more of its experience, which are altogether different. It is no longer the aura of the mountain in Benjamin's example.⁴ The aura, if it is contained in the image, then the experience of the image is limited to a mimetic rivalry, as described by Rene Girard in *To Double Business Bound* (xii), but could we also say that this experience resides in the observer/participant herself. The image is a text, and perception is always a "readerly" act. If the aura is an exterior phenomenon, then experience is both embodied and decidedly interior: here, now, individual, unilateral, mostly incommunicable, but at times contagious and magical. If aura is about presence and ritual, one is directed to that other space of presence: the theatre. But, one could further observe that this is where the "deadly" theater had abandoned its seekers. Locking the experience of art as a shamanistically controlled ritual, a privilege threatened by mechanical reproduction. In the *Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Ranciere opens up the theater as a space for

a dialogical state of conversion. Both Brecht and Artaud attempt to make the same participatory involvement even though they come at this quest from seemingly different directions.

Our viewing of images should take into consideration both the ideology inscribed in the image as well as the necessity of an iconoclastic eye. As noted by W.J.T. Mitchell in *Iconology*, “the notion of ideology is rooted in the concept of imagery, and reenacts the ancient struggles of iconoclasm, idolatry, and fetishism” (4). A critical viewing experience is better prepared with the notion of breaking through the image itself. When the medium stands in for the message, completely filling in its space, replacing it altogether; when experiences are only mediated instances of an original, this, then, becomes the exact moment when simulacra reaches its final and irreversible triumph. Experience becomes no longer virtual, or simply mediated; it has become a mimesis of a lost self, a reproduction of no original.

The Critical Eye

In “To Veil the Threat of Terror: Afghan Women and the Clash of Civilizations in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism” (*The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 2004), Dana Cloud explores the role played by the media in widely circulating images of the Afghan people as an attempt to build public support for the U.S. war with Afghanistan between the years 2001–2002.

Cloud analyzes the use of imagery published on the website Time.com to delineate ideological arguments based on an already existing racist mentality supporting the notion of “the white man’s burden” (285). Thus, as she maps an image to the workings of its effect, she also notes the contradictory nature of the apparent coding of a photograph and its meaning. The apparent objective of the article is understand the regime of meaning-making in an image—

where there are perceptible contradictions between what the image shows and what the image says (285).

Cloud here applies a method known as “depth hermeneutics” proposed by John Thompson (287), which aims at going beyond the limits of semiotic analysis by detecting “an extra discursive real” by exposing “the contradictions between discourses and the truths that they veil” (296).

As Cloud puts it:

The photographs of people who represent entire cultures in conflict encourage viewers to interpret the war as a moral clash between good and evil, and between persons who are essentially reasonable and people who are fundamentally irrational. Metonymizing the conflict in terms of ‘our way of life’ and challenges to it reduces a complex set of geopolitical motives, strategies, and outcomes to a cultural binary. (291)

These cartoons, these photographs, the minaret, the Islamic center, all in the end contribute and constitute a compilation, an anthology of images that metonymically stand for and abbreviate a “whole” Other – and redefine “his” Otherness and situatedness as an adversary.

Cloud notes a similar fake rationale for war in Afghanistan, which she characterizes as a “war of saving the brown women from the brown men”. Cloud’s essay finds that this rationale is contradictory to the lived experiences of women in that country. The exploitation of a legitimate issue of a local group by a foreign power with the latent purpose of furthering the interests of this foreign power is a technique cleverly and frequently used by colonialists in multiple examples. The same rationale has been detected and refuted by Frantz Fanon about the French brutal

conflict with Algerian independence fighters as well as by Gayatri Spivak, Lila Abu-Lughod, and others. Cloud remarks that the Taliban have been making it more difficult for Afghani women to organize. Women's organizations there also flatly rejected U.S. help that would come "in the form of bombs and military occupation" (279). In that sense, the women were rejecting a much-needed assistance because it comes bundled with military domination.

The logic used in justifying U.S. intervention to help Afghani women from Afghani men is a false logic used to justify a false pretext: Afghani women are oppressed, therefore, Americans need to save them from the Afghani man. The fact of the matter is that even after the white man's intervention, the lives of Afghani women (as part of a whole society under occupation) have not fared much better.

Euphemisms like "nation-building" and "exporting" democracy are viewed as empty rhetoric by the native and yet another way that the emperor's nakedness becomes more and more unbearable to witness. It does not make it any easier that the ordinary man in the Iraqi street has already lost a family member to Saddam's wars with Iran and Kuwait, to the occupation forces, or to domestic extremists of all sorts. This troubled (recent) history is translated to a cynical reluctance to accept what the media throws at the native. Therefore, suspiciousness becomes a permanent filter at the foreground of the perception of any image viewed by most ordinary people under conflict that involve the U.S. military power.

Cloud invites us to go behind the ideograph, embedded within the image, in order to search for what the image wants to replace. The image seems to establish an evidentiary proof of an already false statement—but by the fact that the image exists and is supported by the

ideograph, one is inclined to believe the myth and that the myth could then be generalized. By activating such an understanding, one is able to employ a new critical approach to understanding images of Otherness. Cloud suggests that “Scholars should understand the workings of images during the war and occupation in the context of the actual economic and geopolitical aims of the United States” (299).

News images of terrorists, abject women, and angry brown men with beards violently and threateningly displaying this anger in public places, have the immediate effect of establishing a visual binary opposition between “us” and a terrifying “Other.” The gaze of the Western viewer is immediately turned to a normalizing need for modernity and rationality, which are visibly absent in these images. This vision, Cloud points out, veiled “not only the reasons for terrorism, this discourse also rendered opaque the actual motives for the war and, thus, disabled real public deliberation over its course” (299).

Cloud makes the argument that the apparent meaning of war photography is the exact opposite of its true effect. The apparent humanitarian empathy with the plight of a less fortunate people is only a **veil** for a “pseudo-cultural, pseudo-humanitarian coding of what is, at the end of the day, a racist and imperialist project of war and occupation for the control of oil” (Cloud 299).

In *Image Politics*, Kevin DeLuca argues that the public saturation of mediated images compels us “to engage and employ the strategies of visual rhetoric.” Cloud seems to agree with Kevin DeLuca and others in the necessity to highlight the intertwining (dare we say complicity?) of media and politics, the construction of visual images in the media as part of an ideological framework that the media employs. The dialectic between what is already in the public

unconscious (in the sense suggested by Lakoff in *The Political Mind*) and an incessant additional supply of media images could illustrate the functionality of images as tools for explaining and understanding within a “nationalist system of ideas” (Cloud, 300). Cloud quotes DeLuca’s argument that “social movement ‘image events’ can ‘deconstruct and articulate identities, ideologies, consciousnesses, communities, publics, and cultures in our modern industrial civilization’” (300).

News photography, Cloud posits, could be taken for granted as “slices of reality.” What is needed, she argues, is a “public reframing and questioning of images.” She calls for critical readings of images...to unpack the workings of hegemonic imagery in broadly accessible venues and language” (Cloud 300).

We discover that images are not isolated instances of a given culture. They constitute elements in a societal spectacle that has gradually shaped our world in consumerist “Umwelts” as described by Giorgio Agamben in *The Open: Man and Animal* (39). This realization was made by Guy Debord in “Society of the Spectacle.” The interworking of images becomes fundamental to not only cultural relations, but also the social imagination within the same (imag-ined) community. Debord notes that “The spectacle is not a collection of images, rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.”

Debord’s aim and proposal, is “to wake up the spectator who has been drugged by spectacular images,”... “through radical action in the form of the construction of situations,”... “situations that bring a revolutionary reordering of life, politics, and art.”

Debord explains how images structure the public unconscious in not only how we perceive images, but also what we consider as societal needs. He says, “In a consumer society, social life is not about living but about having; the spectacle uses the image to convey what people need and must have. Consequently, social life moves further, leaving a state of ‘having’ and proceeding into a state of ‘appearing;’ namely the appearance of the image.”

As a viewer of images, one is called upon to detect and separate the official story from the counter-culture reinterpretation. Ranciere points out that reliefs on temple walls are ancient media systems that presented the official story in images and calls upon us to note the tension between image and ability to think and critique (“Spectator” 44-45).

A critical reading of cross-cultural images, especially those indexing the false dichotomy of “Islam versus the West” may reveal a quest for the Muslim, as subject, to be “seen”. The mistaken identity of the Muslim as the terrorist could be viewed as driving a “Will to Visibility”—not in a voyeuristic mode, or an exhibitionist mode, but more in a context where one could be seen and would count as a human being, as noted by Judith Butler in her recent works. The Muslim may notice that he is being looked at but will also realize that he is not being seen.

Will to Visibility

In Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, she describes that which must be expelled to establish the clean and proper self. However, one can never be totally expelled as it is part of being alive (saliva, feces, menstrual blood) (Taylor and Altarity, 160). This disturbing image of bodily horror could be seen in the biblical story of Abraham's firstborn, Ishmael, who was

expelled by his own father and left alone with his mother, Hagar, in the Arabian desert. Could one do an Oedipal reading of this story? Hagar had been a slave to Abraham's wife, Sarah, and when Sarah was unable to bear children, she suggested that Abraham lay with her slave Hagar. However, when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, Sarah grew jealous and demanded that Abraham expel both child and mother into the desert. Later, Sarah is blessed by God to give birth to Isaac, who becomes Abraham's favorite son.

Ishmael is considered to be the ancestral father of the Arabs, while Isaac is considered the father of the Hebrews. To this date, Muslims from all over the world every year commemorate the expulsion of Ishmael and Hagar into the desert in performing the rites of Hajj by walking on foot repeatedly back and forth between the two hills of Safa and Marwa in the Arabian desert to symbolize the diasporic conditions of the two and Hagar's desperate search for water to quench her child's thirst in the relentless desert heat.

The body longs to be viewed by its father, and unable to attain this desire, then one may explode their body just to be seen and counted—even if nothing more than a body. A suicide bomber who kills Arab and Jew is making a terrible and bloody desperate attempt to reconcile Ishmael's body with that of Isaac, in a mimetic rivalry in the sense described by Rene Girard. Where God used Isaac, Abraham's favorite son, as a potential object of sacrifice to test Abraham's faith, Isaac's life was spared, but the life of Ishmael, the abject, persisted in exile. Ishmael's life outside of his father's gaze did not count, was non-existent, and will only be reunited with the father after the father's death.

Like Christ, Tammuz was in Mesopotamian mythology a God that was sacrificed for the prosperity of the community, and also like Isaac and Christ, Tammuz comes back to life to celebrate the spring of prosperity. Ishmael, however, is of a different kind. For no error of his own, Ishmael, although living, is cast out of the act of being seen. He is a homo sacer in the sense described by Giorgio Agamben (*Homo* 71). Homo Sacer is a person, in Greek society, whose life does not count and could be killed by anyone without recourse but is not even clean enough to be sacrificed in a religious ritual. In fact, Ishmael, in the Bible, was simultaneously blessed and cursed along with his descendants: “he shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen” (*New International Version*, Gen. 12:12). Did I mention that Ishmael was a Palestinian, born in Hebron, the West Bank?

The suicide bomber may be viewed as part of a terrible ritual of equalizing the martyr's body with those of his kin. It is a diabolical scheme of forcing oneself back into the field of vision, a call to be viewed by the (half) brother as an equal. This dissipation of the sacrificed body into others is experienced all the time with the sacrament of the Eucharist, where the body and blood of Christ are shared with the congregation.

In *Frames of War* (2009), Judith Butler asks what makes certain lives grievable while other lives are accepted as deserving of death. Butler posits that there are certain norms of intelligibility and recognizability that determine where one's life falls within this frame. She asserts that although all lives are born precarious (because they're susceptible to death):

“Precisely because a living being may die, it is necessary to care for that being so that it may

live” only those who fall within this frame of norms as determined by the West would be grievable” (Butler, *Frames* 14).

Those whose recognizability is called into question are not only individual “homo sacers” thrown out at the periphery of society, but rather are entire populations who have become vulnerable and at risk. They have been failed by their states and are in need of protection. But, instead, they are listed as “destructible” collateral damage and almost never seen. Butler invokes the images of prisons of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay as examples (*Frames*). The world of media images narrowly frames the Arab/Muslim (viewed as type) as either unworthy or culpable a priori, much as Ishmael was.

Butler refers to Samuel Huntington’s work, *The Clash of Civilizations*, in which he positions the West at an “advanced and finally more rational, and hence... more capable of democratic deliberation and self-governance” (124-125). She describes this claim as a “missionary” one, and states that it renders populations who remain outside of this frame of intelligibility eligible to be destroyed (125).

There is a desire to be seen and to count. This “Will to Visibility” is as necessary as exercising a critical perception of images. We, as viewers of images, may want to factor not only what is in the image itself, but also what the image omits, or expels as abject in the sense proposed by Kristeva. In our original story of the U.S. Marines’ battle on the shores of Tripoli, what is missing was that the Pasha of Tripolitania at the time, Yusuf Karamanli, was indeed no less of a ruthless tyrant than Colonel Qaddafi. But unlike Qaddafi, Karamanli was also a foreign colonizer, a Turk dispatched by the Ottoman Empire to subjugate the local population and

exploit the country's resources and who in the process had massacred much of the local population and assassinated his own brother. Nor does the official story tell us of the many counter-culture images of heroic opposition to Karamanli's rule (and that of the Ottoman system of governance) by the local population nor of the ordinary exchanges that were taking place between the natives with Western merchants, travelers, and ordinary people. The portrayed image of Karamanli as representative of all Muslims, as a homogenous and consistent group whose religion calls for the annihilation of the infidels, rings fake and hollow. But, it also must bring forth the omitted images of cooperation among ordinary people: Muslims, Europeans, Americans, Africans, and others, engaged in ordinary interactions that were taking place at the time.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SOUND OF THE REVOLUTION

At the culmination of the recent Egyptian revolution (now named the January 25 Revolution), an air force general stood at a podium in front of TV cameras and announced that the military High Command Council had taken over control of the state affairs of the country. The general was reading from a prepared statement. By committing to the paper he was reading, the general had emphasized the text as a solid literary material, a document, that was intended to be printed, distributed to news outlets, and reprinted in history books. However, the general delivered the text orally, in a pseudo-public setting, announced not to a real, live audience in the city square, but to a virtual audience in front of a TV camera. Compounding this linguistic layering, towards the end of the speech, a fascinating thing happened. As the general reached the part of his statement where he was saluting the young souls of those who died in the pursuit of reforms in Egypt over the past few days, he suddenly stopped talking, raised his right hand, and stomped his foot in a formal military salute, followed by a second or two of silence, after which he went back to concluding his otherwise all-verbal statement.

In the *Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, Marshal McLuhan describes the redundancy of alphabetic technology, where thought is seen as the content of speech, speech is the content of writing, writing is the content of print, etc. He cites the Rosetta stone as an embodiment of redundancy, stating the exact same thing in multiple linguistic iterations. So, was the general's statement an example of linguistic redundancy, where the same content was communicated in three separate modes: typographic, oral (verbal), and physical (gestural)?

I would argue that the general's statement, delivered orally from a written text and accompanied by a gesture that represented words that were already said would not be considered as redundant texts, repeated content. Not only did his statement, delivered to a TV camera, constitute an example of Walter Ong's secondary orality—(*Orality and Literacy*) in the sense that it was an oral message delivered through electronic media but it also signaled something interestingly different. What we were witnessing is a hybrid mode of communication that draws on competencies of literacy, orality, and digital communication—plus something altogether surprising but one that sums all of the above: live theater.

Watching the Egyptian revolution on television screens, one was immediately struck by the sonority of the whole thing. Revolutions are noisy gigs. Everywhere at Tahrir Square were people chanting anti-government slogans, singing patriotic songs, dancing, reading poetry, performing comedic acts, creating politically themed monuments from trash bags and broken stones, memorials for their fallen comrades. In the midst of all of this were also all kinds of written (silent) signs, placards, pieces of cardboard, paper, anything on which the protestors could write their anger and their yearning for freedom. Signs were written in Arabic, English, French, even Chinese. Certain signs were written in both English and Arabic, in a way that you needed to know both languages to understand the meaning, like the one addressing President Mubarak: “رحتنا رلته – You Can Do it Too”: “Hitler Committed Suicide – You Can Do it Too.”

Tahrir Square, over the course of 18 days, turned into a territory that was independent from the state in which it was located. Except (or more aptly because of it) when the protestors

were attacked in a surreal charge of men on horses and camels, the site showed a carnivalesque spirit (in the Bakhtinian sense), a collective sharing of the here and now, suspension of rank and difference, and the chaotic display of colorful participation—and, most of noticeable of all, a deafening, non-stop amalgamation of all types of sonority—all merging in a vociferous brew as the sound of the revolution.

Ong classified Arabic culture among those that have known writing for quite some time (a gross understatement when you note that the alphabet was invented in Ugarit, Syria) but still failed to “interiorize” literacy (27). Ong cited the use of formulaic utterances in Arabic as evidence, even using the writing style of Kahlil Gibran (*The Prophet*, etc.) as a case in point (27). To Ong, Arabic (like Russian, and other Mediterranean languages, he thought) has not yet fully transitioned from its oral roots but manifested a good deal of what he termed “oral residue” (38). As such, Arabic would not easily facilitate the kind of critical thinking, atemporal, abstract thought one finds in predominantly print cultures.

The Quran is said to be impossible to translate from Arabic. Not only because Arabic, like Latin, is considered a sacred language, but because reciters and listeners of the Quran experience a certain meaning in the aurality of the recitations. In fact, there is a whole Islamic discipline, called Tajweed, dedicated to studying the rules of reciting Quran. The purpose of Tajweed is to bring forth from writing to sound the sonoric qualities of the text to communicate not only the meaning, but also a certain feeling associated with the sound of the text. The language of the Quran as a written text is similar to, but not exactly the same as, written classical

Arabic that one would read in books and newspapers. However, the oral/spoken language of the Quran is completely different from both modern classical Arabic and spoken colloquial Arabic.

Mostly anything that you can write in classical Arabic will sound sublime and impressive to a native speaker when spoken aloud. The literariness of the written word in Arabic almost automatically assumes a certain poetic eloquence when the word moves from the realm of writing to the realm of sound/ speech. This quality refers to certain aural characteristics in classical Arabic but also to the distance between the language of history, books, learnedness, and poetry, and the language of everyday life. The orality of Arabic resides in memory not exactly as a recorder of events but also has a recapturing of sounds and histories that one keeps in their cultural storage as a reference to the sublime, an envisioned by Ong. (Orality, 70-73)

Unlike classical Arabic, the spoken vernacular differs greatly among states and regions, and is mostly not written (even though electronic culture has already started to change that). It is the language of people-to-people conversations, much of the entertainment, and a good deal of “popular poetry.” Whereas classical Arabic denotes erudition, spoken Arabic denotes orality, easiness and day-to-day familiarity.

At Tahrir Square, the demonstrators, again, were doing both: shouting their slogans and displaying their written messages in multiple languages. Recurring chants included: “شم انحا“ (شوا يمشي; he should leave), gnivael ton er’eW :ihsmey aw uh ,ihsmenah hsuom anha” (شوا يمشي - حاذم شي), or “ةدح او ديا شي جلا و بعشلا“: Esh-shab wel geish eid wahda” (The people and the army are one hand). These are simple rallying cries that would easily accomplish what Ong described as the sound of orality that unites people in groups and communities (72). That was the sound of the

people speaking from the heart, unembellished, with little reference to chirographic thinking. More remarkable, however, were the two most dominant slogans heard almost nonstop at Tahrir Square: “لحرا” and “ماظنل اطاقسا دي ري بعشلا”: “Leave” and “The People Wants to Topple the Regime,” respectively. Neither of these statements are particularly “spoken Arabic.” To the contrary, these slogans clearly sound like they belong to typography more than orality, and would have sounded strange in standard common folk conversations. These “print-sounding” cries were not limited to the versatile group of student, professional, unemployed, and lower class demonstrators at Tahrir; they were also repeated by millions in cities and provinces throughout Egypt. How did such statements, clearly belonging to the typographic side of language, jump to the oral side, spoken by millions and adopted as the revolution’s main rallying cry? In fact, keeping in mind that adult illiteracy in Egypt nears 30%, this is even a bigger surprise.

Awareness of this linguistic leap was not hidden from the demonstrators themselves. The demonstrators (Egyptians are known for their acute sense of humor) started chanting another slogan: “يشمهفبب ام نكمي ،يشما ينعي لحرا” (Leave means go, maybe he does not understand).

Other humorous displays of dissent were performed in reverse: spoken language slogans written on improvised placards. These included signs that communicated common speech phrases like: “يديا تبعت ،لحرا” (Leave, my arm is tired), “ريغأ زواع لحرا” (Leave, I need to change my clothes), and “يضف ملقلا ،لحرا” (Leave, my marker ran out).

In addition to the visual of a population that came out to the public square to demonstrate resistance, and the sound of anti-government chants, the music of various groups singing for

freedom, at Tahrir Square, there was also the thunderous non-verbal sound of theater. Anderson Cooper of CNN reported the eerie nonstop beating on tin barricades that the protestors used to signal their presence and declare a challenge to the government-hired thugs, who had assaulted them for more than a day. When the songs of the peaceful demonstrators were quieted down by Molotov cocktails and stones thrown by the government thugs (balatagies), one could sense that a primordial consciousness by a modern people has morphed into a different kind of language. Deep inside the psyche of human communication, lies the rhythmic beating of the drum. A long time before the printing press, before the alphabet, before the word, there was the beating of the drum. With the beat of the drum, theatre is always present.

Walter Ong described oral cultures as “homeostatic,” firmly planted in the present (46). The spoken word vanishes as soon as it is uttered and takes an almost instantaneous refuge in memory. Communicated meaning needs to be explored in tones, oral delivery, gestures, facial expressions, and performance. Ong concluded that this kind of temporal communication prevents the kind of consciousness and logic necessary in print cultures for the development of advanced technology (79).

Derrida, too, distrusted the foregrounding of the present in speech. He considered that philosophers privileged voice as a medium of meaning (logocentrism). If writing was the signifier of speech, then it is a weak medium because it is a signifier of a signifier—since speech (the spoken word, logos) signifies thought. In this scheme, writing becomes merely a derivative of speech. Derrida proposes Grammatology as a way to liberate ideas from the hold of speech (logocentrism) on meaning and knowledge. According to Derrida’s logocentric theory, presence

abolishes the need for writing as the medium of communications. Speech takes over from writing; no need for signs, placards, or any of the kind. (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 50)

Typography functions not in presence (of the two requisite participants: speaker and addressee) but in absence. The written word functions autonomously of the writer and therefore does not require the presence of the writer or any particular addressee. Derrida thought that by separating writing from speech, one is able to counter the metaphysics of presence. To him, writing was the only way of communicating thought. (*Grammatology*, 23 and 75)

To Derrida, logocentrism leads to a “metaphysics of presence” and assumes a “transcendental signified” in which there is a proximity that lends consciousness to thought, and thought, as secondary state, to speech, thus making speech twice removed from an original, which it is trying to express. The presence of the voice, the spoken word (signifier) also refers to the presence of the signified interiority of thought. This dangerous proximity of thought to speech is cleverly noted by Walter Ong, who in *Orality and Literacy* explains that Hebrew has intentionally omitted all vowels from its alphabet since the vowel sounds would correspond to the ineffable name of God: Yaweh (Ong 88). Vowels become the speech sounds that come from the deep interiority of the human body and are expressions of breath, the secret of life.

Ferdinand de Saussure asserted in *Cours de Linguistique Générale* that the spoken language is an arbitrary sign system that does not directly represent language visual or aurally. This is why words (except in onomatopoeia) do not necessarily correspond to the sound of their referent (dog, chien, hund, kalb, etc.). Likewise, except for hieroglyphic writings, the written word does not denote the visual image of the referent directly. However, as Richard Harland

states in *Superstructuralism*, de Saussure also maintained that the spoken language (parole), not the written language (langue), is the natural manifestation of thought. (Harland 15).

On the other hand, it is evident that Western culture has privileged knowledge only in its written format as represented by what Jean-Francois Lyotard terms in *The Postmodern Condition* as the grand metanarrative (35). The canonical oeuvres of Western civilization are to be found in the written word and founded on the legacy of the printing press. The dominance of this singular modality constitutes a cultural hegemony in the terms suggested by Antonio Gramsci.

Like Derrida, Walter Benjamin aimed at disrupting the metaphysics of presence in order to propose a new vision of art that is not spatio-temporally connected to the observer. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin seemed to characterize the “presence” of a work of art as anti-democratic and reactionary aura, steeped in ritual.

Bertold Brecht, on the other hand, suggested the exact opposite solution to the question of metaphysics. He posited that only by drawing awareness to the here and now can one can have a critical position regarding one’s social conditions and the work of art being perceived. In the *Short Organum*, Brecht called for a theatrical technique that he termed: the Verfremdung Effekt (V-effect). It has been translated into English as alienation, or distanciation, effect. The V-effect required that the actors, at certain points in a play would stop acting, get out of character and refer to the “real” person of the actor in order to get the spectator out of the state of immersed reverie (that occurs when watching the play) (Willet 91-99). What V-effect does is invite the spectator to become conscious of the artificiality of the space (topos) he or she is in (theater) and to critically relate to the events on the stage as he or she relates to his or her own life in the

present. In other words, V-effect was meant as a reference to the state of awareness of the here and now as it is “happening” here and now, but uses the story and characters as catalysts to a critical understanding of one’s present in a larger socio-political and economic context Brecht’s V-effect indeed pushes the present to the front, but what it aims to accomplish is a transformation of the present. Thus it achieves the exact opposite of a metaphysics of presence because it calls for a critical positioning vis-a-vis the theatrical performance.

Revolutions necessitate moments and places of resistance and a discourse that is altogether new and that is not a repetition on a calendar. The notions of space and presence need to be revisited, not only in the light of history, but also of the historicity of the moment. This is an example of what Allan Badiou describes as an “event,” an interruption in the repetition of acts that require attention to itself, an “event of truth.” Jean Baudrillard, In “Strike of Events”, posits that the event will never happen. He lamented the glory of the event, and the loss of its aura. He asserts that the revolution is not on the agenda any longer. But it was Walter Benjamin who somehow, by some sort of reversal, redirects us to the location of the event itself. In “On the Concept of History,” Benjamin introduces the concept of *Jetztzeit* (now-time). *Jetztzeit* is the opposite of what Benjamin describes as “empty time.” It is a time that exists only in the now, when one’s consciousness cannot be anywhere else. The moment of the event. He, indeed, talks about the French Revolution in the same context.

So, a present that is unlike empty present, and a time that is unlike empty time, were materialized at Tahrir Square for 18 days. Baudrillard asked “what could possibly come after the orgy?” (*Strike*) The answer, undoubtedly, is the revolution, marked by a total amalgamation of

the signs, a polyphony (in the Bakhtinian sense) of sounds, images, and I am sure smells of Jetztzeit. Meaning is not redundant, but polyphonic. The bodily presence of the protestors at Tahrir Square was not metaphysical, but a necessity.

In *Antigone's Claim*, Judith Butler tackles the act of public protest by Antigone in standing up to the state and questioning the state's legitimacy. Antigone placed her body at the risk of physical danger with her public disobedience. Her reality was defined by the necessity to place her body in the public space of exposure and danger.

At Tahrir Square, a hundred thousand Antigones were making their own claim: deligitimation of the state by placing their own unprotected bodies directly under the perils of the state's power machine—protesting their version of King Creon (Antigone's uncle), President Mubarak, the father of the nation, who in turn, also quick to note his patriarchal authority, asks the youth to go home and forget about the whole thing. Mubarak's newly appointed VP, General Omar Sulliman (who himself bears an uncanny resemblance to someone's great uncle, or an undertaker) puts it more succinctly by again asking the protestors to go home, or he will have to call their parents: "... we'll ask their parents to ask them to go home," he said in a statement issued from the Presidential palace (ABC News). Clearly, the state apparatus had chosen to be completely oblivious to the nature of the revolution as an "event" and opted to revoke its relevance in the form of parental 'curfew.'

Derrida thought that the "metaphysics of presence" should not be accomplished because it would be the same as death. He was right. The present of the protestors at Tahrir was marked as such: facing death and injury as the last resort at the hand of the state. Tahrir Square would

turn into what Gregory Ulmer, in *Internet Invention*, described as chora, “a mediating space that coordinates the inner void, nothing, openness (Being) with the outer order of events (Becoming)” (68). Tahrir Square, as such, becomes a space for mediation of memory and invention, being and becoming, presence and absence, living or dying. Its foundation is public, but its experience is ultimately very interior and personal. However, Ulmer’s *Mystory* located chora in a metaphorical domain. He says, “chora could not be treated directly; it was that which made appearance possible, but itself did not appear.” (Ulmer 100) At Tahrir, one was not watching a sacred memory, though. One was living an event in the present.

Ironically, this *Jetztzeit*, this here and now event, which would, to the young Egyptian protesters, only materialize in the physical space of Tahrir Square had its origins in the digital world of online social network. The original activists of the 25 January movement had organized on Facebook and exchanged ideas and data files, using virtual tools and without the need to physically meet in person. Tahrir Square, a space of places (in the understanding proposed by Manuel Castells in *The Rise of Network Society*) has its roots in what Castells terms as its exact opposite: “the space of flows.” Castells described this split as a “structural schizophrenia” and “*bipolar opposition between the Net and the self*” (*Network 3*).

Castells posits that contemporary culture is characterized by a digitally based informational society within a global economy. His theory of Network Society calls into question traditional notions of time and space. The space of flows connects disparate geographical locales through flows of capital, information, technology, images, etc. The network society has three main components: technology, nodes (places), and people (actors/the elite that control the

switches). Castells states that much of the power in network society resides in command and control centers that determine inclusion and exclusion to the network (*Network* 409). In the network society, personal communications and organizing are replaced by social networking, digital modes of communication as a foundational platform for social change and reform.

It is precisely this flow of information that the organizers of the 25 January revolution were counting on to communicate with each other, a network flow of ideas and intelligence. It was also the space of flows that brought together the same group that was functioning in a decidedly disembodied (if not virtual) presence and discontinuous space in different countries. Protest locations and times were tweeted and SMS'd among participants. Information about nonviolent agitation was disseminated along with information on how to clean the trash after a demonstration and how to attract the local population. However, by an extension of the same logic, the Egyptian government did what many thought was unthinkable. Realizing that these "Facebook kids" were using the network to communicate activities that were translated to acts of disobedience on the streets, the Egyptian state (with a finger on a centralized command and control switch) decided to turn off the Internet. When they realized that mobile telephone networks also provided a communications network redundancy to the protestors, they shut that down, too.

The assumption of the state was that by turning the network offline, the communication flow was going to be disrupted. If this was a Facebook revolution, then, turning off Facebook should kill it. However, something amazingly different happened. The revolution did not die

despite of the total blockage of the electronic network. The opposite happened; it grew by the millions throughout the country.

This was a self-healing redundant network that went far beyond digital connectivity. It restored itself ad hoc offline and extended its communication as the beat of a drum on tin plates. The informational flow within the network had clearly been based on a hybrid topology all along. Egypt's Internet connectivity is less than 20% and therefore the original spark that has ignited the revolution was already diffused to offline networks that the original online network was not aware of, although it was possibly counting on it. This network of networks, star of stars was a space of places that went beyond Castells' theory. The flow jumped seamlessly from one type of mesh network to another. This flow, too, became clear to the Egyptian state as it quickly moved to freeze the movement of all trains (the main means of long-distance public transportation) throughout the country and to set up restrictions on vehicle movements towards the space of places, the physical epicenter of the revolution, ground zero, if you will. The power of the network has been wrestled from its (now standard) command and controls and was now in the hands of what Hardt and Negri call the Multitude, the force that counter-balances the power of multi-national corporations (MNCs) in globalization, and the obstinate desire to control by the state and global capital (*Empire* 393). The Multitude played its role without a glitch. The leaderless revolution with a distributed network topology was indeed a medium that was its own message.

The traversing of spaces, flows, networks, orality to literacy, and presence to virtuality describe a hybrid societal organization that is characterized by the interoperability of otherwise

disparate networks and flows. At the control and command center are no longer the traditional powers of high capital and government bureaucracy but the diffused power not of the network itself, but of the multitude. The only constant in the network of relationships and organization is hybridity, a polyphonic, multi-system, multi-modal interoperability functioning all at once.

When Derrida privileged writing over the spoken word, it was his inability to cope with his own hybridity that was at the root of this rejection. In “Le Petit Juif Français d'Algérie,” Derrida seems to confess that his attachment to writing was the result of his hybrid identity: an Algerian Jew, who never quite learned Arabic, who never felt at ease with Judaism, and to whom French became his assumed and defining identity. A theatricality of presence (with its genesis still mostly in written texts) always foregrounds the “actor’s” body (even in Castellsian terms of social actors) (Castells, *Network* 442). It communicates using multiple, simultaneous, asynchronous texts, and it exhibits a reality that is perceived in the here and now (Jetztzeit). However, this theatricality is intended to critically affect the life and outlook of its participants. It is not hegemony, but participation. It is not identity, but hybridity.

CHAPTER THREE: COLONIAL GAZE—NATIVE BODIES

The Mohammad cartoons raised quite a stir a few years ago, provoking violent riots throughout the Muslim world and leading to the burning of Western embassies and killing of many—but also raising questions about freedom of speech, Islamic fanaticism, even a renewed clash of civilizations between the Islamic and Western worlds.

This essay seeks to understand why these twelve cartoons exploded a deep interiority of hundreds of millions. Could it be because of a certain visual rhetoric, not clearly visible to us in the Western world, a system of representation whose direct aim is to humiliate the Arab and the Muslim? Could it be that the rioters in the Muslim world were reading the cartoons as a clear text, a sign system, a visual rhetoric, that we, in the Western world, naively took for simple cartoons? Were those in the Muslim world merely having problems comprehending or accepting basic principles of civilized democracy, free speech, or were they responding to a message altogether different?

Is there a system of representation that goes as far back as hundreds of years and aims at locking the Muslim or the Arab in a phantasmic space imagined by the Westerner? How can we view this type of representation as a regime of power relations between cultures? Could the Abu Ghraib prison photographs, replete with classic dominatrix sexual imagery, be nothing more than a reiteration of a sexual humiliation and domination practiced by the West over the East even before the advent of colonialism in the eighteenth century?

The Photograph

What is worse than sexual subjugation and rape? Photographing it. Serial murderers, rapists, and lynch mobs know that too well. So do their victims.

A photograph that captures its subjects in a certain fixed state of representation and meaning is in fact positing itself as a medium of control. Like a painting, the photograph does rely on certain visual compositions and semiotic markups for its communication. But, unlike a painting, the photograph does not automatically assume the subjectivity of the painter. The lens of the camera is viewed as an objective recorder of events; the photographer as a documentarian of real events. We want to think of “the camera as the eye of history” (qtd. in Sontag, *Regarding* 52). Therefore, in an era before digital photo-editing, one was expected to accept photographs as evidence of the real, unquestionable, uncontested. The photograph becomes alibi and evidence, an undeniable proof.¹

But the photograph can also be a personal memento, a private souvenir. An intimate childhood picture (think of the tenderness in way that Roland Barthes reads his mother’s photograph in *Camera Lucida*), family reunion, graduation, a travel picture, all serve as depositories of personal memories that one keeps hidden in an album or a box.

However, when a photograph is displayed as a postcard, it moves from the personal to the public domain. It, thus, can no longer be considered personal. A postcard is evidence of participation and observation, a trophy of sorts in which many are implicated, not only the photographer and the subject of the photo. We, too, as senders, receivers, observers of the postcard, become implicated by participation. We send home postcards of the Eiffel Tower, the

Pyramids, or the Manhattan skyline, for no other reason except as evidentiary proof that we came, we saw, and we conquered the space. We captured its representation and sent it to those less fortunate.

Malek Alloula, who wrote an influential book on French postcards in Algeria, *Colonial Harem*, describes the postcard as “falsely naïve.” (Alloula 27) He notes that the postcard “misleads in direct measure to the fact that it presents itself as having neither depth nor aesthetic pretensions. It is the degree zero of photography.” He adds that “The postcard conceals its motivations because the innocuousness of its façade is granted once for all” (Alloula 27-28).

The postcard is a naked photograph, exposed for all to see one’s exploits in far away lands. It is stripped of the privacy afforded to the letter and envelope. Its medium is its message!



Fig. 1. Postcards and cartoons.

Orientalism

The experiment in fixing the Arab and Muslim in the image of the Oriental as the Other is probably as old as the accounts of “Eastern Despotism” by Herodotus in the fifth century BC. Herodotus, who also reported that the Oriental culture was effeminate, is the Father of History,

who, in the *Histories*, chronicled the history and geography of countries he traveled through—most of which included those Oriental nations that were militarily occupied by, or actively at war, (Persia) with his own, Greece (Morgan 47).

This whole “the Orient” as the exemplary-sexualized-“Other” business was taken down further when Rome, led by Julius Caesar, decided to make Egypt and, by extension, its Queen Cleopatra, as the object of its Imperialist **and** sexual desires. This covert state policy of empire continued with the passing of Julius Caesar through the reign of Mark Anthony. Like Caesar, Mark Anthony dominated Egypt and her queen politically and sexually, had children by Cleopatra and ruled with her as Co-Regent. He also pursued a policy of setting up a series of puppet regimes (client rulers) that were simply doing Rome’s work and reporting to him – a setup that is not altogether different from the contemporary view of the people of the region towards the current policies of the United States in the Middle East. After that, Rome seemed to have run out of patience for playboy ruler/generals and decided to take over Egypt overtly in 30 BC. Both Cleopatra and Mark Anthony were killed (probably by their own hands), and a new era emerged. That was the first, but not the last, time that Egypt would fall under foreign occupation. It was also the beginning of an aggressive global-scale expansion of the Roman Empire into much of the old world.

Three centuries later when the Syrian warrior-queen Zenobia waged a war of independence against Roman occupation, she was fiercely fought back at Antioch, defeated, kidnapped, and paraded as a hostage in golden shackles through the streets of Rome. Public humiliation was the most adequate answer that the superpower had for the rebel queen. The

invader is never satisfied with usurping a country's wealth and resources. To be fully satisfied, he needs to sexually and visually master its women as well.

Colonialism took the Orient versus Occident notion to new depths, placing the Oriental as the center of an exotic Otherness that is at once sensual, lazy, mysterious, indolent, luxurious, cruel, and barbaric. Orientalism, which may be defined as the depiction in art and literature of imagined scenes of life in the Arab and Muslim worlds, could also be traced as far back to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Merchant of Venice*, Moliere's *Yamamuchi*, and many other examples. In the visual arts, it is seen in the works of Ingres, Gerome, Delacroix, and many others. In the nineteenth century, the heyday of Orientalist fascination (as well as colonialism), Victor Hugo observed that "Whether as image or thought, *the Orient has become a general preoccupation for both the intellect and the imagination*" (Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 61).

The distinctive characteristic of Orientalism, as has been duly noted by Edward Said, is that the Orient is not seen through the analysis or scholarly work of Middle Eastern subjects. It is decidedly seen through the biased gaze of the Western observer with or without direct involvement with the site of study itself. Even when an Orientalist does attempt a direct examination of life in the Middle East, he is no longer able to extricate his work from the pre-existing prejudices and biases of the Orientalist gaze.

The rise of colonialism gave the Westerner a unique opportunity not only to penetrate the mystery of the Orient—but to literally possess it, to shape and alter it. The Orient has become no longer a concept, no longer a topography, but a woman to rule over sexually, dominate.

As seen by Herodotus, the problem with the Orient is that of Otherness, that it did not look or act like Greece. The issue was that the Orient needed to be corrected, to be normalized, in the image of the Western world.

The Postcard

The postcard, invented in Austria in 1869, quickly found its way to colonial exhibitionism. If the photographing of nude Muslim women in various states of assumed privacy shows the voyeurism of the colonialist photographer, his use of postcards to showcase his Eastern exploits shows us another of his perversions: exhibitionism. The postcard grants the photographer an opportunity to exhibit his sexual control over Muslim/Arab women. It is the evidence of his masculine victory, the total subjugation of the Orient through the eradication of its men, and the sexualization of its women: an evidence of the colonialist's manhood, his victory as a representative of the conquering culture—never merely as an individual. In conforming and furthering this positioning, the colonialist was not merely placing the oriental in an essentialist positioning, but also himself.

Lisa Z. Sigel is a researcher of pornography, and in her essay, "Filth In The Wrong People's Hands: Postcards And The Expansion Of Pornography In Britain And The Atlantic World, 1880-1914," Sigel speaks of the particularity of pornography when race and consumerism become an issue of postcard circulation that ultimately spells difference.²

Sigel remarks that although "postcards of the exotic thus displaced the ideas of primitive sexuality onto women, children, and families in distant places" Postcards with photographs of nude ethnic women were not considered pornography by Western postmasters. Only the images

of nude white women were considered pornographic and therefore not eligible to be distributed by post. If not pornographic, then these images must certainly be a documentary photographic evidence of ethnographic value, a “National Geographic” material.

Ethnography



Pornography



Fig. 2. Pornography/ethnography according to the postmaster general.

Resistance of the Veil

As the Western photographer began exploring the new colonized territory, he must have been shocked by the absolute inaccessibility of the Arab/Muslim woman and her resistance to his gaze. The Muslim woman in her veil is enveloped head to toe—with only a small opening for the eyes to see. The eye of the camera has only one recognizable target: a counter gaze that looks back at the photographer. The veil constitutes a veritable shield that protects the Arab/Muslim woman from inspection and public exposure but also causes terrible frustration to the photographer who is unable to exercise his mission: taking as many photographs and selling as many postcards as he can. The veil, in many ways, renders the job of the Western photographer

totally obsolete. How many photographs can he take of the veiled woman before the image turns back on him by making itself multiples of a single image?

The only action that the photographer can take is to penetrate the veil, to disrobe the native woman and lay her bare to the voyeuristic gaze of his camera.



Fig. 3. Moroccan women: Postcard (personal collection).

What the photographer could not imagine is that beyond being a traditional outfit of clothes, the veil also exemplifies a fundamental Middle Eastern philosophical concept that divides the world into the private world of the latent, al-Batin (the inner) and the public manifest world of al-Zahir (the outer). This worldview can also be seen in the architecture of the Arab house that looks solid and closed from the outside but wraps itself (hacienda-style) around a garden of flowers and fruit trees. All the rooms in the house face the garden—the center of everything. In the center of the garden is the secret of life: a water fountain. To the Arab/Muslim,

life can only be interpreted and practiced through the propriety of the relationships of the latent and the manifest. Tell that to the young U.S. commander ordered to break the doors down on an Iraqi family in the middle of the night.

The veil, to the West, has always been an easy emblem of Otherness—it also exudes a sense of incomprehension and fear, a resistance to penetration. Since the Western gaze is unable to penetrate the veil, it was left with a sense of visual impotence. The veil functions as an unaddressed envelope, mysterious and dangerous, and the only action the West can take is to remove it. Under the veil, the Muslim woman is imagined by the Western fantasy as a prisoner, a wild sexual being that is exploited and dominated by the Muslim man, and the role of the colonialist is to free her, bring her to a field of vision where she can be seen and experienced and enjoyed.

Frantz Fanon, the French psychiatrist who was also the moral theorist of the Algerian revolution, finds that French occupation will only win over the Algerian society by destroying its very infrastructure through the unveiling of its women (Bhabha 58). Although his zealous assertion was contested by many, including Algerian writer Assia Djebar, many women during the Algerian revolution took to the veil specifically as a form of resistance (847). Indeed during the Algerian resistance to French colonialism, Algerian women used the veil to literally hide and smuggle weapons for the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN).

To unveil the Algerian woman, Malek Alloula posits that the colonialist photographer had to invent a substitute, a stand-in. As noted by Alloula in *The Colonial Harem*, the photographer had to rummage through the lower depths of Algerian society's world of

prostitutes and fallen women to locate women who were willing to take their clothes off for money and assume any position on command: the ideal colonial and photography subject (129). The colonialist photographer had finally found himself a fake representative for his fake representation of Orientalism, itself fake.

Postcards from the Colonies

As postcards made their way into the colonies, they were used, beyond their utilitarian application, to document the progress of colonization, the colonizers' effort at nation-building and bringing civilization (but not yet democracy) to the natives. Particularly of interest was the displaying of the architectural development brought up by the colonizers. Postcards, as such, served to legitimize the colonial claim of bringing civilization to a backward, repressive people and carrying on "the White man's burden."

One of the common themes of colonial postcards is the image of (mostly naked) women behind window bars. Not only does it excite the allure of wanting to penetrate through the window and reach out for the forbidden woman—it also provides a social justification for the photographer's political agenda of colonialism and occupation—colonialism's *raison d'être*: The colonialist is colonizing to bring Western enlightenment and civilization (an equivalent to our contemporary attempts to export democracy) to a despotic and backward culture, but he is also there to liberate the women from the barbaric prison of the native men. The positioning of the colonized Algerian culture as a woman imprisoned in her own home (country)—repressed behind the veil (Islamic Fundamentalism)—may be viewed as fantasy that only serves the interest of legitimating the colonizer's claim of being the sole herald of civilization.

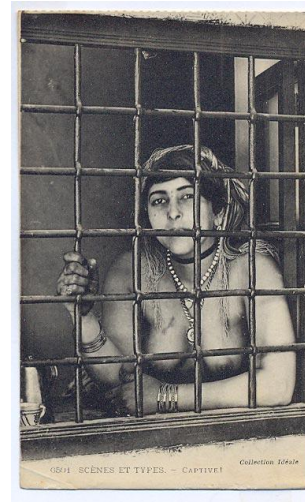


Fig. 4. The Muslim woman portrayed as prisoner of her own house (personal collection).

Gayatri Spivak calls this pretext: “brown women saved by white men from brown men” (qtd. in Alloula, xviii). She rightly notes that the true objective of the colonialist (British rule in India, this time) is “the subversion of social structure, traditions, and habits” (Alloula xviii).

Unfortunately, history repeatedly tells us that most legitimate indigenous causes are immediately reversed and deligitimated as soon as the suspect hands of the foreign invaders get involved in appropriating them. In Algeria during the Algerian liberation movement, many women who previously had dropped the use of the veil started wearing it again as a symbol/ form of resistance—let alone its practical usability to smuggle weapons, etc. Barbara Harlow notes “the dilemma created by British interference and cooptation for those who wish to reform the society from within” (Alloula xviii). The example she uses is of the Kikuyu women in Kenya who began “to demand the right to womanhood through circumcision as an assertion of their Kenyan identity against the British imperialists” (Alloula xviii). A more recent example is the call by a leading Iranian human right activist to the U.S. government to stop attacking the Iranian government. The activist explains that this policy of being anti-Iranian is making life impossible for reformers in Iran because it lends legitimacy to the Iranian government’s resistance to

Western domination. At the same time, by extension, it weakens the activists' ability to resist their own government's anti-freedom practices. In a way, because the United States policies in the Middle East are viewed by the Iranian public with suspicion, the U.S. support for the activists renders their struggle suspect as well. (Wonder why Iraqis insurgents are bombing American-built schools, hospitals, and police stations?)

Scenes and Types

The colonial photographer, unable to "liberate" the Algerian woman from her veil or her iron-bar window, pays her substitute, the model in the photograph (whom Alloula calls the *algerienne* to differentiate from the inaccessible Algerian woman), to assume various positions and personas (129). He then leaves a caption on the postcard that functions as the final identifier of his subject.

Most postcard captions read "scenes and types," thus reducing the presumed native to a type, not an individual. These types may include tags like "Arab Women," "Moorish Woman," down to the purely sexualized objective "Arab bust," etc. Even when names are used, they are used pejoratively and never refer to a specific person but reduce the Algerian woman to ethnically generic names like "Belle Fatmah," "Aisha," "Zeinab," etc.



Young Arab



Arab Woman



Arab Bust

Fig. 5. Postcards and captions (personal collection).

These photographs, presented as “types and settings” became the stock images of the nineteenth and early twentieth century photography of Muslim women—not only in Algeria, but throughout the Maghreb and Egypt.

When the photographer wants to feign more anthropological specificity, he uses captions like Kabyl woman, woman from the South, Bedouin woman, etc. Furthermore, he decks his models with a repertory of saturating jewelry and accessories normally never witnessed on the same woman at the same time before. This “regalia of dress and jewelry,” as Alloula describes it, functions to deceive the purchaser of the postcard of the photograph’s authenticity (17).

Captioning the photographs as “types and settings” is not an accidental typification of the Algerian woman. It is the whole purpose of the postcard: to offer itself as an ethnographic representative of the Algerian society laying bare and dominated under colonialism. The poses, the forced smile, the constructed acrobatic positions, all on cue from the photographer, serve to

underline the dominant-dominated relationship of colonizer-colonized long after the colonizer had been declared triumphant.

To the consumer of the colonialist postcard, this is an authentic image of the reality of colonial subjects. No wonder that the Algerian tourism industry skyrocketed during the golden age of these postcards (1890-1930). However, this construction of the resemblance of reality reveals something altogether different.

Trophies are the material evidence of one's victory, triumph over the other; an Elk's head stuffed and hung on the wall. Algerian postcards serve as such alibi, a proof that the colonialist has taken over the natives, body and soul. The native, represented by the model, moves at the photographer's beck and assumes any position demanded by the photographer. The photograph becomes an evidence of total subjugation and domination of the native politically as well as sexually.

Casualties of War

The photographer wanted to simulate the moral and physical takeover of the colonizers over the native by the absolute sexual surrender of the Algerian woman to his gaze and domination. But the result betrays the photographer and comes on an altogether different imaginary level. The models were paid to assume certain dreamy, overtaken poses and expressions. However, with a closer look at their countenances, one discovers a state far beyond resistance. The model either aims her counter gaze of disgust and accusation back at the gaze of the photographer or assumes a surprisingly different position: that of the dead.

Many a conqueror is not satisfied with material victory. Their only satisfaction comes from the realization of death, the certitude that the other has been overcome, annihilated - and photographed. Thus, we can read in these postcards a text that says that the Algerian woman has been a subject of violence, violation and death in the photograph.

These **are** war photographs—of a different order. Instead of representing the heroics or atrocities of war, they show the piercing stench of the after-war calm: the victor has long been victorious, the defeated is vanquished, obliterated, if not completely physically, most of all morally, taken over, the land by appropriation, the men by omission, the women by degradation: The “whorifying” victory of the image.

Long after he wins his wars, the colonialist is master and the native women his war spoils. These photographs reek of the stench of death. The Algerian woman, as the sexual trophy of the victorious colonizer, has not only surrendered but is morally dead. The colonizer’s gaze violently disrobes and ravishes the body of the Muslim Algerian woman.

Violence, cultural and moral as well as potentially physical, is being perpetrated on the Algerian woman—her dress collar is hastily pulled down to reveal her breasts, speaking of violence more than sex, of ravishment than eroticism, of desire to dominate sexually more than commerce. The sense of violation and ravishment to the model gives way to a larger violence against the Algerian society, for which the model stands as a fake but still referential signifier.

A reviewer of Algerian postcards is assaulted with incessant ad nauseam repetitions of stereotypical poses and types, even of the same model in multiple settings, almost reminiscent of

a diabolical Commedia dell'Arte spectacle where the same actors wear different masks to portray multiple stock/type characters.

False Authenticity



Fig. 7. Excessive regalia of jewelry and dress.

Contrasting the Orientalist phantasm of nude Algerian women of the colonial postcard against veiled and conservative daily life of Algerian/ Muslim society, it becomes clear that the photographer's work is a simulacrum of a nonexistent reality.

Alloula, who notes that the Algerian society generally detests letting itself be photographed (37) also describes a “degradation through excess,” where the photographer dumps all fake signifiers on a single sign vehicle to convince us of the authenticity of the sign. But all we get is false authenticity: “this exactness creates a resemblance, a verisimilitude to the original.” Alloula exposes the pseudo-realistic trick exhibited in the photograph, which employs

some authentic elements to construct an image that is altogether fake. He emphasizes that “The counterfeit realism of the postcards requires a minimum of truthfulness without which the whole thing would degenerate into gratuitous fantasy” (52).

Alloula also describes how this trick may have an opposite effect, that of making the image improbable: “The accumulation of all of these accessories upon a single individual creates a saturated effect that is detrimental to verisimilitude... This slide towards the improbable” (54).

Jean Baudrillard likewise explains, in *Simulation and Simulacra*, that for simulacra to work, simulation must contain a good deal of authenticity:

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have to be produced: this is the vital function of the model in a system of death. (2)

Staged Reality

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag introduces Roger Fenton (1819-1869) as an embedded war photographer who was dispatched by the British War Office to cover the Crimean Wars. His instructions were to “drum up support for soldiers’ sacrifice” but “not to photograph the dead, the maimed, or the ill” (*Regarding* 49). Fenton, who had already made a name for himself as a star photographer having taken photographs of the Royal family, came back from the Crimea to an outstanding success. Sontag notes that what most people did not

realize was that Fenton's war photographs were mostly staged not only in "rendering the war as a dignified all-male group outing" (*Regarding* 51) but also in actually giving instructions to the soldiers "to stand or sit together, follow his directions, and hold still" for each exposure that would last fifteen minutes.

In 1858, Fenton embarked on a new experience that would become one of his most acclaimed achievements: "The Orientalist Suite." In his desire to make photography an art form to equal or compete with painting, Fenton (a trained painter himself), began a series of photographic studies of Orientalist themes. Fenton had been on a brief trip to the Middle East three years earlier, and now he constructed at his London studio an Orientalist setting by bringing the usual set of Oriental paraphernalia including musical instruments, clothes, hookahs, rugs, ornaments and models. These representative signifiers were composed in a careful way to create the illusion of an Oriental interior..

In his book, *Pasha and Bayadere*, which analyzes Fenton's Orientalist Suite, Roger Baldwin provides specific details on the careful staging that Fenton went through to create this illusion of the Orient, this simulation of reality. The result was an outstanding critical success of both the "artistry" and "authenticity" of Fenton's work. Baldwin quotes a contemporary critic describing the exhibition as "a correct idea of the household economy of the Orientals" (93). However, later critics began realizing the artifice of this "authentic" presentation, noting the European carpet that runs under the Oriental rug and along the edge of most photographs. They also noted that the models (mostly Fenton's friends) lacked the facial characteristics of Oriental types and most interestingly that the models in two of Fenton's most recognizable photographs,

“Pasha and Bayadere” and “The Water Carrier” (both 1858) were actually attached by wires to the ceiling of the studio to maintain the exact pose that he desired. The image of the fake Oriental, portrayed by a pretend Arab and being directed and moved by the Western imagination as a marionette in a puppet theater could be viewed as a significant fabrication that will carry moral as well as visual implications of Orientalist stereotyping all the way to the Mohammad cartoons today.



Fig. 8. Fenton's The Orientalist Suite.

As noted by Baldwin, Fenton’s work was influenced by the works of Orientalist painters, but it may not have been the only or the last of such photographs. By migrating the biased and ignorant gaze of the Orientalist from the subjective space of painting to the documentary space of photography, Fenton was only the first in a line of photographers who would take it upon themselves to rearrange reality in order to construct an artifice of “realistic” representation of the Orient and Orientals.

As a matter of fact, with a quick glance at colonial postcards, one can easily find parallels in Orientalist painting: the same compositions, the same themes, the same paraphernalia, repeated and echoed ad nauseam. It is as if this narrow and limited view of the Orient needed to be repeated and repeated to confirm its legitimacy, its solidity. The Orientalist mind has seized the image of the Oriental and will keep it that way as a form of control. Any deviation from that image is an aberration that is not tolerated and will not be depicted in any work. Hence, the imaginary repertoire of the Orientalist is so poor and narrow. In fact, it may be said that it is limited to one image represented in multiple ways using a very small set of props, the phantasm of the Oriental under the controlling gaze of the West.

Whereas it can be understood, in some ways, that an Orientalist painter, who may have never been to the Middle East or may have done so on a short vacation, could create subjective work that depicts the Orient from a short catalogue of subjects, the colonial photographer is an altogether different matter. Colonial (postcard) photographers lived and worked mostly in the Middle East. Their profession was to take pictures of colonial families as well as the local landscape and people, all objective photographs that do not need to present any challenge to authenticity. It is only when the colonialist photographer starts taking pictures of natives that eventually were sold as postcards that he engages in a scheme of corroboration. His work becomes a strict confirmation of the Orientalist fantasy.

Almost endlessly, the colonialist photographer alters the reality of his surroundings to create a comforting message back home that, yes indeed, the West has subdued the natives,

altered their social structure, civilized the backward population, omitted the men, and disrobed the women.

The Water Carrier



David Roberts



Roger Fenton



J. Geiser

Fig. 9. The Water Carrier.

Girl with Tambourine



Fissario
Dancer



Joseph Bernard 1864-1933
Harem Girl with Tambourine



Fig. 10. Girl with Tambourine.

Odalisque



Lord Frederick Leighton
(1830-1896)

Fig. 11. Odalisque.

Odalisque



Lord Frederick Leighton
Odalisque

Fig. 12. Odalisque II.

Dance of the veil



John Singer Sargent
1880
Ambergris Smoke



Fig. 13. Dance of the Veil.

Dance of the veil



*One of the Three
Ladies of Baghdad* (1900)
William Clarke Wontner



Fig. 14. Dance of the Veil II.

Odalisque



Henri Matisse
Odalisque with Red

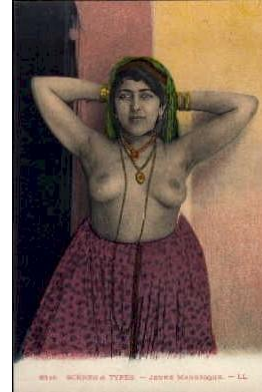


Fig. 15. Odalisque III.

Simulacra

Our reading of colonialist postcards clearly reveals a Baudrillardian simulacra of the first order, documented photographic evidence by embedded eyewitnesses to the colonialist agenda. They are the evidentiary corroboration of the 2,500 years of the Orientalist project, documentary evidence that has been repeating itself for centuries.

It is when one compares these photographs to what is blatantly obvious—the image of the Muslim/Arab in her veil, accompanied by an extended family and engaging in banal, quotidian, activities, (you mean that Muslim women do not drink coffee and smoke hookahs in the nude?)—that is when the whole simulation collapses. One, then, can easily see that what resembles the real (for the postcard is saturated with false authenticity) is stripped of its fallacy and shown by juxtaposition to be a different image altogether.

Baudrillard defines simulation as “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (*Simulation* 1). The colonialist photographer pieces together a simulated reality that confirms an imaginary original. This representational imaginary becomes more

original than the real. In this instance, it becomes a flagrant and undeniable confrontation that the simulation has with the real. The photographic simulation is an act of violence that deliberately and consciously alters the identity and reality of the colonial subject.

The Colonialist as the Natural Subject of the Photograph

The successful commercial enterprise of the colonial postcard attests to the fact that ubiquity of the image of the real, of the Algerian woman, did not diminish the popularity of the simulated postcard. Could it be that these postcards do not attempt at representation altogether, that the colonialist paraphernalia, the colonialist code of representation that includes the live model herself, is not about the Algerian woman, or Algerian society, at all? Could the true subject of the postcard be the colonialist photographer himself, as a representative of the conquering culture?

The postcard's mise-en-scene, since it clearly does not represent its manifest subject, is a signifier of a different sort. It signifies the effect of conquering and control, the ability of the Westerner to invade deep into the Muslim territory and command the natives into nudity, acrobatic positions, and phantasmic settings. All the postcards carry one theme: the utter domination by the Westerner and the utter humiliation of the Muslim as the aberrant Other.

This incessant image seems to be an indelible and permanent resident of the Western imagination. It is a confirmation of the Orient as "Scenes and Types," and it explains clearly why George Bush could easily switch his target from one Oriental villain (Osama Bin Laden) to another (Saddam Hussein) with few ever noticing the legerdemain. To the Western Imperialist

simulacra to succeed, the Westerner needs to view all Orientalist signs as a single giant sign that spells “Otherness.” The rest is easy!

Furthermore, the historical repetition of the short list of Orientalist codes of representation, Orientalist themes and props, in literature, in paintings, in high photography and in postcards, is explained by the sudden realization that there has always been one image, one painting, one photograph: the Oriental as the Other—under the control of the Westerner. And, what is better than sexual subjugation to drive a point to the core? Baudillard writes:

The only weapon of power, its only strategy against this defection, is to re-inject realness and referentiality everywhere, in order to convince us of the reality of the social, of the gravity of the economy, and the finalities of production. For that purpose, it prefers the discourse of crisis, but also—why not?—the discourse of desire. “Take your desires for reality!” can be understood as the ultimate slogan of power, for in a nonreferential world even the confusion of the reality principle with the desire principle is less dangerous than contagious hyperreality. One remains among principles, and there power is always right.

(Simulation 22)

The Islamic world, in its perceived fundamentalist self as the Other to the Western/Christian world, assumes the functional role of resistance to America’s simulacrum of the world in its own image. This ongoing aberration of the “they hate us because of our freedom” logic must be normalized and televised. In fact, Baudrillard’s simulacrum gives us the most insight on the ideal way to understand the current relationships between Empire and divergent cultures in terms of the image and its simulations.

The more contemporary photographs of the Abu Ghraib prison seem to communicate a similar image of sexual domination and humiliation. The disrobing of the Muslim individual (this time male) and commanding him into assuming degrading sexualized positions, crawling like a dog, piling up naked men like a human pyramid, wearing women's underwear on his head, are all acts simulated specifically for the camera for the purpose of illustrating the absolute domination of the Westerner and the U.S. military in this instance. Again, the native is not the subject of the photograph. The native is in the picture only as a prop to illustrate the true theme of the photograph: Power as exercised by the Western Empire.

Sontag as well as Baudrillard noted independently that if nothing else, the Abu Ghraib photos comment on American ideology. In an essay entitled "Regarding the Torture of Others," Sontag notes "the displacement of the reality onto the photographs themselves." She goes on to explain that

considered in this light, the photographs are us. That is, they are representative of the fundamental corruptions of any foreign occupation together with the Bush administration's distinctive policies. The Belgians in the Congo, the French in Algeria, practiced torture and sexual humiliation on despised recalcitrant natives.

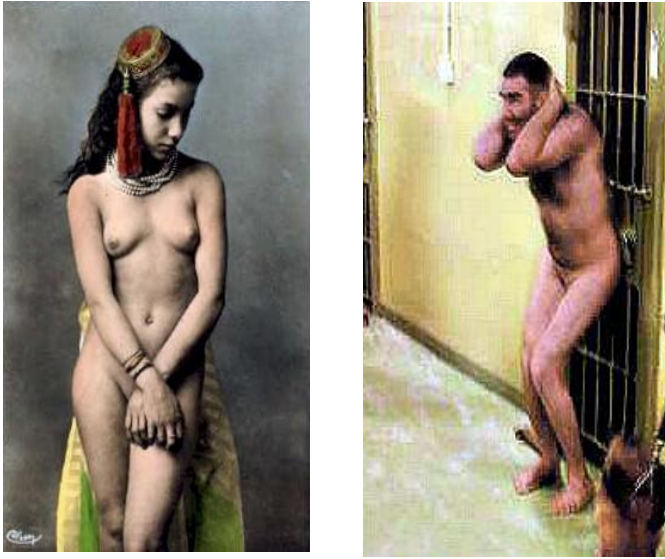


Fig. 16. Fetish.

Sontag links the Abu Ghraib photos as a public spectacle as well as societal testimonies with the lynching of blacks in America (“Regarding”). However, she sees a quality similar to those found in the colonial postcard that disseminates a message beyond the apparent/ visible content of the photograph:

The lynching pictures were in the nature of photographs as trophies—taken by a photographer in order to be collected, stored in albums, displayed. The pictures taken by American soldiers in Abu Ghraib, however, reflect a shift in the use made of pictures—less objects to be saved than messages to be disseminated, circulated.

She also finds in the prison photos “a larger confluence of torture and pornography,” similar to the confluence of violence and pornography one can locate in the colonial postcards. She says: “what is illustrated by these photographs is as much the culture of shamelessness as the reigning admiration for unapologetic brutality.”

Baudrillard finds a more specific functionality to the Abu Ghraib prison photographs: inflicting humiliation on the other. He finds that the humiliation suffered by the US in the September 11 attacks was humiliation “from the outside.” However, the prison photographs bring shame and humiliation that is self-inflicted. He says of the photographs,

With the images of the Baghdad prisons, it is worse; it is the humiliation, symbolic and completely fatal, which the world power inflicts on itself—the Americans in this particular case—the shock treatment of shame and bad conscience. This is what binds together the two events (“War Porn”).

In “War Porn,” Baudrillard notes that “the worst is that it all becomes a parody of violence, a parody of the war itself, pornography becoming the ultimate form of the abjection of war which is unable to be simply war, to be simply about killing, and instead turns itself into a grotesque infantile reality-show, in a desperate simulacrum of power.”

Is it then that we’ve been merely engaged in a 2,500-year run of a colossal reality show that simulates power once and again, and again, to rave reviews and an adoring audience? One where each character hurls humiliation and insults at the other. Is this the Jerry Springer of history?

The problem with the Muslim world’s perceived stubborn resistance to the New World Order of American simulacra is those occasional spurts of counter humiliation in the forms of the atrocious acts of embassy burnings, school bombings, terrorism, etc.



Fig. 17. Angels.

Baudrillard describes the effect of the image as that of overwhelming humiliation:

The bad conscience of the entire West is crystallized in these images. The whole West is contained in the burst of the sadistic laughter of the American soldiers, as it is behind the construction of the Israeli wall. This is where the truth of these images lies; this is what they are full of: the excessiveness of a power designating itself as abject and pornographic. (“War Porn”)

The reality show seems to be “the real” in a world of simulacra. Humiliation is a simulation of what is worse than war, worse than death. It was discovered by the Romans when they paraded Syria’s queen Zenobia in shackles and continues to the images in this morning’s

newspaper. As Baudrillard would put it: “those who live by the spectacle will die by the spectacle” (“War Porn”).

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BOY WHO WAS KILLED TWICE

At around 10 a.m. on Saturday September 30, 2000, fifth-grader Mohamed al-Durra finished breakfast and must have been excited to accompany his father, Jamal, to the auction lot so they could buy a used car for the family. Jamal, a 34-year-old Palestinian carpenter and house painter from the UN-run Bureij refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, had worked for 20 years, but today, he did not have to go to work. It was the second day of the Second Intifada. Jamal and Mohamed used the opportunity of no work and no school to go to the auction. However, at the auction, they had no luck buying a car. So, they took a cab, and headed back home.

On their way back, Jamal and Mohamed encountered some serious rioting at the Netzarim junction, a crossroads separating Gaza from the Israeli settlement of Netzarim. The area was nicknamed by the locals as Martyrs Junction because of the repeated fatal clashes between protestors and the Israeli army that frequently took place there. The junction was a permanent checkpoint primarily set up to protect the nearby Israeli settlement of Netzarim (now dismantled). Noting the rioting and commotion, the Durras' cab driver refused to go through the intersection and asked that his passengers finish their trip on foot. Palestinian protesters had gathered since morning and were throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at the Israeli position. Mohamed and Jamal had to walk on foot over to the Palestinian side.

As father and son tried to make their way amid the chaotic intersection, a fire exchange erupted between the Israeli army and the Palestinian police. Mohamed and his father, found themselves in an area immediately facing the fighting parties, and took refuge between a block wall and a concrete drum that was found against the wall. For a brief moment, the Durras were

joined by a cameraman working for Reuters, but he, along with many of those who were in the area, ran away from the direction of the fire. Mohamed and Jamal stayed behind the drum and across from the Israeli outpost.

Eyewitnesses said that for 45 minutes the shooting continued. As the terrorized 12-year-old screamed in fear and clutched his father's shirtsleeves, Jamal positioned Mohamed behind his back as a way of protection and desperately waved and yelled to get attention. People were screaming "the boy is going to be killed, the boy is going to be killed." A cameraman working for the French network France 2 was positioned across the street and was able to capture the last 59 seconds of the incident. Moments into his video, bullets flying, we see the boy dropping dead and his father's body slumped, wounded with eight bullets all over his body.

Notwithstanding that the image of Mohamed and his father cowering under a shower of bullets is barely recognized in the U.S., writer and poet Helen Schary Motro writes in Salon.com that the picture "has been burned into the world's consciousness beside the Vietnamese girl aflame with napalm, the Oklahoma City firefighter carrying the dead baby after the federal building explosion, the boy with raised hands in the Warsaw ghetto."

Indeed, it took only few hours for the footage to be shown on televised news bulletins throughout the world. The image of the boy and his father going in less than 60 seconds from horrific fear to death-on-camera seemed direct and unambiguous. The image became iconic in its portrayal of the horrors and savagery of war and occupation. As described by James Fallows in *The Atlantic*, "It offers an object lesson in the incendiary power of an icon."

The image was printed on postage stamps in many Arab countries. Streets were named after the boy. Terrorist attacks were said to have been carried out in his revenge, and images from the news footage are reported to be seen in the background of the videotaping of the beheading of journalist Daniel Pearl by Al-Qaeda militants. To many people, these images have become a symbol of the precarious lives of Palestinians under occupation and a condemnation of the Israeli army that terrorized them. It did not take too long until the Israeli army acknowledged its responsibility for the incident.

But images that turn iconic seem to affect the lives of many in ways beyond the actual images depicted. They quickly move out of their own documentary narrative to an understanding that is different and bizarre. Shortly after the video created worldwide sympathy for the Palestinians, calls started coming out to undermine the credibility of the story. Israeli newspaper Haaretz published an article describing the incident as a major Israeli “PR” failure (Haaretz). Calls raising doubts about Mohamed al-Durra’s story ranged from those who blamed the kid and his father for being out on the streets on a day that was predicted to be violent, to those who suggested that the Durras could not have been attacked by the Israeli soldiers because of the physical angle that the bullets were coming from. There were those who claimed that the boy did not die in the incident, and that the dead child was, in fact, a second boy. Others claimed, in an obscene reversal of culpability, that the whole incident was in fact a hoax, that the boy and his father were mere actors in a production staged by the France 2 cameraman and that Mohamed al-Durra faked his own death. Other doubters claimed that the incident was indeed staged with the knowledge and involvement of the father, but that it went too far and ended in the boy’s death.

When the powerful images of the death of Mohamed only intensified with the passage of time, a counter visual was produced in order to present a rebuttal of the popular story of the boy's death. In 2002, German journalist and filmmaker Esther Schapira produced a documentary entitled "Three Bullets and a Dead Child," which was shown on the German network ARD, and then in 2009, she and George M. Hafner produced another documentary entitled "The Child, the Death, and the Truth," in which the producers cast doubts about the events surrounding Mohamed al Durra's death and questioning if the boy had ever truly died.

In fact ever since the al-Durra incident was shown on French TV, there has been a persistent campaign in both Israel and France against the meaning that one could make from the al-Durra video. Critics of the France 2 video were decrying it as anti-Semitic and a modern blood libel against the Jewish people. Sets of legal battles were fought in French courts between detractors of France 2, which was the first to broadcast the story and continued to stand by the video's authenticity, and those doubting what the images were showing in the video. Some of these legal cases are still pending in courts to this day. Jurisprudence becomes the last stage of distorting reality.

In an article published in *The New York Times* article entitled "The Mysteries and Passions of an Iconic Video Frame," (February 7, 2005), Doreen Carvajal quotes France 2 journalist Charles Enderlin as saying that the "video has become a cultural prism, with viewers seeing what they want." One of those raising doubts about the authenticity of the tape was Daniel Leconte, another prominent French journalist. Carvajal quotes Leconte in the same article as saying, "[t]hat image has had great influence...[i]f this image does not mean what we were told,

it is necessary to find the truth.” For a while, it seemed that the legal burden was indeed on Mohamed Durra to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that he had died as shown in the video. A photographic image, traditionally viewed as a corroborative evidence of truthful events, is no longer sufficient for proving what it actually shows. Even news footage becomes questionable and unreliable to those who may not agree with its apparent content. As such, the image becomes the subject of legal proceedings and of geometric and curvilinear analyses that aim at pitting what the image shows against what the image means, or should mean. In the example of al-Durras images, the breakdown of what the video footage was showing and what lied outside the camera’s field of vision has become the subject of analysis by those whose specific aim was to discredit the very events that were captured in the video: a child and his father, innocent passers-by at the crossroads of occupation, rebellion and humanity.

In “Violence of the Image,” Jean Baudrillard asserts that images undergo “this double violence—that of the image and that done to the image? Images are unable to communicate meaning anymore because of the over burdening of the image with meaning” (“Violence”). The image of a terrified boy being killed even in his father’s protective arms is an obscenity. But what is worse is what the image does not show. As Baudrillard states: “The image ... is violent because what happens there is the murder of the Real, the vanishing point of Reality” (“Violence”). When the image is no longer capable of communicating reality, then it becomes an object of violence. But, also as Baudrillard explains, “[T]he image too is more important than what it sneaks of.” One can still ask what other reality the image keeps out of vision (“Violence”).

Is it possible to have a system that controls and facilitates the understanding of images? Could a photograph possess an internal consistency that offer a stable meaning to **all** its viewers? Or is it more accurate to say that an image will always communicate different meanings to different viewers all the time? And if the latter, what determines how this meaning gets constructed?

The picture of the death of Mohamed al-Durra becomes incapable of telling a reliable story without being perverted to every single possibility. One asks not only whether Mohamed al-Durra ever died but also whether he ever lived. The life of a child in a refugee camp – under occupation and in an uprising, unlike the lives of children elsewhere, is always uncertain and at peril. In some ways, it could be said that it is no-life. In comparison, death seems more of a certainty. Therefore, denying Mohamed al-Durra even his own death could be viewed a second murder by the image. Not only by what the image shows, but also by what the image does not show, and what the image is accused of. The exceptionally inhumane conditions under which Mohamed lived and died are the main subject of his photograph. It is not the angle of where the bullets came from, not who actually fired the bullets, who took the video, why was he out that particular day. None of these killed Mohamed al-Durrah. How people choose to view the image of his death becomes a demarcation line of politics and prejudice.

Paul Virilio describes the eventual result of technology and speed as an “accident.” In that context, the death of Mohamed al-Durra has been foretold regardless of even the specifics of his videotaped murder. Mohamed, the fifth-grader, was born as a potential of collateral damage, an accident. He was already dead even before he was killed, but even this death becomes suspect

in the photograph. In the *Politics of the Very Worst*, Virilio describes the accident as “an inverted miracle, a secular miracle, a revelation. When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck; when you invent the plane, you also invent the plane crash; and when you invent electricity, you invent electrocution” (89). Collateral damage is the certain and predictable accident of the state of war. That day, it was Mohamed’s turn. That time, it was on video.

False Dichotomies, True Prophets?

Has the photographic image become no longer reliable for meaning-making? Could it be said that the meaning of a single image gets implicated in not only its own semiotics but also in the identity of the viewer? Is the meaning of the photograph determined along cultural divides that constitute visual fault lines and lead to a questioning of the very act of visual cognition?

Few cultural binaries are present in contemporary media stronger than those describing the relation between Islam and the West. We are incessantly presented with image after image, a news story after another as corroborating evidence of an ideological opposition between these two “cultures,” these two irreconcilable dichotomies.

Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth! (Kipling)

A cleavage reveals an oppositional separation between what we have come to know as the “West” and “Islam,” a twin, two seemingly discrete ideological but also geographical and historical constructs. This clear division posits the accusatory “they” in the almost rhetorical—

“they hate us because...”—one is likely to hear on either side seems to denote a sense of an all-encompassing generality but also of finality. “They” becomes a demarcation line separating “us,” all of us, from **all** of those on the other side of an imagined division line. How does this division locate itself on the basis of difference? Could be said that “difference” is detected in the visual? The veil? The face? The skin tone? Or does visual difference merely translate a more fundamental cultural split that intermingles ideology with religion?

Indeed, Samuel Huntington describes, in his influential “The Clash of Civilizations?” a cultural “velvet curtain” that has replaced the ideological “iron curtain,” and constituted a fault line of religion and culture between civilizations. He calls this “the most significant dividing line in Europe” and terms this new condition as a “clash of civilizations.”

Huntington finds that this clash is primarily about the West confronting “non-Wests that increasingly have the desire, the will and the resources to shape the world in non-Western ways.” However, Huntington claims more specifically that what he means is primarily a conflict between Islam and the West: “. . . On both sides the interaction between Islam and the West is seen as a clash of civilizations.”

Huntington goes even further to state that this conflict is not only a result of a change in world affairs after the collapse of the Soviet block and the end of the Cold War, but that it is also a perpetual and fundamental divide that is steeped in hundreds of years of history, ever since the birth of Islam. He says, “[c]onflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1,300 years.” Huntington predicts that the next world war “will be a war between civilizations,” specifically, between Islam and the West.

To further bolster his argument about the confrontational nature of the relationship between Islam and West, Huntington also cites Islamic writers showing “similar observations” to the ones he’s making. Among them is Egyptian journalist Mohammed Sid-Ahmed, whom he quotes as saying in 1994: “There are unmistakable signs... of a growing clash between the Judeo-Christian Western ethic and the Islamic revival movement, which is now stretching from the Atlantic in the west to China in the east.” Huntington also quotes Indian Muslim Scholar, M. J. Akbar, as saying that the “West's next confrontation ... is definitely going to come from the Muslim world. It is in the sweep of the Islamic nations from the Maghreb to Pakistan that the struggle for a new world order will begin.”

But Huntington’s best borrowing (including the title of his article/book) comes from Bernard Lewis. Huntington quotes from Lewis’ article “The Roots of Muslim Rage” published in *the Atlantic* in 1990:

We are facing a need and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations -- the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.

Lewis frames the relationship between the Islamic world and the West purely in the confines of an ancient religious rivalry between Islam and Christendom. In an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), Lewis goes further to describe a struggle in the West against Islam, which he says is “comparable with the two great struggles of the 20th Century against Nazism and against Bolshevism.” Lewis makes it clear that his lifelong pursuit of

knowledge about the Middle East and the Islamic world could be seen within a framework that serves an objective of “winning” over the other, a logic of espionage and conquest. He goes on to explain in the same interview: “And it would improve our chances of winning if we understand who we are and who they are and what it’s all about.”

Lewis further describes the conflict between Islam and the West as both historical and inevitable: “[this] conflict has been going on for more than 14 centuries. Crusade and counter-Crusade. Jihad and counter-Jihad. Conquest and counter-conquest.” Quite interestingly, Lewis grounds this conflict not in difference, but in similarity—an uncanny state of mimesis: almost the same, but not quite. He says: “When you have two religions of the same self-perceptions, and sense of mission, the same historical background in the same geographical area, conflict was inevitable.”¹ However, Lewis warns of a very sinister aspect to the conflict: Islam’s plans for world domination and turning all Christians into Muslims. He even points to the United States as the last stronghold, the center of our age’s struggle with Islam: “Now the only obstacle that remains to the worldwide triumph of Islam is the United States. So, that is the next target. And that is very clear.” Lewis even describes Muslims in America as a type of infiltrator, sleeper cells. Rejecting a comparison of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with the Vietnam War, Lewis argues that “the difference is the Vietnamese did not follow us here... these people will.” When asked what is at stake in the relation between the West and the Islamic world, Lewis answers without hesitation: “The survival of our civilization.”

This positioning of a primordial and incessant conflict that borders on the existential lends one to think not of “Islam” and “the West” as independent notions in conflict with each

other (which could lead to different anthropological and cultural disciplinary tracks), but as a single notion: “Islam and the West.” One may ask whether the West’s understanding of the term “the West” is defined by an opposition to the notion “Islam,” and likewise, could those in the Islamic world be deriving their “Islamicity” from a resistance to what is perceived as “Western”?

As such, one may make out the semblance of a violent dialogue between these two apparently discrete domains. This dialogue seems to be rooted in an exchange of which terrorism is merely one manifestation, while military intervention (and Colonialism before that) is viewed as its counterpart. As stated earlier, Lewis sees this dialogue purely in military terms: “Crusade and counter-Crusade. Jihad and counter-Jihad. Conquest and counter-conquest.” Itself more a product of the imagination than anything else, Terrorism, in this context, turns to be a technology of communication. In other words, it functions as a language, as crude as it may be. One wonders if it is possible to speak of a system of terror that defines itself in images, signs, spectacles, and their counter images, signs, and spectacles. Therefore, one may find linguistic or at least communicative elements in the airplane attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11. But something similar could also be found in the toppling of the Saddam Hussein statue. The head of the former head-of-state was eliminated, taken out of sight. Even before Hussein’s real head cracked in the gallows, and before his statue was pulled down, the statue’s head was hidden from sight by U.S. troops, covered by an American flag. The head of the head-of-state was ciphered and clumsily substituted by the victor’s insignia, rendering the statue, not that of a head-of-state, but of a man. A man with no face, Everyman? Every tyrant? Every Muslim? Or a mere equalizer of headlessness? A head for a head. The Twin Towers, icons of Capitalist supremacy, have been

described as headless, as noted by W. J. T. Mitchell, (*Cloning*, 78-79) and, therefore, the statue, another icon, needed to lose its head too. There was something predictable and compulsory that the statue needed to lose its head in the same way that Iraq, a Muslim state, needed to lose its head. Bagging the head of the Saddam Hussein statue, as watched on televisions worldwide, was somehow in dialogue with the brutal spectacles of the videotaped beheadings of captives in Iraq by anti-occupation militants (insurgents). Later, the head of the real Saddam Hussein gets covered by another bag before his eventual hanging as supervised by U.S. troops in Iraq—also as captured in video recordings. These sites of conflict could only become meaningful when they have become sights as well.

Silence of the Bombs

As noted by Roland Barthes, for certain press images to communicate clear messages, captions are required: “a complex of concurrent messages with the photograph as centre and surrounds constituted by the text, the title, the caption, the lay-out and...by the very name of the paper” (*Photographic* 15). Images of the recent wars could only be part of a clear narrative when paired with their own neologisms of al-Qaeda, Intifada, Jihad, Shia, Faluja, Ramadi, Tora Bora, Kandahar, suicide bombers, Hamas, Hezbollah, 9/11, Ground Zero, WMD, drones (manned and unmanned, armed and unarmed), axis of evil, war on terror, Islamic terrorism (also fundamentalism, extremism), Islamofascism, and the new favorites, Sharia Law, Taqiyya, salafis, wahabists and so on. All suitable captions for news images.

In other words, the historical events of the September 11 attacks and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan have been somehow both paralleled and replaced by a mediated discourse of

images and words. These words and images have become a simulacrum, in the sense suggested by Jean Baudrillard (*Simulacra*). Hence, a virtual war is being fought, not only in military drones and simulation equipment but also in the simulacra of words and images, a war of images. It is as if this has become a simulacrum of a larger simulacra. One needs to trace the threads of these parallel wars in order to understand a growing visual war—a long war of perception between the imagined worlds of Islam and the West. Following the path of the image countering the image, one finds out, rather quickly, that these images and words constitute definite technology-based textualities within a discourse.

Even now that we're comfortably outside the rhetoric of the Bush era with its single-line abbreviated aphorisms: “War on Terror,” “with us or against us,” “they hate us because of our freedom,” a wider scale visual rhetoric continues to manifest itself, not only in the United States, but throughout much of Europe as well. One can visibly witness it with heated public issues like schoolgirls wearing the Islamic hijab in France, the publication of the Mohammed cartoons in Denmark, the vote to ban the construction of minarets in Switzerland, etc. What seems to have happened here are clear shifts from the visceral to the ideological to the symbolic—from “they hate us” to “they hate us because...” to “they hate our symbols, so we hate their symbols too;” “you burn my flag, I'll burn your holy book!”

Who is intended by “they” in the statement “they hate us because...”? One could quickly realize that this “they” is a generalization meant to refer to “all” and “any” Muslims and Arabs. “They” in this context, does not exclusively refer to a terrorist group called al-Qaeda or its chief, Osama Bin Laden. Almost magically, this notion of “they” becomes an ever widening net that

covers a whole mix of personages who are not necessarily identical or even similar, including Saddam Hussein, Iraqi insurgents, the Taliban, Hezbollah, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, sleeper cells, Muslim Americans who could be a part of a sleeper cell, Middle Eastern men with beards, a Jamaican trying to ignite his shoe, a Nigerian trying to explode his underpants, a Latin American Muslim in Miami, men with Muslim names, men in Muslim countries, Muslims, Arabs, and so on. The net keeps getting wider and wider. The “they” in “they hate us” becomes this magical, euphemistic catch phrase for the Muslim/Arab male as a person or group who is decidedly antagonistic to Western ideals and determined to subvert the West’s cultural and religious integrity.

On one level, a war of images is being fought in pure simulacra where the image, the spectacle, replaces reality. On a different level, however, it is evident that this war is not only being fought in images and in the media. It is also being delivered in the form of real bombs, in real armed (albeit unmanned) drones, flying robotic machines that deliver death to all with no distinction between combatants, civilians, or earth. And, since there are robotic machines, visual feedback, thus, becomes unnecessary, undesired or simply redundant. The mission ends with the delivery of the payload – not in the counting and identification of the bodies. That task is left to the enemy. This remote-controlled war uses drones and subcontracted warriors (as in the case of Blackwater). Conversely, it is evident that when war becomes unmediated, the results become quite messy. In Iraq, an experiment failed miserably in the second battle of Falluja (2004) where human-to-human combat was filled with firsthand imagery, and the Real was too real to fathom.

Fighting in the here-and-now only ended in being one of the bloodiest battles in Iraq for the U.S. military.

In *The Age of the Word Target*, Rey Chow draws upon Heidegger's essay "The Age of the World Picture," which links visibility /seeing to military targeting. Nevertheless, Chow retains a sense of present visual simultaneity that connects seeing and targeting in a consistent and contiguous relationship, a condition not shared with disembodied combat technologies as such drones.

The relationship between words and things, as well as words and images, becomes loose and destabilized. Chow points out that what results is a deep interiority of sorts, where language becomes self-referential. In a way, Chow argues, language loses its basic power (of communication) and as such now needs to refer to itself as a repeated pattern: "Having lost its age-old agency, language can now derive its strength only, and paradoxically, from its own powerlessness ... literature perpetuates itself by referencing itself, ad infinitum, and in that manner takes on the import of a *deep interior*" (Chow 8).

Chow deploys Heidegger's notion of "the world as a picture" even further to focus on the physicality of seeing as a military necessity, which is swift at defining positioning as that of an automatic target creation. What you see is not only different from what you get, but what you see is what you will never see again. Seeing, in this context, structures identity through a formidable self-referentiality emanating not merely from an understanding of identity as difference but also from focusing difference on visibility. In other words, identity is constructed not in disidentifying with the Other, but in destroying the Other as soon as the Other becomes visible.

Chow describes this condition as “politics of vision,” marking the technologies of warfare as “inseparable from those of seeing” (12), or, where to see becomes almost an act of instant condemnation. Further than Foucault’s panopticon, which structures visibility as an element of control and power, Chow argues that a post-Hiroshima world is now conceived as a military target “to be destroyed as soon as it can be made visible” (12). Chow links this condition with the modern rise of destructive technologies, echoing some of Paul Virilio’s thoughts linking technology with the military. Chow couples the technologies of vision with the technologies of war, the personal act of seeing with the military act of targeting, and as such, she repurposes the image as a technology of target-creation and of self-referentiality and most importantly as a technology of war.

It is precisely in this framework of visibility that the Muslim veil constitutes itself as a target of certain state systems (no longer exclusively Western)—where the inability to “see” automatically turns the object of (lack of) vision into a target of Othering and elimination.

Chow notes, as a case in point, the demand in post 9/11 United States for Arabic speakers. This need to bring to light, she asserts, is not only evident in the standard state organs like the CIA and NSA, but also in academic circles as in departments of cultural studies. Chow explains that this is hardly a question of epistemological dimensions, but more of a desire to “make them more legible, more accessible, and more available for ‘our’ use” (15). This, too, can, be understood not merely in academic terms but on military grounds. The same concept is echoed in the same militaristic tones in the aforementioned TV interview of Bernard Lewis, where he frames the concept of knowledge within the military terminology of “winning”. He

says: "... it would improve our chances of winning if we understand who we are and who they are."

In *How Images Think*, Ron Burnett captures this condition where the image becomes no longer simply a matter of representation of ideals, no longer a semiotic instrument. The image has become a material cultural artifact that plays a central role in the workings of modern culture. Burnett notes that images have become "mediators, progenitors, interfaces—as much reference points for information and knowledge as visualizations of human creativity" (xiv). Burnett's work "explores the rich intersections of image creation, production, and communication within this context of debate about the mind and human consciousness" (xiv). As such, Burnett challenges much of the conventional wisdom about the relationships between images and meaning with a particular interest in the biological faculties of the brain in structuring meaning in human perception.

Burnett defines images as "the interfaces that structure interaction, people, and the environment they share" (xix). Images are ubiquitous and constant through media. Even if we turn them off, they continue to exist in our world, or at least continue to function. We, as humans, are immersed in what Burnett terms as "image-worlds," a multi-layered living archaeology of images where each layer or level is "relatively stable, living, and metaphorically speaking, breathing, and contributing to the overall structure of the image world" (43). According to Burnett, this "image world" is a result of an eco-system, "an ever expanding ecology that is altering not only the ways in which people interact with each other, but the very substance of these interactions." (Burnett xix). Burnett is concerned with both how digital

technology impacts this ecology as well as how images eventually structure one's perception of reality.

As part of a greater reality, images are contextualized within consciousness in various ways. Burnett notes how images of the destruction of the World Trade Center "immediately became part of a dynamic, ongoing historical process" (15). This historical process, he asserts, "is a necessary staging ground for interpretation and analysis" even though this investment is external and interferes in the meaning of the image (15). In his analysis of his photograph of a "smokestack set against a fiery sky," Burnett posits that much of what we perceive in an image could be constructed culturally or even personally. Burnett draws upon Umberto Eco's remark that "images depend upon a shared agreement among viewers and a fairly structured set of conventions" (16).

Burnett describes these conventions as "the heart of the paradox about photographic truth. He posits: "Photographs are only records if viewers agree by convention that truth is present" (24). In that sense, what is held as a historical record by a certain group at a particular time may not be consistent when these conventions are no longer held. Meanings held in an image are almost wholly dependent on who and when that image is viewed. Further, Burnett claims that "very little of what is described as the real exists in isolation of its double as image and text" (31). He explains that images and events "coexist within a shared context and are part of a shared foundation that upholds and gives coherence to reality" (32). This "collaborative" relationship shows that photographs do not present innocent realities, that viewers encode images

with both body and mind. Burnett explains that “from a cognitive point of view it is just not possible to separate what has been seen from what has been thought” (33).

Not only does meaning, then, reside outside of the photograph, but this meaning lies outside of (and possibly prior to) the very act of seeing. Burnett questions whether what we see in the photograph is determined by one’s identity and asks if images don’t communicate a certain experience “but point to some of its elements” (34). This moment of image perception, which is also a moment of almost unconscious creation, is described by Burnett as a reverie of imagescapes: “a reverie that music listeners drift into when they ‘listen’ to a song or symphony” (40). These fluid imagescapes are almost performative in the way they generate meaning within image-worlds.

The etymology of the word “photography” means “writing with light” and as such directly links the photographic image not merely to communicating but specifically to writing as a linguistic technology. Marcel O’Gorman describes his attempt at writing in *E-Crit: Digital Media, Critical Theory, and the Humanities* (2006) as “a heuritic approach to discourse that draws on the suggestive power of pictures as a means of generating new modes of writing suitable to an image-oriented culture” (12). As such, O’Gorman calls for abandoning the hermeneutic approach to meaning-making in favor of a methodology that uses pictures as “a tool for invention, a generator of concepts, and linkages unavailable to conventional scholarly practices” (12). He calls this type of practice “hypericonomy.”

O’Gorman cites W.J.T. Mitchell’s description of hypericon as “a piece of moveable cultural apparatus, one which may serve a marginal role as illustrative device or a central role as

a kind of summary image...that encapsulates an entire episteme, a theory of knowledge” (*E-Crit*, 19). To O’Gorman, a text is not a static construct that one critiques or comments on. Rather it is more of a collaborative product, a “generator of theories” (23). In Barthesian terms, it is a “readerly” text. O’Gorman emphatically includes the visual in his concept of what is a text. In fact, it is this “graphicness” that O’Gorman believes is the focus of his work. Indeed, O’Gorman claims that his aim is a “yearning for a more explicit graphicness in academic discourse” (25).

In his analysis of how hypericonomy produces meaning, O’Gorman draws upon the work of E. H. Gombrich, who suggested that perception is not simply based on a realization of the perceived object, but rather “relies upon ‘projection’, or on our ability to reference ‘mental sets’ that are culturally, physiologically, and personally determined” (30). If meaning of a perceived image does not reside in the image itself, but rather produces different meanings to different viewers, clearly this calls into question traditional semiotic theory fundamentals. In fact, O’Gorman clearly states (drawing upon Gombrich and McGann) that “the process of reading text or pictures involves various physical and mental operations, some of which the reader may not always be aware” (31).

If we read images in an almost unconscious manner, notwithstanding the semiotic makeup of the image, how can we study an image as a text? How can we determine the workings of meaning-making in pictures?

The Borderless War of Pure Terror

The “War on Terror” may be experienced by grieving families in places like Gaza, Iraq, and Afghanistan, but it is also felt at tightened-security airports in the U.S. and Europe, and

through a media apparatus that attempts to remind us that the War on Terror is not just an abstract notion, but that it could be an unmediated reality as well. The multicolored terror alert system, developed in the aftermath of September 11, and abandoned almost a decade later, was designed as an instant and ubiquitous sign system that would alert the public about security conditions without wasting any words. All you needed to do is find the color of the current terror alert and adjust your panic accordingly. The ubiquity of this sign system also indicated that terrorism has become a fixture in our midst. The question has become not if there was a need for a terror “alert” but its degree. We are told that the American public could face the terrorist threat not only overseas or in major U.S. cities, but that terrorists can poison the water supply of a small town in the Midwest. Terror could even come in the mail delivered as anthrax courtesy of the U.S. Postal Service. A sleeper cell next door could be turned on at any time.

War is not an “event” anymore. War is not something men fight and then come home to enjoy the spoils of peace with their wives and families. Wars have traditionally been fought among sovereign nations but not between a state and an abstract concept, an emotion, as was noted by W. J. T Mitchell in *Cloning Terror*; not between a super state and a group of bandits hiding in caves and mountains. Mitchell explains that the war on terror “is revealed as a highly dubious fantasy, a form of asymmetrical warfare that treats the enemy as an emotion or a tactic” (*Cloning*, 21). This war is a continuous war that probably should not have started and does not end. It is a war that shows no demarcation lines in time or in geography. This is “Pure War,” as suggested by Paul Virilio in his work *Pure War* (1983). Virilio claimed that there has become no distinction between war and peace any longer. Life has become militarized, and life has become

“about” war. Hence, the militarization of science and technology, the intertwining of the goals of higher education institutions with the military apparatus produces an intimate relationship that Rey Chow finds to exist in the humanities as well. The academic discourse about the Middle East in cultural studies, ethnic studies, Middle Eastern studies, etc., becomes deployable as a form of War Service, in almost the same ways that the military has optioned scientific research centers at universities everywhere. The incorporation of the military-industrial complex, as such, becomes an underlying essential part of the foundation of civil society, including academia.

War as a temporary state of the state, as an event that takes place mostly outside city walls with the clear finality of defeat or victory, has given way to total war. This war becomes an all-consuming effort that requires the mobilization of state resources for its execution. However, total war, such as the American Civil War and the two World Wars, too ends at some point. The men, or what’s left of them, come home, bombed cities get rebuilt, and life, gradually, goes back to normal. But total war has been replaced by Pure War in which the war effort is on an implicit equal footing with not war, and where technology, the media, academia and the industrial-military complex become primarily **about** war. Everything that may be done contrary to this principle is considered treason, un-American. This state has been witnessed in the Cold War, and it continues, with much exaggeration in the current War on Terror.

But what is war, and the technology it produces, really the harbinger of? Virilio posits that for each new technology a reverse accident occurs in which humanity is a victim. If Virilio is correct, then both the militarization of society as well as the eventual transformation of civilians into collateral damage should no longer be viewed as only an unavoidable “accident.”

This blurring of the line between war and not war is also witnessed in a new construction of “enemy.” By “terror,” do we really mean to say “Islamic Terror?” But what is “Islamic” about terror? What are the identifiers that we can use to determine a good Muslim from a bad Muslim? This war is being fought in the imaginary. The imaginary is everywhere: battleground, town, and country. Geography is no longer a divider—the nation-state has abrogated not to the new condition of globalization that will bring economic prosperity to all, but to an all-out war that seeks to annihilate the enemy anywhere and everywhere. Collaboration between the United States and other nation states is no longer merely about extending the reach of U.S.-led multinational corporations, it is now about the extension of “extraordinary rendition,” the practice of abducting and shipping of civilians to other countries where torture is applied on these individuals. This war is not confined in time and space because our enemy is not a traditional enemy. It is Pure War that seeks to amass everything, all the technologies, all the geography, all the space, and all the time in its fight. It is *Guerre Sans Frontieres*.

Larry’s Last Perversion

In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Zizek locates the terror of September 11 in “American paranoid fantasy” to experience catastrophic disasters, both natural and caused by foreigners, as expressed in Hollywood blockbusters like *Escape From New York* and *Independence Day*. Zizek finds that American media were bombarding us (Americans) all the time with talk about a terrorist threat even before September 11. He describes this threat as “obviously libidinally invested.” (*Desert*, 15) He says, “the unthinkable which happened was the

object of fantasy, so that, in a way, America got what it fantasized about, and that was the biggest surprise.” (*Desert*, 16)

History after September 11 seems to bring to the surface a reversal of othering from an instrument of power to an instrument of both desire and fear. The attacks seem to have extended the Muslim in the West to the extreme limits of Otherness—achieving its goal of objectifying and de-humanizing its target. But the Other strikes back, as the perfect nemesis and entrenches itself in its Otherness. It comes back as the ultimate Western fantasy. As a genre, this fantasy combines horror with sex. By extension, an extreme imagination of the nation becomes a hallucinogenic mix of violation and supremacy, almost a sadomasochistic condition.

In the September 11 scenario, already previewed in the media, the orientals behave as the Orientalist imagines them—a horrifying object of fantasy, and now the oriental in the garb of the Muslim/Arab returns to embody the worst fears that can be fantasized by Western reverie. The fantasy morphs into a sadomasochistic reality that has already been experienced vividly by T. E. Lawrence, the British military secret agent who led the men of Arabia in their liberation war against the Ottoman Turks in 1916. Lawrence dressed and spoke like the Arabs, and rode his camel along with rebels through Arab lands culminating in his ultimate triumph in Damascus. But just before he entered Damascus, Lawrence himself was savagely raped and beaten at the entrance to Syria in the city of Deraa (allegedly by Turkish soldiers). In *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence describes in great detail (443-445) his terrible torture by the enemy—but he also explains some of the strange effects it had on him:

I remembered the corporal kicking with his nailed boot to get me up; and this was true, for next day my right side was dark and lacerated, and a damaged rib made each breath stab me sharply. I remembered smiling idly at him, for a delicious warmth, probably sexual, was welling through me: and then that he flung up his arm and hacked with the full length of his whip into my groin. (445)

Aside from fantasies of glory and victory (or because of them), Lawrence's experience in Deraa had a profound impression on him, and he is reported to have secretly arranged for reenactment of his rape, flogging, and sexual assault in Deraa on the anniversary of the event for nine years (1925-1934). Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown quotes Lawrence in "The Ironies of T.E. Lawrence's Relevance and Reputation" as saying that the flogging he had in Deraa had "resulted in a longing for a repetition of the experience.... [It] had journeyed with me since, a fascination and morbid desire, lascivious and vicious perhaps but like the striving of a moth toward its flame."

It seems that Lawrence's colonialist and militaristic dreams were not at all separate from his eventual sexual humiliation by the very people he came to subjugate. The climax of Lawrence's military desire even at the brinks of victory in Damascus was met at the exact geographical point of no return in Deraa by a sadomasochist desire. Has this been a fantasy of the colonialist conqueror all along? To be sexually mastered at the brink of supremacy? The specificity of rape as the ultimate weapon of humiliation, a form of extreme violence during times of war for women, has been witnessed in numerous historical and geographical examples. Male rape is utilized to inflict utter humiliation and defilement on its victim.

However, not everyone is convinced of the authenticity of Lawrence's rape story. Many place the story squarely in the realm of fantasy. In *Setting the Desert on Fire: T. E. Lawrence and Britain's Secret War in Arabia 1916-1918*, James Barr conducts forensic and historical analysis to dispute Lawrence's claim of the rape at Deraa. If Barr (and others) are accurate in the claim that Lawrence had fabricated the rape story for political gain, then his later (more verified) attempts at re-enacting what had originated in fantasy makes the whole episode all the more pertinent—especially when read in an Orientalist context. This latter version encircles the Colonialist's desires completely within the confines of fantasy and as such reveals Lawrence's desire as a autoerotic fetish. The colonialist, as always, is the subject of his own fantasy: a self-referentiality which is seated in the sexual but experienced in the visual.

It takes little imagination to discover the power of fantasy in terrorism. The imagined figure of Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda cohorts acts as the object of dehumanizing fear, imagining a mythical figure in a cave commanding worldwide violence and terror and with that becomes more fearful than fear. Fixing the other is no longer an instrument of power; it is an instrument of self-inflicted fear and a license to free oneself from the burdens of (the apparent) self. Could the freedom to self-inflict fear, as in watching a horror movie, be an effect of true power? Terror is tantalizing exactly because it is self-inflicted – and by living it as a fantasy the Western psyche aims at emptying terror of any attributes that do not position the West as a central subject.

And, even though the Western psyche spent the latter part of the twentieth century imagining itself as part of a developed, democratic civilization defined by ethical boundaries, this reveals only one side of the Western fantasy. Terror is its opposite side. One may be tempted

to understand the NeoCon's doctrine of exporting democracy by force (Frum and Perle) adopted by the Bush Administration within this self-referential scenario of the Western Psyche as a hero in a horror fantasy, an over-determined hero, resisting an exaggerated fantasy of terror.

In his lecture "Rules, Race, and Mel Gibson" (2006), Slavoj Zizek retells a famous story by Jean-Paul Sartre in a chapter in *Being and Nothingness* entitled "Mauvaise Foi" about a waiter in a cafe "who with exaggerated theatricality performs the clichéd gestures of a waiter and thus plays being a waiter in a café." Whereas Sartre's story may have pointed at the ontological thesis that the waiter could resist being defined as a waiter by choosing to act more like a waiter but without authenticity, Zizek explains that in comparison with an actor on the stage who may be playing the role of a waiter, and thus asserts his act by identifying with the role, the waiter needs to follow the role a little too much in order to assert his identity as something more than a waiter.

The exaggerated performance of the waiter is a contradiction because the result of his going overboard in his role is disidentification with his performance as a waiter. Nevertheless, it is difficult to accept that the waiter is not really a waiter. This ontological identification of the man and his work is itself a clichéd imagination about what is a waiter and that identity is defined and fixed by his condition as a waiter.

One may use the above perspective as a tool to understand attempts to impose democracy by the West to the rest of the world. By overemphasizing their role as propagators of democracy (by military force), NeoCons were in fact underscoring that what they were spreading was

anything but democracy, a performance of *mauvais fois*, which has been translated as “bad faith” or “self-deception.”

Jean Baudrillard argues in *Simulacra and Simulation* that the hyperreality of Disneyland convinces us of the assumed reality of American life, which, Baudrillard posits, is itself a simulacra of an idea, a fantasy of its own. However, by the same token that established this Disneyland condition, one witnesses that there are those who seem intent not to comply, and as such they breakdown the simulacrum effect and remind us of the cracks in the fantasy. These characters violently and brutally shatter this Disneyland effect. However, a better look at these cracks in the fantasy, a different reality may reveal itself. One may realize that those aberrant characters do not reveal the hyperreality of the Disneyland effect at all. In fact, killers, kidnapers, terrorists, and perpetrators of violence play a role that actually aims at furthering the fantasy experienced in the Disneyland effect, by attempting to convince us that our lives are separate, distant and not as brutal as these characters. In this sense, Osama Bin Laden, al-Qaeda, and other criminally insane villains convince us that whatever brutality they demonstrate renders whatever **we** do, as a civilized nation, clean and innocent, and not merely justifiable.

At the end of the day, at the center of the fantasy is self-referentiality: the West as its own subject. The Other is only a target in as much as he is intended to underscore the over-emphasized identity of the West as a hero, a savior—but what’s on the other side of the mirror?

This is the War That Never Ends

Virilio’s War is unlike Baudrillard’s media simulacrum of the first Gulf War. It is the reverse. It is the simulacrum of peace. We are in a constant state of war, even though we may not

be aware of it. Terrorism becomes like Disneyland in the Baudrillardian example; it helps to enforce the illusion that the hyperreality of our peace is real peace. The images of the war in Afghanistan serve the purpose of creating an illusion that this war is categorically different from the “peace” that preceded it. This war, by defining itself as an official war, aims at presenting itself as the opposite of the assumed peace that came before it. This temporal demarcation line, in the American public lore, defines the start of the war (with 9/11) and thereby (by contrast) normalizes the U.S. military activities pre-9/11 and subsequently exonerates the United States of culpability of any involvement in events during “peacetime” that could have led to 9/11.

Pure War has mobilized technology in a way that man has to be trained/ programmed to deal with a system of technology that moves faster and faster. One could even say that Virilio’s theory has been predicted by Moore’s Law, which provides that micro-chip processors will double in speed, capacity, and density (will be smaller or use less space) every two years. The increased speed facilitated by technology will manifest itself in new mobility products (transportation, telecommunications, and productivity applications), that necessitate that the individual should speed up his or her life in order to function in this culture. Since the purpose of this culture is to support the techno-industrial status of Pure War, which has no beginning or end, has no geographical boundary, a new ontological state of being posits itself as an extreme manifestation of Western Civilization.

Virilio describes technology as a new, omnipotent idol that competes with, and flares the fire of, historical religions. He says that [it is] “hardly surprising that religions, beliefs are unfurling their flags. Whether it be Islam, Israel, Jerusalem ‘the Eternal City,’ or the Christian

banner. I would say it's perfectly understandable, because facing them is a superb idol they can't accept" (*Pure War*, 133).

Virilio's characterization maybe understood in the sense that one extreme calls for the need for an oppositional 'Other.' A counter push towards the exact opposite direction away from speed and technology, away from the machine and the digital representation of life, brings itself forth in the role played by Bin Laden's al-Qaeda, a deterritorialized, stateless organization, steeped in Medieval ruthlessness and idealism, with theories that can only be described as analogous in their emphasis on return to the original idea: fundamentalism. If one were to accept the description of fundamentalism as a push in the opposite direction of "Pure War," it would seem false to assume that the fundamentalist position as a form of resistance is unique to al-Qaeda as one would witness similar resistance positions across multiple platforms including fundamentalist movements of many religions, anarchists, etc. It would seem naïve to assume that a symmetrical opposition to the technology and speed of Pure War constitutes a simple and unitary binary of an imperialist state and a terrorist organization. Al-Qaeda's reactionary extremism, in its resistance to the imperialist state, does both belong to a whole host of groups opposing the status quo, but it also converges with the techno-industrial extremism of Pure War in the vanishing point of war itself. Both are necessary for each other and for War to occur as if it were an "event." The logic of terrorism and anti-terrorism, therefore, could be described as an interconnected attempt at constantly historicizing the event of a war as if it was singular and unrepeatable, and in doing so, inventing a history where actions prior to the war itself are to be seen as innocent and exonerated.

The aim of *Pure War* is “unconsciousness.” By unconsciousness, Virilio means the inability to make conscious and informed decisions. We will be under such a state of simulacra that we will no longer be able to ascertain our positioning relative to the techno-military apparatus and the status of our being, and we would already have become robo-human citizen-soldiers.

The connection of Virilio’s *Pure War* to Terrorism has been noted by Curtis White in his essay “Our Pure War with Islam,” in which White finds that as North Americans, we are unconscious in the sense that we are unaware of our “predatory economic privilege,” or lifestyle. He likens the last half a century to a state of war between those benefiting from this relatively comfortable lifestyle and those who provide them with cheap natural resources. White finds an exemplary manifestation of this relationship in the people in the Middle East, who have been told, he says,

You will suffer the injustice and indignity of a military-client-state-of-last-resort (Israel) established in your midst by Western fiat. You will suffer and live in poverty in spite of the opulence of your rulers who will rule at least in part because we guarantee them. And in return you will give us cheap oil so that General Motors and Big Oil can continue to profit, Americans can drive any sort of steel nightmare they like, and metropolitan areas can be organized around the great suburban principle ‘get in your car or stay home.’

(White)

Visitors to the Moroccan city of Ouarzazate, which hosts the world’s largest film studio² and is described as the Moroccan Hollywood, have noticed that the city does not contain a single

cinema for the locals to watch movies—even the ones they work on. Instead, those locals scurry to work for \$12 per day as extras in productions that range from *Lawrence of Arabia* to *Gladiator* to *The Mummy* to *Babel*, etc. The native is made to feel grateful to partake in the production of goods that enrich Western civilization, but not in the financial and cultural rewards they bring. In fact, the opposite is true. Profits (at least tax money) generated from the labor of the native are partially siphoned back to oppress the native even more by financing ruling regimes or a state of war that rob her of even more humanity. When these profits are not coming back to the native in the form of political and military campaigns, they do return in the form of marketing campaigns, which push “must-have” consumerist products and as such complete the cycle by financing the same socio-political-military system.

Our acceptance of this lifestyle constitutes an admission of our position as subjects of terrorist attacks and the homeland security restrictions that are necessary, as the media tells us, to protect us. We, as citizens, become beneficiaries of the lifestyle of the system of Pure War, a part of the military techno-industrial complex. In Virilio’s terms, we become “citizen-soldiers” (Desert Screen in the Paul Virilio Reader, 158). Curtis White remarks that the “success of the techno-military is in the fact that people don’t recognize their own militarization.” The militarization of a state necessitates that all citizens (in various degrees, depending on skin color and thickness of accent) are subject to homeland security precautions, but also that citizens are empowered to attack and citizen-arrest suspected terrorists.

White also notes the paradox that “the United States may be part of a postmodern global reality without economic or political borders, but its citizens continue to need to be appealed to in more old-fashioned ways.”

Indeed, American culture is profuse with nationalist references, from zealous chants of “U S A, U S A, U S A” at rallies and gatherings that involve an outsider as the Other, to ideological siren calls of the United States being the leader of the democratic and beacon of the “free world,” the defender of human rights worldwide, the bringer of “good things to life.” But the paradoxical nature of the citizen-soldier in a postmodern global economy where the multinational corporation has taken over the status of the nation-state as the arbiter of power would most assuredly be viewed differently by those who may not enjoy the same economic benefits of this new global reality of techno/military/industrial advancement.

From the perspective of a citizen of the Middle East, the above could be understood as a condition that says if you wish to partake in the technology and products we invent, you will need to accept that we, in the Western World, can have power, but you cannot, we can have a state, but you cannot. In other words, those outside the military/industrialized world are being conquered twice, once by military supremacy, another by economic subjugation.

Democracy itself becomes a patented property of the West such that it needs to be imported (from the U.S.) like Nike shoes and Starbucks coffee. If not imported, then exported courtesy of NATO, which willing and eager to switch horses from a collaboration with the Colonel’s dictatorship to a full-blown military support of the Libyan rebels, with their promises of future oil and construction projects. Clearly, the rebels understood too well the rules of the

economic interests' game and coopted it to their benefit. As such, France and German with a stronger military contribution than the United States will stand to reap larger economic benefits in the country's reconstruction plan.

Not to be outdone, even in its paradoxical inconsistencies, al-Qaeda, as the representative of terrorism with its backward, fundamentalist doxa, seems to leave enough room for its appropriation of Western technology, not merely in communication and media, but also, as remarked by White, in seizing Western technology as weapons of choice: airliners as bombs, buildings as explosives, the mail system and water supplies as a potential biological weapons delivery program (Our Pure War).

This appropriation of the weapon of the other and turning it against its original owner, White asserts, will be repeated once and again in this visual binary between the West and Islam. We will see it in architecture as signs of power, ideology and sovereignty (Twin Towers, minarets, skyscrapers, etc.). We will also see it in the video footage showing the shooting of Palestinian child Mohammed al-Durrah, the fight over the hijab, Quran burning parties, etc. Whereas the Cold War, unlike this one, was more like a duel, a dare game of two equals (at least from a nuclear destruction capability), the War on Terrorism is a war of visibility: a sinister hide and seek game, where the terrorists hide in the crowds, hide their methods, their bombs, and where the leaders are hiding out of sight, supposedly in mountains that could be in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or behind the high walls of a luxurious villa in Abbottabad. When they are visible, they appear in different countries, in different nationalities, in video footage of their choosing. In a diabolical game of peek-a-boom, terror has veiled its visage from visibility except when it

chooses. In that latter sense, the War on Terror, like the Cold War, becomes steeped in a national paranoia that suspects “commies” of hiding under our beds and in our closets. The ongoing Peter King congressional hearings into the radicalization of Muslims in the United States becomes a contemporary echo of hearings of the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the McCarthy era.

The Consistent but Predictable Aberration of the Other

Derek Gregory argues in *The Colonial Present* that by representing the Islamic world as uncivilized, backward, and incapable of democracy, “the West” justifies military interventions. Gregory finds that the War on Terror is a continuation of the Orientalist model that was established with Colonialism. He describes an “optical shift” that is necessary for a “future free of colonial power and disposition” and is “sustained in part by a critique of the continuities between the colonial past and the colonial present.” Gregory affirms that “[w]hile they may be displaced, distorted, and (most often) denied, the capacities that inhere within the colonial past are routinely affirmed and reactivated in the colonial present” (7).

If one is to accept the notion that all geographies are imagined, like Borges’ map, it is the application and manipulation of these geographies that explain the usefulness of one type of imagination versus another. The power vested in these geographies is what defines their efficacy as tools of ideology. In this sense, imagined geographies become necessary for a popular discourse invented by the political culture of the War on Terror—and in complicity with the media. The failure of the Muslim/Arab to comply with the image of the Muslim as Other will

shatter the whole simulacra of the purposefulness of Western democracy. As such, we come to predict that the only good Muslim is the bad Muslim. When Saddam Hussein acts like a thug, Qaddafi dresses like a clown, the crowds jump in anger on the streets of Karachi, Hamas in Gaza fires a few backyard-made missiles at civilians in Israel, only then the official narrative confirms itself with documentary evidence. Any deviation from the above, the acceptance of the Muslim visual difference as no difference, as a non-signifier, exposes the existence of an alternative narrative, the realization of which is sufficient to collapse the whole simulacra of the war on terror. When the Muslim/ Arab fails to comply with his own clichéd image and actually appears as “one of us,” just another person down the block, what is revealed is a “punctum” in Barthesian terminology, which only affirms the artificiality of our cultural imaginary in its construction of the Muslim/Arab as its Other.

The issue with legitimating visual difference as a threat to national and cultural identity is witnessed in much of Western Europe’s distrust of veils, minarets, and Islamic street prayers, that one may view it as a desire for a recognizable and homogenously-shared cultural consistency. Even after we argue that homogeneity is an illusion, and that heterogeneity has throughout most of history always been the rule, empirical evidence presents us with one sad example after another in Lebanon, Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Palestine, Rwanda, Darfour, and elsewhere, where terror was used to eliminate cultural difference.

However, extending certain active popular rejection of difference to a presumed all encompassing cultural binary is exactly how fake generalizations get manufactured? Cultural, ethnic, or religious heterogeneity is seen as problematic only when conveniently viewed in

selective isolation. A wider historical perspective shows us an altogether more convincing evidence: that periods of ethnic strife, where micro-identities clash in micro-geographies, are short-lived and limited in geographical and temporal scopes.

The new country of South Sudan was born as a result of a long strife between the predominantly Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south. Western media portrayed the conflicts in Darfour, as a purely ethnic war between government-supported Arab militias and non-Arab tribes. Armed with a binary system of divisions, we, in the West, can comfortably accept these identity-based explanations. But one can also note that even the new South Sudan is already a heterogeneous state with multiple ethnicities, religions, and tribes—most of whom voted to secede from a national selfhood that stood for more than 200 years.

Historical reality gives us plenty of explanations for cultural and ethnic strife that lay squarely outside of binary oppositions and the need to eliminate pure difference. Robert Hayden remarks in “Imagined Communities and Real Victims: Self Determination and Ethnic Cleansing in Yugoslavia” (in *Genocide: An anthropological reader*) that what seemed to be ethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia has taken place “almost entirely within regions that were among the most ‘mixed’—those in which the various nations of Yugoslavia were most intermingled.”

Hayden explains that the extreme violence that ensued was due to the changing nature of nationhood that had glued Yugoslavia together. He argues that “the wars have been about the forced unmixing of peoples whose continuing coexistence was counter to political ideologies that won the free elections of 1990.” Hayden points out that the collapse of Yugoslavia was based on an essentialist definition of the nation that moved away from the “imagined” notion of Yugoslav

nationhood to a more homogenous imagining. He notes that what he describes as “extreme nationalism” was founded less on the idea of “primordial communities” but rather on “making existing heterogeneous ones unimaginable.” In other words, where life had shown cooperation and a nationhood of multiple ethnic and religious groups, heterogeneity was already a social reality. Hayden says that the Yugoslav wars were meant to “implement an essentialist definition of the nation and its state in regions where the intermingled population formed living disproof of its validity.” (Hayden, *American Ethnologist*, 783-784)

In most of the Arab World, at the end of the Colonialist period in the second half of the last century, a movement towards Arabization and Arab nationalism has dominated most of the post-independence movements. Most of the liberation movements were secular and as such involved communities of all faiths. In states like Syria and Egypt, religious diversity was necessary for the success of independence and the establishment of new national states that have proclaimed Arab nationalism in their name as in the Syrian **Arab** Republic, Egyptian **Arab** Republic, etc.

In countries like Syria or Iraq (as well as Turkey) ethnic minorities like the Kurds, Assyrians, and Chaldeans were completely marginalized (if at all recognized) in the national composition of the Arab nationalist state. A glaring example of this silent marginalization of ethnic minorities in Syria was the de-nationalization of thousands of Syrian Kurds in Northern Syria in 1962. Many Kurds remained officially stateless for almost 50 years until President Bashar Assad restored their right to claim Syrian citizenship in a presidential decree made up of a single paragraph.

The current uprisings in the Middle East unveil fundamental cultural and ideological shifts that could have deep and long-lasting effects. Most noticeable is the move to recognize the legitimacy of ethnic minorities with clear cultural identities as essential components of the national fabric within the nation state: the Kurds in Syria or Iraq and the Amazigh in Algeria, Morocco, and other North African states. Both ethnic groups have distinctive linguistic and cultural identities but have at present chosen to incorporate their own struggle within the national agenda of their respective countries. The resurgence and legitimation of these ethnic minorities within the composition of the national and cultural identity is a marker of how these nations are beginning to redefine their national imaginary. These national identities seem to be moving from being decidedly Arab to a pluralist, multi-lingual, multi-cultural composite.

The Arab democratic uprisings could be linked to a technological leapfrog that resulted from the telecommunication revolution and the ensuing access to information and communication that was previously unimaginable. It could be said that the restructuring of the concepts of time and space as an effect of a new computerized, networked society (Castells, Urlich), has also resulted in a shifting of cultural identity perceptions of ethnic communities in states that have been hitherto closed to the outside world, like Syria or Iraq. Specifically, one could observe that the reverse effect of globalization in marginalizing the power of the nation state can also be felt as a side effect of network society. The state's integrity as the mother nation (as in the case of Syria and Iraq) is, in fact, being protected by ethnic minorities who frequently choose something other than ethnic-based divisions to emphasize their national identity (within the nation-state). This shift is manifested in the surprise that even though the

recognition of the cultural identity of the ethnic minority is underlined and recognized, the same ethnic groups are not asking to secede from their mother nation. And, when they have done so in the case of South Sudan, cultural homogeneity remained the rule.

A remarkable example of the above argument can be shown in the recent upheavals in the Kurdish areas in northern Syria. As stated earlier, Syrian Kurdish activists have fought for decades to restore Syrian nationality to tens of thousands of stateless Kurds. When, as a result of the recent uprisings throughout Syria, President Assad agreed to sign a Presidential Order restoring Syrian nationality to the Kurds, an injustice was lifted in one paragraph signed by one man. However, once they attained the right (at least to apply) to belong to the state, many in the Kurdish community, in fact, rejected the Presidential Order, claiming that the Order was a ploy by the government to weaken the solidarity of the opposition. Instead, they replaced their demands for recognition with the overall goals of the Syrian uprising for freedom, democracy, and plurality. Kurdish Syrian activists started using the word Azadi, which means “freedom” in Kurdish, as their main rallying cry. The Syrian state had, for decades, forcefully banned the Kurdish language and certainly disallowed it in any formal or state affairs. So, in and through asserting their cultural identity as Kurds, these activists were at the same time proclaiming their allegiance to the nation as an imagined community and a home for their cultural and linguistic identity. The linguistic and political opportunity was not to be missed by the general population in Syria, and soon enough, the slogan “Azadi” was being chanted by thousand of anti-government demonstrations throughout the country. May 20, 2011 was named “Azadi Friday” in

recognition of the Kurdish community's significant contribution to the making of the country and its revolution.

Within that context, one may note that Iraqi Kurds are affirming their Iraqiness while Syrian Kurds are also affirming their Syrianness at the very same time that they are claiming their cultural identity as Kurds. In other words, a certain geography of identity is being actively imagined by these groups as a means to thwart an essentialist definition of the nation in its linguistic, religious, or cultural consistency. Plurality and heterogeneity become the point of this restructuring of the nation. The imagining of the community is the active perception of how the community elects to deal with its own space. It is where the imagination is activated to envision the space that the community shall describe as safe, warm and familiar—in other words, “home.”

To See or Not to See, That is the Question

Terrorism, by definition, is about inflicting pain in a spectacular way: it uses the image as a weapon. Whether terrorism is an action or a reaction to an action is secondary to the question of how a visual ecosystem is being constructed as part of a militarized engagement of the sign and the image.

This study seeks to understand the nature of this semiotic war of images, where an image can cause a war, (at least, an uproar), and war will generate images of differentiation/alienation (alien-nation). Also, the study aims to understand the signification process in situations of visual cultural difference: where does the signified stand in total opposition to the signifier, and when does the whole signification regime become questionable and near collapse?

The current obsession with the veil as a signifier of Islamicity, itself a signifier of un-Western otherness, is of interest on many levels. For one, there is the resistance that the veil lends not only to cultural hegemony but also to the whole act of seeing, to the question of visibility. Digital artist Hasan Elahi³ has made a career out of the issue of visibility and surveillance. When he was stopped at a U.S. airport for having a name that appeared on a no-fly list, he was interrogated at length and asked to stay in touch with the FBI. Elahi decided to make it easier on the FBI by rearranging his life and making it publicly visible and trackable on the Internet and social media by using a GPS tracking device on his website, which also features pictures of places he visits throughout the day: airports, offices, restaurants, even bathrooms. Elahi's response was the opposite of the image of a veil where all visibility is disallowed. Instead, by making every possible visibility visible, Elahi saturated his own surveillance and counterpointed the whole issue of being monitored. In other words, by making every aspect of his life visible and traceable online, Elahi used visual saturation to thwart the very necessity of visibility as surveillance.

The U.S. government has certainly learned a lesson of the value of the image both deployed and undeployed, its presence as well as its absence. As such, images of the raid at the Bin Laden house in Pakistan and his eventual killing were carefully made unavailable, even though the government made it perfectly clear that photographs existed. The point of the dead Bin Laden photographs was double: 1. that they existed and 2. that they were not going to become visible. In other words, the U.S. government considered the photographs as a landmine,

a sort of weapon, which the government devised but did not dare to risk the serious possibility that it could backfire and unleash presumed violence in the Muslim world.

Certain images of an Islam/West dichotomy have carved themselves in recent memory as cultural emblems of oppositions. These images seem to begin with the penetration of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, leading to the destruction of the Saddam Hussein statue in Baghdad, to the Abu Ghraib prison photographs, to George Bush's televised "deus ex machina" descent on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln declaring "Mission Accomplished," the Mohammed cartoons, to the orange-jump-suited Guantanamo detainees, to posters in Switzerland calling for banning the building of minarets, which were represented in the posters as phallic-looking missiles. All of these, of course, are intercepted by images of street violence in Muslim countries, burning of American flags, suicide bombers with explosive belts, men with long beards and angry eyes, women in blue Burqas and of course not least, the mythic, evil Rip Van Winkle image of Osama Bin Laden with his foot-long beard, soft and quietly-evil smile, sitting on the grounds somewhere in the caves of Tora Bora.

Pure Culture

An essentialist view of a singular Oriental Arab or Islamic self that is not only decidedly different but also clearly antithetic to Western civilization is not necessarily a novel idea. Throughout history, cultural demarcation lines have frequently portrayed discreet and immune cultural and political identities in competition with one another. Many of the historical illustrations by Benedict Anderson explain the invented nature of nationalism, but also lay bare many of the claims of ethnic, national, and cultural purity. Anderson notes the practice of

polygamy in much of the European royal dynasties, as “religiously sanctioned, complex systems of tiered concubinage ...essential to the integration of the real.” (20) Anderson notes that there “has not been an ‘English’ dynasty ruling in London since the eleventh century (if then); and what ‘nationality’ are we to assign to the Bourbons?” (21)

A reader of Islamic history will note that much of the West’s disapproving criticism of the life of Prophet Mohammed has been (and largely is still) focused on Mohammed’s many marriages. Those making these accusations see no contradiction between a Western history laden with royal marriages arranged for political conveniences and Mohammed’s attempt, at least 500 years before the Renaissance, to unite Arab tribes under his new religion by being a son-in-law to many of them. Another example of a frame of reference that highlights difference as form of accusation and double standard maybe seen in a recent media condemnation of the public hanging of a convicted killer in Iran, while almost at the exact time sidelining the execution of Troy Davis in Georgia that occurred in the same week. In fact, the U.S. had executed three people that same week. However, it seems that terror is a term that is only ascribed to the violent actions of others.

It is difficult for one to accept a discrete and pure culture that stands in opposition and isolation of all others. In the dialogue of cultures, the conclusion has never been about superlative comparisons: my culture is better than yours; my culture is earlier than yours, my people suffered more than yours. Why can it not be a synthetic one? I can see my culture in yours, your language in mine, blood spilled anywhere is a cause of pain for everyone.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE MARTYR'S VISION

[The day will come when] the Jew will not be ashamed to find Arab elements inside himself, and the Arab will not be ashamed to declare that he also contains Jewish aspects.... I am a product of all the cultures that have passed through this land--Greek, Roman, Persian, Jewish, and Ottoman.... Each culture passed on, and left something behind. I am a son to all these fathers, but I belong to a single mother. Does that mean my mother is a whore? My mother is this land, which absorbed us all, and was both a victim and a witness. – Mamoud Darwish

Terrorism: Body and Vision

The suicide bomber lies outside the contingencies of religion and the promise of sex with 72 virgins. Instead, her desire lies squarely in the quest for inclusion in the field of vision and to count as a human being. This chapter proposes an alternative critical discourse to the question of identity-based suffering and culpability. It aims to raise doubts about certain established notions concerning historical trauma that are thought to be singular, unrepeatable, and the result of fixed dichotomies. Instead, I propose a tracing of inconsistencies in the “official narrative” in order to challenge current distributions of victimhood and culpability. As such, I wish to call for a rejection of the notion of competitive suffering and of culpability as limited to the group perpetrating the last act of violence.

I draw upon Agamben’s notions of *der Muselmann* and *homo sacer* in order to locate a commonality of suffering in which the human body is foregrounded as Bare Life, a zero point of

humanity. I also deploy Judith Butler's notion of precarity to the splicing of life between identity-based frames that the suicide bomber intends to violently suture back together.

The Muslim at Auschwitz

The Muselmann was described by Holocaust survivors as the Auschwitz prisoner who has given up and was given up by his comrades: "no longer had room in his consciousness for the contrasts good or bad, noble or base, intellectual or unintellectual ... He was a staggering corpse, a bundle of physical functions in its last convulsions" (Agamben, 41).

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Giorgio Agamben characterizes the Muselmann as a stage that Auschwitz inmates reach when they are in such a state of physical decrepitude that other inmates would look at them almost as dead already. Agamben quotes Holocaust survivor and writer Primo Levi describing the Muselmann by saying, "One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death" (44).

The Muselmann becomes the threshold between the states of life and death, but more importantly between the categories of human and inhuman. Deprived of all of dignity and moral compositions as human, there remains a faint biological connection between Muselmann and its species. Not a "living being" anymore, he is a walking corpse, non-human, living dead, and mummy-man (Agamben 54). To Agamben, the Muselmann "is the guard on the threshold of a new ethics, an ethics of a form of life that begins where dignity ends" (69). He was cast outside the gaze; no one bears to look at him. In other words, he became a counter Medusa, who gazes at no one, but one who cannot be gazed at either. Before the Muselmann was cast into the gas chamber, he was already outside the gaze, "unbearable to the human eye" (Agamben 50). This

inability to look at the Muselmann is not one of sympathy or abundance of compassion, but rather because he was unworthy of being looked at. The Muselmann was a source of anger and worry (Agamben 43).

Primo Levi describes the Muselmann as “he who has seen the Gorgon.” According to Agamben, a Gorgon is a faceless “female head covered with serpents whose gaze produced death” (53). The Gorgon had no eyes and merely by looking at it, one would be killed.

But where did the term Muselmann come from? How was it that the Muselmann became a separate being from his former self? Agamben clearly states that the word *der Muselmann* means Muslim, literally, and uses the two terms interchangeably (41). However, Agamben also explains that although there is little certainty about the origin of the term, it is evident that it was used at Auschwitz possibly as a reference to the image of a Muslim prostrating himself on the ground in prayer—all curled up with his face touching the ground. The word Muselmann may also be referring to the Muslims’ belief in submitting to the will of God and, as such, are seen as losing their will and surrendering to fate.

Agamben mentions that there were other terms that were used at the various concentration camps as synonyms for the Muselmann: “In Majdanek, the word was unknown. The living dead there were termed ‘donkeys;’ in Dachau they were ‘cretins,’ in Stutthof ‘cripples,’ in Mauthausen ‘swimmers,’ in Neuengamme ‘camels,’ in Buchenwald ‘tired sheikhs,’ and in the women’s camp known as Ravensbrück, *Muselweiber* (female Muslims) or ‘trinkets’” (44).

Auschwitz inmates had to invent a new category for their Jewish identity as it began to descend into the state of non-human, an identity that does not resemble one's original self, but one that is categorically different. Agamben notes: "It is certain, that with a kind of ferocious irony, the Jews knew that they would not die at Auschwitz as Jews" (45). In other words, the Jews who were targeted solely for their religious identity, in order to affirm the solidity of this identity, needed to invent an Other (The Muslim) to whom they can ascribe the degeneration of their own as they descend into the non-human state/stage of the Muselmann.

The Jew, in that state, has become the Muslim. The Jew is stripped down to the remnant of his or her biological existence of the body as "bare life," thus becoming, not a Jew anymore but a Muselmann. One may wonder, why has the Muslim become the alterity of the Jewish inmates at Auschwitz? Has the Muslim, a descendant of Ishmael, not been the Jew's brother all along? Both sons of Abraham, the father of all? Was Moses not an Egyptian?

Could one consider this division of Jewish identity as the product of a "Western" perspective that has burdened itself with Otherness, once as perceived in the Jew, and a further Otherness as perceived in the Muslim? It is as if Othello was Shylock's tormentor in the European fantasies of Otherness. Was Othello, a paranoid and violent man of war, meant to be the tragic counterpoint to Shylock's comedy of greed?

Jewish Kebab in Baghdad

Where else do the Jew and the Arab meet? Don't they meet in the person of the Arab Jew? Israeli scholar Ella Shohat, in "Reflections of an Arab Jew," excavates the figure of the Arab Jew, a term that to many in the West is seen more like a paradox. Shohat argues, however,

that until the establishment of the state of Israel, the Arab Jew has been a fundamental part of the socio-economic, cultural, and even political life in many communities throughout the Middle East, and along with Arab Muslims and Arab Christians, developed through the centuries a common cultural identity that is imprinted with the sounds, sites, and aromas of the region.

The life of the Jew as an Arab was richly, albeit romantically, described in *Memories of Eden: A Journey through Jewish Baghdad*, by Violette Shamash. She speaks tenderly of the luscious life she experienced as a young person within the vibrant Jewish community of Baghdadi Jews in Iraq before 1945. Shamash describes her life as “paradise” (19). She paints a tender, though idyllic, portrait of the city as seen from her family mansion on the banks of the Tigris characterized with the fragrance of walnut and apricot trees in the garden with kebabs being grilled on a tanour oven. Shamash traces her Jewish community in Iraq back to Babylonian history as the home of “our patriarch Abraham” and the birthplace of the Talmud. (95)

In *Baghdad, Yesterday: The Making of an Arab Jew*, Sasson Somekh writes of his youth in Baghdad, describing details of the education he received in Arabic from a Shia cleric and how it started his interest in writing Arabic poetry as a teenager. Somekh’s memoir recounts his life as a writer involved in the political and cultural life of his Baghdad, meeting other writers in cafés on al-Rashid Street and sharing in the city’s vibrant cultural scene. As in Shamash’s story, Somekh also notes the role played by the rise of Zionism and Nazism as a strong factor in bringing out Jewishness as a marker of difference in the life of Iraqi Jews. He also unveils the complicit role of the Israeli, British, and Iraqi governments in facilitating the emigration of Iraqi

Jews through secret agreements, false propaganda, local fascist gangs, and even terrorist operations by the Mossad in Iraq.

Somekh eventually makes it to Lydda, Israel, on 21 March 1951 along with two hundred other Jews. He describes how before they could leave the plane, passengers were sprayed with DDT, a symbolic gesture that one would feel was intended to cleanse the new immigrants of their filthy Oriental past. Somekh recalls that it was at this very same arriving place, Lydda, where in July 1948, less than two years prior, more than thirty thousand Palestinians were expelled from their homes by Israeli forces led by Yitzhak Rabin. He and his fellow arrivals were merely exchanging spots with the Palestinian deportees. However, what was awaiting Somekh was another camp, an absorption camp where he was interned before he was assigned to a permanent destination.

In “Reflections by an Arab Jew,” Ella Shohat points out Israel’s systematic discrimination against Mizrahis (and Sephardic Jews in general) through state “institutions that deployed their energies and material to the consistent advantage of European Jews and to the consistent disadvantage of Oriental Jews.”

Oriental Jews constitute 50% of Israel’s Jews, and when you add the indigenous Palestinian residents, Israelis who do not come from a European background total greater than 70% of the whole population. Nevertheless, Shohat notes that much of the cultural and educational systems in Israel were set without any consideration of the Oriental Jews’ identity and with only European Jews in mind:

Stripped of our history, we have been forced by our no-exit situation to repress our collective nostalgia, at least within the public sphere. The pervasive notion of "one people" reunited in their ancient homeland actively disauthorizes any affectionate memory of life before Israel. We have never been allowed to mourn a trauma that the images of Iraq's destruction only intensified and crystallized for some of us. (Shohat, "Reflections")

Arab Jews in Israel were made to learn a whole new history (of the European Jews) that was not necessarily their experience. Further betrayed by their language (they speak Arabic at home) and their own physiognomy, they are often mistaken for Palestinians and subsequently profiled as such and at times attacked by some or arrested for questioning by the authorities.

Here, bio-politics perverts its way into the Jewish imagination one more time. As the European Jew, interned at Auschwitz, subjected to unthinkable trauma, began to degenerate physically into the Muselmann, here in the Jewish state, the Oriental Jew, likewise, lends his body to the Muslim, deprived of freedom, reduced to an inmate because here too, the Jew's body is indistinguishable from that of an Arab. The eye that accuses the Palestinian also accuses his mimesis in the Oriental Jew.

In her earlier work, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims" (1988), Shohat explores in postcolonial terms the ways that Oriental Jews have been treated with prejudice by European Jews in Israel in ways reminiscent of the same colonialist and Orientalist terms that Europeans used with colonized nations, treating them as uncivilized, barbaric, and even sub-human. She contrasts the cultural and historical backgrounds of Arab

Jews with European Jews, as representative of separate and uneven cultural domains. European Jews are the ones who imagined Zionism to solve the European problem of anti-Semitism and built the state of Israel in their own image. As such, they came to dominate the cultural, educational, and political discourse in the new state of Israel, and therefore, exercised the same Orientalist approach of Europeans towards Orientals in general.

In “Sephardim in Israel,” Shohat notes that an “essential feature of colonialism is the distortion and even denial of the history of the colonized.”(7) In this framework, she also explains that along the discriminatory propaganda of Israeli mainstream media, the Oriental Jew has been represented as backward, living in caves, unsuitable to modern life. Contrasted with that image, she posits, one should keep in mind the Metropolises from which many Oriental Jews came from: Alexandria, Baghdad, and Istanbul, which “were hardly the desolate backwaters without electricity or automobiles implied by the official Zionist account” (Shohat, “Sephardim” 7). She explains:

Yet Sephardic and Palestinian children, in Israeli schools, are condemned to study a history of the world that privileges the achievements of the West, while effacing the civilizations of the East ... The Zionist master-narrative has little place for either Palestinian or Sephardim, but while Palestinians possess a clear counter narrative, the Sephardic story is a fractured one embedded in the history of both groups. (Shohat, “Sephardim” 7)

Furthermore, Shohat seems to be pointing to a form of cultural ethnic cleansing on the part of the state of Israel to “cleanse the Sephardim of their Arabness and redeem them from their ‘primal sin’ of belonging to the Orient” (“Sephardim” 7). To clarify, she states:

Sephardic children are inculcated with the historical memory of ‘our ancestors, the residents of the shtetls of Poland and Russia’, as well as with the pride of Zionist founding fathers for establishing pioneer outposts in a savage area. Jewish history is conceived as primordially European, and the silence of historical texts concerning the Sephardim forms a genteel way of hiding the discomfoting presence of an Oriental ‘other,’ here subsumed under the a European-Jewish ‘We.’” (“Sephardim” 8)

Faced with an official state culture that designates Arabness (non-Europeanness) as undesirable, Shohat says that Sephardim became “ashamed of their dark olive skin, of their guttural language, of the winding quarter-tones of their music and even of their traditions of hospitality” (“Sephardim” 8). She notes that not only did the “West” become to represent the “East” to Orientals, “but also in a classic play of colonial speculariry, the East came to view itself through the West’s distorting mirror” (“Sephardim” 25). Not only has the Sephardic come to loathe their Arabness (a form of self-hatred), but also they became to assume staunch anti-Arab positions themselves.

Added to this tense relation, because of the similar educational and economic conditions, Sephardim and Palestinian blue-collar workers are made to compete for low-paying and manual jobs. Shohat notes that Sephardim mostly takes advantage of considerable government expenditures for building settlements in occupied territories for economic reasons (Oriental Jews

may be discriminated against culturally, but they still receive much more privileges and rights compared to Palestinians), and therefore become the object of frequent Palestinian attacks. And, because the Palestinian and Sephardic communities are closed from each other with little contact, information about each other is strictly controlled through representations through Ashkenazi-controlled media, which represent the Palestinians as “terrorists” and the Sephardim as closed-minded religious fanatics who are Arab-haters. (25)

The Untestifiable Martyrdom of Thicklips

In *the Merchant of Venice*, when Shylock had the opportunity to defend his outlandish ransom for a pound of flesh, his defense was to raise the humanity of the Jew as manifested in his corporeality, his biological composition, which he shares with all other human beings, Christians, and others:

. I am a Jew. Hath
not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs,
dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with
the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject
to the same diseases, healed by the same means,
warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as
a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?
if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison
us, do we not die? (Act III, scene I) (Shakespeare, *Merchant*)

Along the same line, and contrary to Shylock's reasoning, the physical attributes of Othello (the other Venetian outsider) were repeatedly pointed at as signifiers not of semblance but of Otherness and alterity. In the play, Othello is described as "a Barbary horse," and "an old black ram." He is referenced as "thicklips" and as having "the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor" (Act 1, Scene 1) (Shakespeare, *Othello*).

Unlike the European Jew, Othello's physiognomy becomes a visible marker of difference and a disparaging sign of Otherness. Othello's Otherness is all too visible. Therefore, Othello had to be abjected outside of vision. In that sense, Othello's role as a soldier on behalf of the Venetian state is emphasized as the person whose place is supposed to die for others, and whose station is just one behind death. Othello the Moor, like the Muselmann, is viewed as non-human, and one who is implicated in their own death in the form of self-sacrifice.

At the concentration camp, the Muselmann is visibly invisible. He is not dead, but seen as such. When he became Muselmann, the inmate crossed over to where he would not be counted as human any longer, but only as "bare life." Agamben describes the Muselmann as the "untestifiable, that to which no one has borne witness" (Agamben, *Remnants* 41).

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben quotes many survivors who wanted to stay alive specifically because they wanted to be a witness to the atrocities committed at the camp. What they have seen, although unsayable, must be told. In fact, survivors, like Primo Levi, have felt a constant compulsion to tell their story for a lifetime. But who testifies for that which no one bears to testify about?

Indeed, at the beginning of the chapter “Witness,” Agamben quotes an Auschwitz prisoner asserting that he would not take his own life because he “did not want to suppress the witness that I could become” (15). Witness in this sense is probably taken in the narrow sense of seeing coupled with the functional sense of testifying. But we already know that there are parallels between the act of witnessing and the act of martyrdom. The martyr as witness is a condition that intertwines the act of seeing with that of the witness’s certain death.

In both Greek and Arabic, the word for martyr has direct ontological roots in the word for “witness”: “Martis” in Greek, “Shaheed” in Arabic. A “witness” is someone who has seen but who also bears the imperative of testifying to what was seen. A martyr, as witness, accepts that their testimony will lead to their death, and as such, could be seen as implicated in his or her own self-sacrifice through the ‘act’ of testifying. The Bible refers to the act of witnessing as both following Christ as well as witnessing the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Martyrdom, then, could be described as the act of willingly getting involved in a physical situation where the martyr knows that by advocating certain principles (testifying to what he or she believes is “truth”), the martyr will be giving up his or her life. In other words, by knowing fully and well in advance that his or her testimony will lead to death, the martyr is implicated in his or her own sacrifice through the act of testifying.

The emphasis that I’d like to make here is on the apparent oppositions that one may find along the states of living, witnessing, and martyrdom. These states seem to resolve around the fourth state of **action**—since which state a person may end up at crucially depends on the action

(or non-action) chosen. I argue that there is an inherent split in the notion of martyrdom between testifying and sacrifice and that at the core of this split has been the question of action.

The martyr is a person who has decided to sacrifice his or her own life so others could live and one who has given up his or her dignity so that others may have dignity. In a way, a martyr, like a hero, is a description given by the beneficiaries of the martyr's actions to those who willingly give up their own life with the hope that others will not have to.

A martyr's testimony is delivered not in the narrow sense of a verbal witness but in the corporeal sense of delivering one's body as evidence. As such, the Muselmann's position at the concentration camp pushed to the thresholds of the non-living could be contrasted by that other Arab/Muslim at that other camp, the refugee camp. The Arab at the Palestinian refugee camps in Gaza and the West Bank casts a different kind of gaze to his own predicament and locates his own body as a site of action and resistance.

This connection of suffering, of the predicament of bare life as an expression of biopolitics has been noted by Hannah Arendt as she looks for the commonality of life lived in concentration camps ("The Concentration Camps" *Partisan Review*, 1948). She finds as futile any comparisons between concentration camps with other forms like imprisonment and banishment, even slavery, etc. However, she does find parallels among the types of concentration camps—which she likens to the Western conceptions of life after death. She categorizes these types as: Hades, Purgatory, and Hell. Hades corresponds to refugee camps, concentration camps for stateless persons, etc. Purgatory is represented in labor camps found in the Soviet Union. And, Hell, she posits, "is embodied by those types of camp perfected by the Nazis, in which the

whole of life was thoroughly and systematically organized with a view to the greatest possible torment.”

Arendt finds that the commonality among these camps lies in that “the human masses sealed off in them are treated as if they no longer existed, as if what happened to them were no longer of any interest to anybody, as if they were already dead and some evil spirit gone mad was amusing himself by stopping them for a while between life and death before admitting them to eternal peace.”

Arendt clearly exposes the link between life (in the concentration camp), which is lived as a form of death (in life), and the state of being unseen and considered as unworthy of living. The refugees /interns/inmates by being in the camps feel that they are invisible to others, their conditions are untestifiable, their suffering unintelligible. In a certain way, Arendt seizes on this camaraderie of suffering that frees the Auschwitz prisoner from his or her singularity of suffering (Auschwitz as a singular, unrepeatable, unspeakable event beyond history). Although she remarks on the different degrees of internment, one is quick to note that all three “types” of internment still belong to a single class of human victimization, that of encampment.

But Whose Blood is it, Anyway?

Primo Levi, the Auschwitz witness par excellence, less than 40 years after his release, found himself confronted with the moral obligation to speak in support of residents of another camp: the Palestinian refugee camps. Commenting on the aftermath of the massacre of civilians at the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in 1982 following the Israeli invasion of

Lebanon, Levi located the Jew in the Muslim, once more. He wrote: “Everybody is somebody’s Jew. And today the Palestinians are the Jews of the Israelis” (qtd. in Butler “Primo”).

In her biography of Levi entitled *Primo Levi: Bridges of Knowledge* (1995), Mirna Cicioni underlines Levi’s moral obligation as a witness to Auschwitz in the making of such a clear and direct connection. She says that Levi “implicitly acknowledged that he was being asked to speak as an Auschwitz survivor as well as an internationally famous writer, and agreed to do so to counteract the ideological use of the Holocaust by the Israeli ruling class as a justification of its attempt to wipe out the Palestinian people” (Cicioni 129). Cicioni quotes Levi as saying in an interview to the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*:

I am torn apart, also because I know very well that Israel was founded by people like me, who were less lucky than I was. Men with the Auschwitz number tattooed on their arms, homeless and countryless ... who found a home and a country over there. I know all this. But I also know that this is Begin’s argument. And I do not recognise this argument as valid” (Cicioni 128-129).

On the other hand, Judith Butler, in “Primo Levi for the Present” (2006) marks Levi’s clear and unequivocal moral objection to the instrumentalization of the Shoah to legitimize violence. Butler quotes Levi answer to a newspaper interviewer’s question about whether he could see all the Jewish blood spilled in all these years, as saying: “I reply that the blood spilled pains me just as much as the blood spilled by all other human beings.”

In the refugee camp, however, a new form of homo sacer is born, one who recognizes her own bio-power and who turns her own body, already a non-living bare life, a zero level of

humanity, into a resurrection of the notion of sacrifice. This refugee understands such a state too well and becomes intent on threatening death itself instead of being the object of the threat of death by others.

The suicide bomber has witnessed her own inescapable state as homo sacer and realizes fully that her misery is outside the field of vision. Unable to sustain a life that does not recognize her humanity, she seems committed to answering a question asked by Shylock centuries ago:

Hath not a Palestinian eyes? Hath not a Palestinian hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, heal'd by the same means, warm'd and cool'd by the same winter and summer as a Jew is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?

In a very simplistic perspective, one can see that a suicide bomber's action is cruel and insane that merely proves that both the Jew and the Palestinian bleed when you prick them and when you poison them they both die. By foregrounding the body, the suicide bomber violently and relentlessly attempts to suture the unnatural slit between the Jew and the Arab.

It is evidently naïve to fantasize about the suicide bomber as merely a religious fanatic duped with the promise of sex with 72 virgins. One would notice that the wave of suicide bombers in the Middle East started in 1985 when an attractive 18-year-old Lebanese sales clerk who works at a video store and a member of the secular Syrian Nationalist Party, Sana Mhaidali, drove white Peugeot laden with explosives into an Israeli army convoy in Southern Lebanon. Mhaidali recorded a video message in which she appeared in military uniform, introduced herself

by saying: “I am martyr Sana Mhaidali, I am 18 years old,” then went on to address her family and her countrymen to explain the patriotic reasons that drove her to become a human bomb. The specificity of video as the medium of her last testimony was meant as an eye opener, a dislocation of vision to the plight of a people who have been for years under foreign occupation.

Initial news reports, unable to comprehend Mhaidali’s motivation, claimed that she was pregnant and wanted to hide her shame, or that she was severely depressed. Neither was true. Indeed, many who studied female suicide bombers have looked for uniquely female contingencies that would drive women to die: too young, psychologically disturbed, under male influence, revenge seeking, etc., only to find no single consistent explanation. According to Lindsey O’Rourke’s August 2008 article in *The New York Times*, “There is precious little evidence of uniquely feminine motivations driving women’s attacks.”

The suicide bomber has no illusions of coming back home. Instead, she, or he, has only the certainty of death. By turning the body into a weapon, the suicide bomber is clearly deploying the ultimate bio-power. This homo sacer is beyond the threat of death and has already passed through the threshold of destruction of human life. And, as the suicide bomber aims at the destruction of the lives of others, by destroying her life first and foremost, is she simply confirming the commonality of suffering? That one can never speak of one’s suffering as deeper or more painful than another’s? By physically and violently blending her own blood with those she thought were not able to see her as a person, is she confirming Levi’s statement that spilled blood anywhere, by anyone, should cause the same pain for all of us? Is she responding to Shylock’s rhetorical question: “If you prick us, do we not bleed?”

In *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It* (2010), Robert Pape and James Feldman present the outcome of their work at Chicago's Project on Security and Terrorism. The report studied over 2,200 suicide attacks across the world for a period of about 30 years. Its findings categorically reject the association of religious fundamentalism as the key motivator of suicide bombers. The researchers found that 95% of all suicide attacks were carried out in response to foreign occupation, citing that 90% of worldwide attacks are anti-American in areas occupied by the U.S. and that there was a drop of 90% in suicide bombing in Israel after Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and large parts of the West bank. (240)

Pape and Feldman explain that the suicide bomber phenomenon is determined by two factors: first is perceived cultural difference between occupier and occupied (49) (which they narrowly define as religious), and the second is the existing of other forms of resistance prior to the appearance of suicide bombing. In that sense, suicide bombing becomes a weapon of last resort, when other attempts at resistance have failed. (24)

When Pape and Feldman look at the ensuing environment post the September 11 attacks, they note the emergence of a grand American narrative on terror that surfaced after the terrorist attacks. Since the 9/11 hijackers were all Muslims, it was easy to presume that Islamic fundamentalism was the central motivating force driving the 19 hijackers to kill themselves—in order to kill us. Within weeks after the attack, surveys of American attitudes show that this presumption was fast congealing into a hard reality in the public mind. Americans immediately

wondered, ‘Why do they hate us?’ and many quickly came to the conclusion that it was because of who we are, our identity, and not what we do, our actions (Pape and Feldman 320).

The media generally followed with a concerted representation of “Fundamentalist Islam” as a staunch adversary of “Western” culture and supporter of Terrorism against the American “way of life.” The goal of forcible or at best interventionist transformation of Arab societies into Western democracies was advocated by political strategists like Richard Perle and David Frum in *An End to Evil* (2003) and Paul Wolfowitz and, among many, columnist by Fareed Zakaria, who wrote an article in *Newsweek* in which he stated, “The United States must help Islam enter the modern world.” One would note that even in the case of Zakaria, who did not explicitly call for the use of military force, he still refers to “Islam”, a religion, as the object of a US intervention.

According to this narrative, the Muslims’ lack of democracy and oppositional stand against “Western civilization” was a satisfactory (albeit summary and quick) explanation for the motivations that drove the 9/11 terrorists. Therefore, it was “understandable” that America needed to strike back at al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, as it is currently “understandable” to place the whole American Muslim community on trial through the Congressional Commission on Radical Islam, chaired by Representative Peter King. The Commission aims to have the American Muslim communities “prove” that U.S. Muslims are not radicalized and that they are willing to cooperate with security forces. The underlying message one receives clearly is that a defense is necessary because Muslim communities are radicalized and non-cooperative.

Smoke, Dreams, and Psychotherapy

It is quite telling that when a terrorist attack is conducted by a Muslim, automatically all focus is poured on the attacker's religious motivations and his deep hatred for America. A case in point is that of Faisal Shahzad, dubbed the Times Square bomber, who in court made multiple religiously infused statements that referred to his actions as being in defense of his "people."

Jared Lee Loughner, on the other hand, is the Tucson, Arizona, resident who launched a massacre, killing six people and injuring sixteen on January 8, 2011. Unlike the surety and finality that seems to have been rendered in Shahzad's motivations, reviewers of Loughner's action seem more perplexed at Loughner's motivations and psychological conditions. The various media representations of Loughner were not only one of shock and disbelief but also (because of this incredulity) almost imbued with an air of veiled exoneration as detected in the insistence of reviewers to dig deeply into Loughner's biography, his relationship with schoolmates, his recent work, his library visits, his marijuana use, smoking, etc. We see interviews of Loughner's family distraught at his terrible actions and begin to question if it is possible that one of "us" could have done this terrible crime against us. It was not one of "them" this time. Therefore, something must be wrong in what we perceive and not in the action itself. Loughner was eventually described as a delusional paranoid and ordered by the court to undergo psychological examination.

One wonders why the terrorist who happens to be a Muslim is considered without history, no friends, no family, no psychological background, no marijuana. Why is it that we find

it quite easy to simplify the Muslim and accept his “fundamentalism” as his singular proof of culpability?

Major Nidal Hassan, a Virginia native and army psychiatrist, on 19 November 2009, just one day before his deployment to Afghanistan, went on a shooting rampage at the Soldier Readiness Center of Fort Hood, Texas, killing 13 people and wounding 30. Hassan’s coverage in the media was limited to references to his Palestinian ancestry, his Islamic religious beliefs, and an underachieving career as a psychiatrist. Again, no family photo albums, no personal history, no marijuana. It is as if the Muslim terrorist not only has seen the Gorgon, but has also become the faceless Gorgon itself, that which cannot be looked at, but is understood to be the source of terror.

Could Nidal Hassan be seen as an echo of Frantz Fanon, a psychoanalyst, born in the French colony of Martinique, French educated and in the service of the colonizing French army in Algeria? One wonders about the psychological and intellectual traversal that went through Fanon, already a colonial soldier fighting those with similar skin tone who are colonized like him. Fanon crosses to the other side, as the head of a psychiatric hospital in Algeria, but only to eventually join the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN). In the *Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha notes that Fanon “discovered the impossibility of his mission as a colonial psychiatrist” (58). Bhabha quotes Fanon: “If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization” ... (58).

Fanon had maintained that since colonialism was built and sustained with violence, it could be destroyed only by violence. But violence reveals its face in multiple ways. In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Zizek points out that the Real in its extreme violence is “the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality” (5-6). One can understand Zizek’s statement as an unveiling of a capitalist structure, which camouflages systems of exploitation and dehumanization under media images of happy consumerism and hyperreal modes economic and social existence.

Western narcissism may have caused many to believe that Western civilization is not only the object of terrorism but also its sole subject; not only that the U.S. faces the dangers of terrorism today, but that terrorism did not materially exist before September 11. Such disconnect from history fails to note that many “liberation movements” in the world as late as the 1970s had adopted violence as the means to effect social change. These groups had similar ideological agendas but still operated with local focus. They included the Baader-Meinhof gang in Germany, the Red Brigade in Italy, ETA in Spain, the IRA in Ireland, the PLO in Palestine, and the Japanese Red Army.

Zizek relates the birth of such groups to the failure of European student movements of the late 60s that demonstrated:

that the masses were so deeply immersed in their apolitical consumerist stance that it was not possible to awaken them through standard political education and consciousness-raising - a more violent intervention was needed to shake them out of their ideological

numbness, their hypnotic consumerist state, and only direct violent interventions like bombing supermarkets would do the job. (Zizek, *Desert* 9)

Zizek claims that “the same holds, on a different level, for today’s fundamentalist terror?” He asks: “Is not its goal also to awaken us, Western citizens, from our numbness, from immersion in our - everyday ideological universe?” (Zizek 9)

Zizek finds that violence, delivered by so-called “fundamentalist terrorists”, to be a revelatory act that aims at penetrating through the specularity of everyday social reality. This revelatory act reveals a “passion for the Real,” that we are not supposed to experience directly—almost like the face of the Gorgon. What we experience in our everyday life is a virtual reality, he posits. It is a reality without its substance. Zizek says, “. . . just as decaffeinated coffee smells and tastes like real coffee without being real coffee, Virtual Reality is experienced as reality without being so. What happens at the end of this process of virtualization?” (Zizek 16) In that sense, one’s experience of coffee is no longer directly related to coffee itself but to what one is told (by the media, marketing systems, etc.) is expected to be coffee, or coffee as it “should” be. It is where an “idea” sits in and replaces something else, and as such alters and completes one’s experience. In the short story, *The Exactitude of Science*, Borges imagines an empire where a full-scale map was devised and eventually replaced the actual geography of the country. Our experience of the map becomes a replacement and substitution for the geographical experience of the country itself. In the same way, our experience of “fake” coffee is quite inconsequential, because it is dependent on what we are told is standing for “the ideal” of coffee (notwithstanding

that decaffeinated coffee, from Žižek's example, is still coffee, but one which has been processed to remove from it what is undesirable).

Observing the spectacular nature of the attack on the World Trade Center, Žižek notes that the video footage of the attack has the characteristics of the effects of a Hollywood catastrophe movie. In a way, he posits, it felt like a catastrophe movie that we could have watched before. He finds that we were experiencing this "real reality" as a "virtual entity." Žižek refers to the compulsion to repeatedly watch images of the collapse of the Twin Towers as "jouissance at its purest" (12). However, he also points to the all revealing realization that "It was when we watched the two WTC towers collapsing on the TV screen, that it became possible to experience the falsity of TV shows" (Žižek 11)—a point similarly raised by Baudrillard in the "Violence of the Image."

Žižek notes the surprising lack in TV images of the actual carnage at the WTC collapse: "- no dismembered bodies, no blood, no desperate faces of dying people" (13). He contrasts these images with "reporting on Third World catastrophes, where the whole point is to produce a scoop of some gruesome detail: Somalis dying of hunger, raped Bosnian men with their throats cut" (Žižek 13).

The repackaging of reality, Žižek finds out, is intended to control the piercing of the Real that was done by the terrorist attacks. This kind of representation is proof that even in this moment of trauma, there exists a distance between us and them, that "the real horror happens there not here." He says: "Again, the ultimate truth of the capitalist utilitarian despiritualized universe is the dematerialization of 'real life' itself, its reversal into a spectral show" (Žižek 13).

The insistence on distancing between the contemporary Western citizen and the experience of historical trauma is felt clearly in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina when the use of the word “refugees”, in the media, to describe the displaced population of New Orleans was seen as an insult. President Bush was quoted as saying, "The people we're talking about are not refugees. They're Americans." Jesse Jackson went even further to say, ": “It is racist to call American citizens refugees” (MSNBC, “Katrina”).

Zizek completely inverts this concept of distancing between historical trauma and the Western psyche, and locates events like September 11 in “the twisted logic of dreams.” He says that these attacks were not

the intrusion of the Real which shattered our illusory Sphere: quite the reverse - it was before the WTC collapse that we lived in our reality, perceiving Third World horrors as something which was not actually part of our social reality, as something which existed (for us) as a spectral apparition on the (TV) screen - and what happened on September 11 was that this fantasmatic screen apparition entered our reality. It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality (i.e. the symbolic co-ordinates which determine what we experience as reality) (Zizek 16).

If we were to go back to Shylock’s assertion of sharing a common physiognomy with the European and the appropriation of this perspective by the terrorist for an emphatic reversal/demonstration of its truthfulness, we will find that what Zizek shows are layers of the Real and of dreams where our realities as humans are not simply exchanged as fantasies but also experienced as nightmarish visions of catastrophe.

Zizek tells a story in “The Smell of Love” about a famous Jewish ballerina who was asked to dance by the concentration camp officers “as a gesture of special humiliation.” As she started to dance and was able to capture the officers’ attention, Zizek says “she quickly grabbed the machine-gun from one of the distracted guards, and before being shot down herself, succeeded in killing more than a dozen officers” (142-143).

The above story, even if accurate, certainly belongs in the realm of fantasy and dreams. Zizek uses it as illustration of an “act” that undermines the “servicing of goods,” one that interrupts the “reign of the pleasure-reality principle” (142). He finds that one could find another example of taking such an act in the passengers of the hijacked UA Flight 93 over Pennsylvania taking over the plane to prevent the killing of others even though this act will cost them their lives. This act, similar to the ballerina’s act, may be viewed as part of a chain or relations in which both the passengers and hijackers are a part: An act of violence that will lead to their own sacrifice, and a nightmarish state of total destruction and mutual collapse.

What is evident is that the assertion of life has to be based on the recognition that life, all life, is precarious, and as such, precious, as posited by Judith Butler in *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009). If the killing of any person is tantamount to the killing of all mankind, as quoted in the Quran, and if spilled blood, any person’s blood, pains us, as stated by Primo Levi, it becomes necessary then to locate violence, any violence, as it violates life, as egregious and a source of terror.

Butler suggests that “specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living. If certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not

conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense” (*Frames* 1).

This intelligibility of life could be seen in the Muselmann and in the refugee, in the news story that allocates a half front page for a white man kidnapped in Colombia and a small third page column for dozens of Africans killed by civil war or by a natural disaster. To understand these differentiations, Butler asks us to understand how meaning is constructed as the result of epistemological frames. Frames of war “are selective in carving up experiences that are essential to the war” (Butler, *Frames* 26). But by extending this notion to the questions of violence and the apprehension of life, one is confronted with the frame being extended to include all kinds of modes and manifestations of violence and counter violence.

It is necessary that one be aware of the essentialist nature of terms like terrorist, Muslim, Arab, Westerner, etc. since it is impossible to encompass all those who are referred to by these terms. Naturally, one can speak of Muslim terrorists, Tamil terrorists, and Basque terrorists, etc. But even Muslim terrorists may not necessarily be Arab or fundamentalist. They could be communist, secular, etc. As we have seen in the field work of Pape and Feldman, Lindsey O’Rourke, and others, it is not only problematic to theorize the suicide bomber, it is likewise difficult to categorize her or him. The temptation to find a unitary explanation that would blanket- cover all possible motivations is blatantly naïve and clearly futile. Terrorists could be motivated by a desire to sacrifice one’s self so that others may benefit (at times even monetarily), or it could be that their motivation lies in hatred, fanaticism, ignorance, poverty, vengeance, idealism, etc. Attempts to categorize “terrorists” or “suicide bombers” under a single of

classification or another could, therefore, merely function as a self-defeating generalization. As one theorizes the concept of suicide bombing, one should not ignore the fact, that the instrument of terrorism, specular violence, is itself universal in its effect and in its experience, which is, in some ways, both the irony and the genius of the suicide bomber.

On the other hand, why could not the concept of violence, although multi-modal, also be viewed as a universal notion: The poison that kills the Jew is the same poison that kills the Arab? Butler emphasizes: “thus forming the basis for an alliance focused on opposition to violence and its capacity to produce, exploit, and distribute precarity for the purpose of profit and territorial defense” (*Frames* 32). Butler, here, calls for a perspective that is capable of seeing that the application of (political) violence leads to the same results regardless of what is the cultural identity of its victim. The same could also be said about the cultural identity of the perpetrator.

In suffering and in aggression, there are commonalities, as well as there are commonalities between suffering and aggression. Beyond the intricacies of identity lie the precarity of life and the mutuality of culpability. The notions of victim and executioner are essential links in a Hegelian “long chain of conjunction,” where “Victim and executioner are equally ignoble”¹ (Agamben 17). These notions are imbedded in the public imagination and, as part of the official narrative, are not immune to subversion. When Derrida received the Theodor Adorno award, on 22 September 2001, he commented on the attacks of September 11 by saying: “My unconditional compassion, addressed at the victims of September 11, does not prevent me from saying aloud: with regard to this crime, I do not believe that anyone is politically guiltless” (qtd. in Zizek 17). It is not only that Zizek’s observation rings true: “ultimately, we are all Homo

sacer” (100), but one needs to most decidedly keep in mind the constant complexity discovered at Auschwitz that “No group was more human than any other. . . the lesson of the camps is brotherhood in abjection” (Agamben 17).¹

The realization that suffering is universal, and that an instrumentalization that could exploit someone (or some group’s) suffering in order to victimize others is a secondary victimization of the original victim because this instrumentalization becomes as disavowal of the meaning of suffering. Therefore, one could assert that the singularization of one’s suffering as unique and unrepeatable could also as a repudiation of those who have suffered but belong to a different category. The project relentlessly proposed by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930 as a form of resistance still rings true and strong. Gandhi’s foregrounding of the body, one’s own, as a site of both sacrifice and public peril stands in contrast to an endless chain of victims and violators, who both deploy and assail the human body. In the same spirit, one notes that the current movements for freedom and democracy in the Middle East and elsewhere have decidedly moved away from violence, while at the same time did so through the position of being physically present in public at the peril of the violence of the state, the object of their resistance.

EPILOGUE: TABBOULEH DETERRITORIALIZED

One need not be a Chamber ... to be Haunted

One need not be a House

The Brain has Corridors ... surpassing

Material Place.

Emily Dickinson

I reach for the menu. We're at this fancy Orlando restaurant, one of the newest and most celebrated, impossible to get into, restaurants in town. My family and I were kind of celebrating Hannah's recital that morning. She takes violin lessons. Hannah is my oldest daughter. Anyway, as we get situated in the lush surroundings of this place, which was clearly trying too hard to look too hip, with a flair for healthy cuisine, my three daughters—half American, half Arab (as if the dichotomy is obligatory) betrayed by the olive tan of their skin, not totally comprehending or accepting the necessary decorum of “indoor voices” in a place that looks so much fun, attempt to enjoy their share of fun too.

As I grab the chic, Ten-Commandment-sized menu, my eyes, as if pulled by a string, are immediately focused on the third or fourth appetizer item: Tabbouleh salad with Belgian Cracked Wheat and Cranberry.

My first reaction was: My God (and yes, it wasn't, oh Allah), Tabbouleh? At this hippest of Florida spots ... this restaurant designed for the connoisseurs of food and architecture! Here is a fellow Arab who had made it to the top (of the menu). Here is a truly Arab tradition hobnobbing with the Garlic Roasted Idaho Wedges, the Ginger Soy Marinated Steak, and the

Jumbo Louisiana Prawn Cocktail. I began to wonder “how did Tabbouleh feel”, having triumphed and reached a pinnacle of multi-cultural cuisine equality. An Arab is eternally handicapped by a historical inferiority complex in a way that each time we achieve some kind of success or recognition, we are reminded of the cultural burden of difference we carry ceaselessly on our shoulder—like a population of immigrant hunchbacks

Then, it hit me. Did the menu say: Tabbouleh Salad? Salad? What do they mean salad? How can Tabbouleh be a salad? A mere mix of parsley, green onions, mint, tomatoes, and lemon juice, and olive oil dressing. I don’t remember being shocked like this in a very long time.

But then again, if you think about it, morphologically speaking, it does sound like Tabbouleh is some kind of salad. Man, if my aunt or my grandmother had heard me insult Tabbouleh as such, I would have been chopped parsley in a nanosecond.

How can they do that? Tabbouleh is that magical dish that women spend hours preparing in such elegance, the extra finely chopped parsley and the just perfectly soaked bulgar wheat, with the exact amount of lemon and the amount of spices that is so precise that no scale could even bear its precision. All of this for their “asrounieh,” the women-only afternoon get-togethers, the time when women reassert their superiority and exclusivity. Tabbouleh is an absolute signifier of leisure and pleasure, of laughing at the sense of time—the time taken in preparing such a unique dish and the time experienced while eating it. When women eat Tabbouleh, they never use spoons or forks. The only way to eat Tabbouleh is by leisurely scooping it in meticulously selected light green, baby lettuce leaves.

First, Tabbouleh's "first order"¹ or denotative meaning, in the Barthesian sense, is misidentified as a salad. Second, its migrant (intertextual) connotative meaning is absent in its separation from its cultural make-up. But can we take Barthes' position that certain foods act as totem-food and are experienced as the "self-evident truths of a natural order"? (*Mythologies* 140).? Can we use Barthes' cultural reading of the postcolonial consumerist society of France to understand the culture of Tabbouleh?

Tabbouleh is not a salad not only because it is not a salad. It is because it is Tabbouleh. De Saussure's all-encompassing system of binary oppositions again fails to explain. Tabbouleh may "look like," have a similar anatomy or physiology as a salad, but it is nothing like a salad in all other aspects. A salad is a subservient dish meant to accompany food. Tabbouleh essentially is not even food. Its culinary aspects are simply a cover-up for its cultural attributes. It is a central ritual that signifies absolute abandon from the world. Do I dare to say, it is the Arabic answer to the British tea time.

Something both as violent and velvety smooth at once as Tabbouleh, where all the ingredients are finely and obsessively chopped (but still maintain structural integrity) with a sharp knife—the mastery of making Tabbouleh is an evidence of the skill by which a woman can use the knife. The exclusion of men from partaking in the fruit of that labor no doubt carries a castration complex effect, or at least that of circumcision.

Tabbouleh is a feminine tradition that was invented by women within a woman's world that, for this instance, decidedly excludes men from Tabbouleh as ritual. Nevertheless, Tabbouleh, borrowed, but never usurped, made its way to the world of men too and successfully

carved itself a place in Arab men's mythology by being part of an evening or dinner meal almost always accompanied by Arak, the Eastern Mediterranean favorite spirit. But unlike its feminine original, the male application is never central or as ritualistic, although it is still by no means ever a mere salad.

I could not help but think how viewing the familiar and semiotically rich Tabbouleh on that menu brought a shocker to my sensibilities. Almost in a Brechtian sense, I was forced to view the familiar out of context and in a new light.

On that foreign menu, at that pseudo-fancy, wannabe metropolitan, imitation of a haute-cuisine restaurant, Tabbouleh was stripped naked to its saladic morphology, robbed of its historical relevance, emptied of its intention and cultural *raison d'être*, reduced to a copy of a copy of an ideal no customer could relate to. My Tabbouleh was robbed of its aura. Was this appropriation of Tabbouleh a form of continued cultural colonization?

Well, Barthes had his mythology of steak and wine. He believed that the drinking of wine has a Frenchness to it that also carries an interpreted cultural glamour. Likewise, when we eat a piece of steak, along with the juiciness and bloodiness of the steak, we also enjoy the idea of the steak, which to Barthes has both nationalist and nostalgic effects, just like wine. According to Barthes: "steak is in France a basic element, nationalized even more than socialized."

(*Mythologies* 63) This experience of glamour, Barthes explained, is not invented by individuals. Rather, it is part of a national mythology sustained by the community. In a way, a Frenchman's idea of wine and steak is shared by all Frenchmen. Therefore, eating steak and fries becomes a way of communing with one's community. Barthes described wine as a "totem-drink."

(*Mythologies* 68) As such, wine and steak start to function as primitive totems that bring the community together.

Tabbouleh, in that sense, certainly can be viewed as a totem-food. Can it also be a Taboo-leh food? Is it possible that it can be both? Totem for women, taboo for men? Totem for insiders, taboo for outsiders? I don't take Tabbouleh to be xenophobic. To me, it is simply a cultural privilege. It does have a collective experience, archetypal and Jungian. And, although we, indeed, do not invent the glamour of Tabbouleh as an individual memory (to appropriate Barthes), can we at all experience Tabbouleh outside of our memories as individuals and as community? Does the totem of Tabbouleh need to be demythologized? Or simply re-lived? And, how do we experience Tabbouleh outside of its cultural context? How would Tabbouleh be experienced outside of its spatio-temporal situatedness? Has it ever been truly experienced? Or is it simply imagined, then remembered, but hardly in the present?

One acquires linguistic literacy in learning to decode signs (signifiers) of various sounds, the combination of which generates meaning (signified). By learning to structure these signifiers in complex forms (grammar), we can produce an infinite amount of meaning, which is then understood by others who belong to the same culture and have accepted this semiotic convention. These signifiers "stand for" the signified meaning. This is how a signifier "d-o-g" refers to the signified concept of a dog. Likewise, the signifier "wine" refers to wine-i-ness and "steak" stands for steak-hood.

However, as we learn the signifiers well, we seem to forget about their presence, and only the signified becomes visible. The word dog instantly stands for the animal, and only for new

learners of a language are the signifiers d-o-g perceptible by and in themselves. We stop “seeing” the sign and only “remember” the signified. Once we encode d-o-g with the meaning the community agreed on, all we do is a spontaneous decoding—that is until someone comes to us and points to a dog and says chien, perro,² كلب , etc. Then we go, ah?

At one point d-o-g stops referring to “an” animal, and starts meaning a single particular being, a personal and intimate signified that means something very specific to a very specific community: d-o-g can only be decoded by standing in for Matta, the dog I had when I was 13 and was my best friend until the day I left my country.

Can signifiers really mean anything at all unless they refer to a signified that is understood on a first-person level? How can true meaning be made? How do we know when we are experiencing or perceiving something that we are efficiently decoding that experience? Or are we just enraptured by the glamour and ideas, many of which are created by the media and advertising industry, as noted by Barthes?

As Roland Barthes pointed out in *Mythologies*, “what allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that he does not see it as a semiological system but as an inductive one.” (131). Myth tells us who we are without telling us how it became a myth in the first place.

Is it possible that the same mechanism that decodes d-o-g to mean the animal in general and my dog Matta more specifically can also be used to make the experience of eating Tabbouleh stand for the experience of Tabbouleh as totem-food? Now, we, as fluent speakers of English, don’t actually engage in the act of remembering the meaning of d-o-g and are oblivious to the signifiers d-o-g. Are we, similarly, at all aware of the act of consuming Tabbouleh in order

to understand Tabbouleh? Or is Tabbouleh simply transparent, almost an invisible sign-vehicle that is communicating Tabbouleh as a unique cultural experience, which is beyond definition or description? Are we simply remembering the original experience?

Do we experience anything, or do we by the necessity of the need to make meaning, only remember, decode, and connect the sign to its original referent? Do people after a certain age stop having original experiences and only remember?

My friend, Lilia, who lives in Montreal, sent me an email the other day completely excited about attending a concert by the legendary Arab singer Fairouz. She was fascinated with the experience of seeing live in concert a diva who for more than forty years woke millions of Arabs to her music and who was the soundtrack to almost all adolescents' first love story. In the Arab world, you are guaranteed to know by heart the whole musical repertoire of two singers: Fairouz and Um-Kalthoum without ever owning a single record or formally sitting in to listen to their music. Both divas are ubiquitous. Their music plays on radios, out of taxis, public busses, the government worker's office, the neighbor's window. Fairouz is played in the morning. Um-Kalthoum is played in the evening for a more heavy-duty listening (a single song will last at least one hour).

Lilia, my dear, I said, you think you attended a Fairouz concert? I promise you, you did not **hear** Fairouz that freezing cold night in Montreal. Fairouz is of the warmth of the Mediterranean, the fancy of Tabbouleh, and a glass of Arak. You only **remembered** the Fairouz we always knew.

Yes, we do know what d-o-g means and we don't need even to notice d-o-g to automatically get to the concept of dog, but do the rest of our experiences work the same way? Does the perceived experience become invisible, while meaning is made only by remembering an original experience? Do we not experience/perceive but only remember? And if we remember, do we remember the thing itself? Or the image of the thing? Its aura?

Aura implies authenticity, but if aura is created by the potential for its mechanical reproduction, as argued by Walter Benjamin, could one say that the extraction and import of Tabbouleh to be mechanically reproduced at eating places, a destruction of its authenticity?

By detaching the aura from its relevant time and space, making it an emigrant cuisine, does Tabbouleh lose its meaning? Or, is it possible that Tabbouleh's aura has been retained in memory, like an old friend returning after a long period of separation?

Walter Benjamin applied the notion of aura to a certain perception of reality—rather than just a superficially manufactured add-on. His description of aura is through the presentation of a visual scene: “[i]f, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch” (qtd. in Thomas 66).

In “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin also links the aura to certain temporal-spatial situatedness:

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject

throughout the time of its existence ... The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity. (*Reading Images*, 64)

First Impressions

The original experiences imprinted/“traced” on our screen of consciousness are significations of impressions that run so deep that they define our perspectives on everything. Like the grooves on a phonograph, they seem defining and unalterable. They are the ones that tell us how to see the world, the filter that communicates true subjective meaning.

Look at the old man glancing with a loving eye to his beloved wife of so many years. He does not see a lady, old and gray, nodding by the fire. He sees a beautiful young girl he once kissed behind the door, the girl of his dreams he waited for by her window so many nights, the subject of his poetry, the object of his desire. Long ago, he had her locked in his gaze, and he will not let go. The sweetness of the apple he is crunching into is not from the present; it is from the sweetness of the apple his grandmother once gave him in her garden, in front of her kitchen, ever clean and overflowing with the scents of exotic foods and sweets.

When we perceive, do we remember, even though we don't realize that we are? How much of our present is only experienced as a reliving of the security of our first home, the depths of our first love, the violence of our first victory? Outside of that cosmos, are we anywhere except in a states of re-member-ing or total alienation; an alienation, which is a result of our separation from that first place of experience?

Is this what Gaston Bachelard talked about as that protected space of intimacy where memories are stored and preserved in spite of time?

How does the body, not merely the mind, remember the feel of a latch in a long forsaken childhood home? If the house is the first universe for its young children, the first cosmos, how does it shape all subsequent knowledge of other space, of any larger cosmos? Is that house a group of organic habits or something deeper, the shelter of the imagination itself? (*Poetics* xxxii)

Is it possible that my taste buds remembered Tabbouleh? Is that why I can almost taste Arak and feel the smiles of youth?

In *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard contends that there is a scheme of security for daydreaming that has its origins in our first house as a place where memories, dreams, and thoughts are constituted. But if the house constructs daydreams in us, as such, do these memories, dreams and thoughts actually **reside** primordially in the house itself? and, by extension, in our first city? our country? Could it be that Tabbouleh remembered me?

Bachelard argues that when we remember, "...space is everything, for time ceases to quicken memory."(9) Our memories are structured by our first house, but so are our thoughts. Both come to us in the form of daydreams. Bachelard writes, "It is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time" (xxxii).

The emigrant's memories have been violently severed from the topos of his childhood home,. This geographical distance from the home as a depository of safety and dreams, also functions as a lack of shelter for the imagination that can only become an understandable cause of anxiety. Bachelard argues that memory relies on language and reason to provide framing

devices that affix recollection in consciousness and create a sense of duration (9). Bachelard's treatment of time and memory characterizes human beings as essentially conscious creatures who are discontinuous from nature, and whose experience of time is their own creation. Is this what Proust described as Pure Time? A perception in a moment of time and space, a juxtaposition of disparate images that are directly communicated to our sensibility?

Could it be that my Tabbouleh is nothing but a mirroring of Proust's Madeleine, as he dipped it in his coffee? Am I attempting to search for a time lost? I remember that I was deeply impressed with a passage from "*A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu*:"

I was in the room, or rather I was not yet in the room since she was not aware of my presence... Of myself... there was present only the witness, the observer with a hat and traveling coat, the stranger who does not belong to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which one will never see again. The process that mechanically occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother was indeed a photograph. We never see the people who are dear to us save in the animated system, the perpetual motion of our incessant love for them, which before allowing the images that their faces present to reach us catches them in its vortex, flings them back upon the idea that we have always had of them, made them adhere to it, coincide with it. How, since into the forehead, the cheeks of my grandmother I had been accustomed to read all the most delicate, the most permanent qualities of her mind; how, since every casual glance is an act of necromancy, each face that we love a mirror of the past, how could I have failed to overlook what in her had become dulled and changed, seeing that in the most trivial spectacles of our daily life our eyes, charged with thought, neglects as would a classical tragedy, every image that does not assist the action of the play and retains only those that may help to make its purpose intelligible... I, for whom my grandmother was still myself, I had never seen her save in my own soul, always at the same place in the past, through the transparent sheets of contiguous, overlapping memories, suddenly in our drawing room which formed part of a new world, that of time, saw, sitting on the sofa, beneath the lamp, red-faced, heavy and common, sick, lost in thought, following the lines of a book with eyes that seemed hardly sane, a dejected woman whom I did not know.

Fig. 18. "A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu" passage.

The passage is fascinating not only because it presents a portrayal of photographic detachment of an otherwise intimate moment, but precisely because it questions the validity of perception as reality. He is in the room physically, but also he is not since he was not perceived by his grandmother. He realizes that his experience of “the people we love” is never in the present tense but always a “mirror of the past.” That when we perceive, “before allowing the images of their faces present to reach us,” we automatically see **the idea** that we’ve always had of them (Proust).

The question is whether when we perceive, do we actually experience our perception, or are we just looking “always at the same place in the past, through the transparent sheets of contiguous, overlapping memories?” (Proust) Is signification locked in the gaze of the first impression, the original experience, and “mechanically” put forward at the moment of perception?

Does Tabbouleh only exist in my memories at this moment, here? The only contact I could have with Tabbouleh’s aura has to be the result of the distance that I have from the original experience and my current proximity to the object. Was there an inherent dialectic of simultaneous proximity and distance that would give rise an experience that is only found in the aura? But, what are the mechanics of its perception? In a conflicted world, devoid of semiotic homogeneity, how does perception work? Is the mechanism of perception influenced by the affects of memory? Does the memory work follow a dream work format? Is our understanding of the present—present, or past? Do we perceive at all, or do we merely remember?

Nachträglichkeit is the term used by Freud for delayed reaction, or was it used by Keirkegard? It refers to one's experience of trauma, when something occurs later in life that will trigger the same feeling of trauma just by invoking the memory of the original incident. This act of perceiving something present but experiencing something from the past. This direct connection between psychic reality and material reality, where an earlier reality is summoned by the experiencing of a current material reality.

Nachträglichkeit may also be defined as Freud's "concept of delayed effect, the experience which only surfaces to consciousness long after the actual event." (Harland, 144)

Is my memory of Tabbouleh and its aura only felt in the present, not in the context of my original experience? Or did seeing the name Tabbouleh on that menu simply shock me into a mythologizing of my life in my country long after my last experience there? Now, that I can think of it, I had a dislike to eating Tabbouleh when I was a youngster, all that chopped parsley.

Richard Harland presents an intriguing explanation of Derrida's understanding of *Nachträglichkeit*:

For Derrida, "*Nachträglichkeit*, the case of delayed effect, represents the fundamental case of all experiences ... even our most immediate experience is not a direct reflection of the outside world, but a contact made with what has already been inscribed, unconsciously, in the memory. Even our perceptual images and impressions are no more than the kind of perceptual images and impressions that we get from reading a book. Perception is forever divided from the presence of 'the things themselves.'" (144)

Harland quotes Derrida as saying, “the so-called ‘thing itself’ is always already a representamen shielded from the simplicity of intuitive evidence.” Explaining Derrida’s position, Harland states that “as with presence, so with the temporal present. We can never catch up with the actual moment of our sensory contact with the outside world, we are eternal latecomers to the ‘now’ of our own experience.’ He, again quoting Derrida, concludes: “The perceived ... maybe read only in the past, beneath perception and after it” (Harland 144). What Derrida describes is a “past that has never been nor will be present” (144). Harland notes that according to Derrida “consciousness ... is an illusion that human beings have invented because they have feared the consequences of a materialist conception of the brain” (146).

If consciousness is really steeped in memory, how do we know that the memory is authentic? Or do we only remember a fantasy? The aura of the original experience – not the experience itself?

“One cannot step into the same river twice, for it’s not the same river, he’s not the same man”

– Heraclites

How can we experience the same thing twice? If we hold the meaning to the lived experience of the present in the memory of the original lived experience, how do really know that it is the same experience?

Following Berkeley’s dictum: “esse est percipi,” Proust creates a scene where he is not present because he was not perceived by his grandmother, clearly the center of the piece. The fact that he was not perceived immediately offers him an amazing privilege: that of a disengaged

observer of reality, a witness—not a partaker. All of a sudden, this release of engagement enables him to view the familiar with the fresh eye of a stranger. In a true Brechtian sense, the narrator’s perception is not subject to an existing set of codes that he’s been carrying around in his memories. This detachment releases him from the conventional semiotics he has always had. It is that of the photographer whose job is simply to document an event.

This distanciation, this *Verfremdung* effect, between the object of the gaze, the signified, and its signification at the moment of perception throws us into a whole different state of revision, a total perversion of the sign—where the signifier ceases to function as we are used to, and opens itself to a new, fresh reading.

At most times, the signifier is invisible; we automatically go past the signifier to what we take to be the signified, at once seeing the signifier and not attaching meaning to it at all. This is what Proust described as “The process that mechanically occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother” It is only in cases of *Verfremdung*-like experiences when we are shocked that the familiar is not as familiar, that we stored experiences that automatically come forward from somewhere in the past.

The emigrant, with a semiotic hump on his back, goes into a bi-directional journey: a cascade of fixed meaning at a moment in the past of a world that has surely changed, and an active forgetting that opens room for new meanings.

To the emigrant, the inability to recapture that experience exactly as in the memory leaves him searching for meaning only in the corridors of his memories. The present becomes a

reliving of a past that is constantly displaced, a home (in the Bachelardian sense) that was left behind.

The paradox of Tabbouleh as an immigrant is twice removed, a double jeopardy—temporally removed and geographically removed, that necessary semiotic efficiency twice failing in a foreign land.

Tabbouleh's aura may be locked in the emigrant's gaze exclusively—but not necessarily in reality. And, what may have seemed earlier as communal memory is nothing but ancient history, culinary and social ruins. What happens when the immigrant returns to the land of his fathers to find that Tabbouleh had finally and immutably lost its aura? That it, there too, is listed under the header: ³السد لطة

In “Little History of Photography” (Kleine Geschichte der Photographie), Benjamin describes the aura as “strange web of space and time” (285) in a sense that it combines a mixture of both space and time in the same manner that it combines physical distance with proximity. Keeping this in mind, one wonders if at the moment of “pure time” does the emigrant cease remembering—and concede that perception is merely subjective forgetting. Forgetting that perception is nothing more than memory, memory is nothing more than aura, that now is a good time to engage in what Nietzsche describes as “Active Vergesslichkeit,” active forgetting.

Harland observes “when Foucault summons knowing to un-know itself, he is actually summoning it to a perpetual oscillation between two extremes of consciousness and unconsciousness” (Harland 118).

Why has it become that amnesia and selective amnesia are seen part of the emigrant's reconstituted semiotic presence: both his consciousness and imagination? Emigrant-icity as remembrance of an imagined and no longer present reality? The thing about the emigrant is that his experience is by definition intertextual. The emigrant's gaze is locked in on a remote tempo-spatial presence, and is he or she locked in the gaze of the Other as psychological remoteness? Unable to fully understand what has become of the present of his or her past or the new semiotic surroundings, eternally on a Lacanic signification chain that leads nowhere, the emigrant cannot but imagine the present.

ENDNOTES

Chapter One

1. Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Park51#Polls>, Last accessed 3/8/11). Polls showed that the majority of Americans, New York State residents, and New York City residents opposed building the center near Ground Zero; more Manhattanites support building the center.

The majority of Americans were opposed to the mosque/Islamic center, [*The New York Times*](#) reported in July 2010. By a margin of 54%–20%, American adults were opposed to a mosque being built near Ground Zero, a national [Rasmussen Reports](#) poll found that month. Furthermore, according to an August 10–11 [Fox News](#) poll, 64% of Americans. A majority of each of Democrats (56–38%), Republicans (76–17%), and Independents (53–41%) thought it would be wrong to build a mosque and Islamic cultural center so close to Ground Zero, and 30% felt it would be appropriate.

A CNN poll conducted August 6–10 found that Americans opposed the Park51 project by a margin of 68%–29%. A majority of each of Democrats (54–34%), Republicans (82–17%), and Independents (70–24%) were opposed. An [Economist/YouGov](#) national poll taken the week of August 19, 2010 confirmed these findings. Overall, this poll found that Americans opposed the Park51 project by a margin of 57.9%–17.5%, with 24.5% undecided on the question. Democrats (41.0–28.0%), Republicans (88.3–1.7%) and Independents (57.6–21.3%) were opposed to the project according to this poll.

In addition, by a margin of 52%–31% New York City voters opposed the construction, according to a [Quinnipiac University Poll](#) carried out in June 2010. At the same time, 46% of

Manhattanites supported it, while 36% opposed it. Opposition was strongest in [Staten Island](#), where 73% opposed it while only 14% supported it. A higher percentage of Republicans (82%) than Democrats (45%) opposed the plan.

A [Marist Poll](#) taken July 28 – August 5 showed a similar city-wide margin of registered voters against it (53%-34%, with 13% unsure), although those in Manhattan supported it, reversing the figures: 53% to 31%, with 16% unsure. A updated Marist poll in September 2010 showed that support for Park51 had grown, with 41% in favor and 51% opposed. Support among African Americans, liberals, Democrats, and residents of the Bronx had increased. Manhattanites remained supportive.

State-wide, by a margin of 61%–26% New Yorkers opposed the mosque's construction at that location, according to another poll in August 2010, by [Siena Research Institute](#), whose poll question wording was criticized by a writer at [Slate](#) magazine.¹³⁵¹ A majority of both Republicans (81%) and Democrats (55%) were opposed to it, as were conservatives (85%), moderates (55%), and liberals (52%). Among New York City residents, a margin of 56%–33% opposed it.

Some polls tried to gauge public opinion of Muslims' right to build Park51 near ground zero. The [Quinnipiac University](#) poll of New York State residents released August 31, 2010 found a 54–40 percent majority of voters agreeing 'that because of American freedom of religion, Muslims have the right to build the mosque near Ground Zero'. A Fox News national poll taken August 10–11, 2010 found that 61% felt that the project developers had a right to build a mosque there (a majority of Democrats (63–32%), Republicans (57–36%), and Independents (69–29%).

The [Economist](#)/YouGov poll taken the week of August 19, 2010 concurred that Democrats (57.5–24.9%) and Independents (62.3–25.2%) believed Muslims had a "constitutional right" to build a mosque at the site, but found that Republicans (31.8–53.2%) did not believe that Muslims had such a right. The poll found that 50.2%, overall, supported the constitutional right to build at the site, 32.7% were opposed and 17.1% had no opinion.

The Economist/YouGov poll also noted that 52% of Americans believe that "Muslims should be able to build mosques in the United States wherever other religions can build houses of worship," as opposed to 34% who believe that "there are some places in the United States where it is not appropriate to build mosques, though it would be appropriate to build other houses of worship" and 14% who believe "mosques should not be permitted anywhere in the United States."

2. Damasio, Antonio R. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. Penguin, 2005, 226. Damasio seems to foreground the role of the body to that of the brain in cognition. He says: "I suspect that the body states are not algorithmically predictable by the brain, but rather that the brain waits for the body to report what actually has transpired."

3. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant's theological foundations of thought is essentially theological in nature

4. Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Thomas, Julia. *Reading Images*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave. 2001 in *Reading Images*. "while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those

mountains, of that branch. This image makes it easy to comprehend the social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura. It rests on two circumstances, both of which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things “closer” spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction.” Benjamin, Walter. *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

Chapter Two

1. According to Barthes, things give off a "first order" or denotative meaning, which is what they purport to be about. Thus at this level, wine is a red drink which contains a certain percentage of alcohol; Coca-Cola is a fizzy brownish liquid. However, Barthes argues that many commodities such as wine have secondary meanings or connotations, which are endowed through social usage. For example, in France wine is not just another drink -- it is a totem drink, corresponding in its mythic status to the milk of Dutch cows or the tea consumed by the British Royal Family. In France, drinking wine is an act of social integration.

2. Dog, in Arabic

3. Salad

Chapter Three

1. “Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it. In one version of its utility, the camera record incriminates” (Sontag, *On Photography* 5).

2. “The production of nakedness underscored the meaning of the card as a consumer item. By buying representations of the exotic (and artificially portrayed) women, consumers gained an apparent familiarity with the closed, inaccessible culture of foreign sexuality. The purchase of a card implied that everything, even the most intimate scenes and acts, was available to European money and European documentation. The symbol of female nakedness and privacy in Algerian life, for example, could become a highly viewable, public form of communication. Short scrawled messages on the back conveyed part of the content, while the woman on the front illustrated the rest. When Europeans received such a card, the (artificial but apparently natural) nakedness of "exotics" juxtaposed the clothed-ness of Europeans. Postcards of "exotics" insisted on compelling differences between these societies” (Lisa Z. Sigel, “Filth In The Wrong People's Hands: Postcards And The Expansion Of Pornography In Britain And The Atlantic World, 1880-1914”).

Chapter Four

1. Interestingly that Lewis, who in *Islam and The West* places the three Abrahamic religions in historical contexts by saying that Christianity sees itself as a complimentary addition to Judaism, and Islam sees itself as a complimentary addition to both – still Lewis locates a rivalry only between Islam and the Judeo-Christian tradition, and not between the Judaic and Christian traditions. Thus he seems to both ignore a history of anti-Semitism within Western tradition as well as the same type of historical and theological similarity between the Judaism and Christianity as the one he uses to describe the relationship with Islam.

2. <http://atlasobscura.com/place/atlas-film-studios>

3. <http://trackingtransience.net>

Chapter Five

1. Agamben quoting Wolfgang Sofsky in *The Order of Terror, The Concentration Camps*. (1997): Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz, The Witness and the Archive*. New York: Zone Books, 1999, 17.

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