



# **The Visual Divide between Islam and the West**

Image Perception within  
Cross-Cultural Contexts

**HATEM N.  
AKIL**



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*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, Tété Shabriban, the quintessential immigrant,  
no mythology could contain your story ...  
no word could express the feeling.*

*Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.*

## PREFACE

I was 18 years old, a freshman in college, cramming for some kind of test, with the TV turned on and the volume muted. It was time for the evening news, and when I glanced at the screen, I saw what seemed to be some kind of Palestinian commando operation in the Occupied Territories. I knew there was some serious unrest in the West Bank at the time, and the screen showed an Israeli bus in the aftermath of a fedayeen attack with two Israelis being carried out on stretchers, the rest of the bus passengers disembarking in horror. At the time, the whole Middle East area was extremely tense with the Lebanese civil war raging, numerous incursions by Israel into Lebanon, and the Palestinians fighting for their survival in Lebanon and existence in the Occupied Territories. I felt a considerable joy that finally here was a minor victory, a successful commando operation by the Palestinians, and at least there were two Israeli soldiers or settlers dead—compared to the hundreds of killed and displaced from the Arab side.

I close my book and lean to turn the volume up. Immediately, it becomes apparent that the two dead bodies were not of Israeli settlers or soldiers. They were actually two Palestinian fedayeen who were attempting to hijack the bus but instead were killed by armed men on the bus.

All of a sudden, the exact same image of the two dead people, the bus full of passengers trying to escape the scene, ambulance sirens hallowing and waiting to take in the dead bodies, becomes a signifier of the exact opposite significations it had just carried. Instead of the joy at the victorious commandoes who were able to avenge themselves against those occupying their land, I felt a deep sorrow for the failed operation and for

the death of the two fellow Arabs. I was perceiving the exact same image, but the meaning of what I was perceiving was the exact opposite of what I had just felt only seconds ago. In semiotic terms, the same signifier carried both a certain signified and its exact opposite almost at the same time.

But along with that reversal of signification and the emotional “flip-flop” that I was in the midst of also came a profound sense of shame and guilt. How can one be joyed for the death of another human being? I realized that I was caught with my moral pants down, that I really was not seeing the image on the TV screen for what it was: two human beings who lost their lives; but that I was using some kind of a visual and ideological filter that directed the way that I perceived and understood that image.

More than 20 years, and a whole lot of growing up, later, I was in Orlando, Florida, dropping my first-grade daughter, Hannah, at her new elementary school. It was my first day driving her to school, even though she had been there a few days already. As we stay waiting for our turn in the car line, Hannah gets excited and tells me, “Look that’s Dr. Grace, our principal. She is very nice.” There were a lot of grown-ups standing by the school entrance, so I couldn’t quite make out which one Hannah was referring to. I asked, which one is Dr. Grace? Hannah said, “She’s the tall lady right there.” I thought, hum, they all look the same height to me. I said, “I am sorry, sweetheart, which one?” Hannah replied, “Yeah, it’s the lady who’s talking to the kid right now.” They were all talking to kids. I looked even more perplexed. Hannah said, “There she is, she is the lady in the blue dress.” For some reason, I could not even detect anyone in just a blue dress. At that moment, we had arrived to the front of the line. And, as we stopped, one of the patrol students opened the car door, and Hannah stretched her hand out and pointed to a lady right next to our car and said, “That’s the one, that’s Dr. Grace, our principal.” Aha!! At that moment, I realize that the principal was the African American lady, who was indeed in a blue dress and stood taller than most in front of that elementary school.

Hannah gives me a warm kiss and leaves the car after wishing me a great day at work. I drive off with the same sense of guilt and shame that I felt watching the two Palestinians on stretchers twenty-some years before. The only visual identifier that I was willing to accept for the principal was the color of her skin—but that was the only visual difference that was completely invisible to my (much wiser) six-year-old daughter.

At that point, I started wondering, do two people, coming from different cultural backgrounds, see the same image the same way? Do we employ technologies of seeing that embed visuality within relentless

cultural and ideological frames? And, if so, when does visual difference become a tool for inclusion and exclusion? Are we always implicated in visuality as a form of confirmation bias? Is what we see shaped by preexisting socio-ideological frames that can only be liberated through an active and critical relationship with the act of perception? Could one claim that 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 June 2015, *The Boston Globe* reported that Emerson College professor, Jabari Asim, was given a traffic citation because he was driving with no valid license. The Winston, MA, officer who issued the citation testified that he saw a nervous Asim driving and that he could identify his bald head and his beard. The problem was that Asim was at the College all day and nowhere near his car. The person driving the car, in fact, was Asim's wife, who is not bald and certainly does not have a beard. The only apparent visual similarity between Asim and his wife is that they're both African American with dark skin. Apparently, that was the only differentiator that the officer needed to determine culpability. Sometimes, justice can be blind indeed.<sup>1</sup>

This book attempts to engage questions about how are images perceived within cross-cultural contexts, why and how does the same image get seen in two opposing ways by people from different cultural backgrounds, and why do cartoons, photographs, and videos become both the cause and target of bloody political violence—as witnessed by the deadly attacks against Charlie Hebdo in France and in the swift military response by the United States and Jordan to videotaped violence by ISIS.

The book seeks to provide a timely and relevant commentary to recent world events from a cultural studies perspective and attempts to connect current manifestation of visual violence to a history of alienation and humiliation between the world of Islam and the West in which the image is used as a weapon of humiliation. As such, the book aims at filling a gap in cultural and media studies (as well as political science) that ignores many of the core causes of the violent performance of the image in the relationship between Islam and the West. The book undertakes a critical theory approach in order to tackle, beyond simplified media representations, questions that are both timely and evolving about ways of seeing, Islamophobia, and new global cultural realities and challenges.

The book considers the possible ways in which Muslims view the way they are being viewed, not viewed, or incorrectly viewed. As such, the



book underscores a certain “will-to-visibility” whereby one may just wish to be seen and counted as another human being worthy of being seen. I relate the failure to achieve this visibility to a state of desperation that inextricably and symmetrically ties visibility to violence. However, when Syrian and Palestinian refugees recently started refusing to be photographed, they clearly ushered the eventual but inevitable collapse of the image and its final futility. The photograph has been completely emptied of its last remaining possibility of signification. Enter ISIS, who violently, blatantly, and sadistically, exploits the image to shock us in ways that literally rupture our experience of both time and space.

If the grotesque ISIS Internet videos and the bloody Charlie Hebdo events in France prove anything, it is that pictures can kill. *The Visual Divide* argues that images have always been used as weapons of mass humiliation. The book attempts to engage, if not answer, questions of why and how images can perform such a powerful role. It investigates the question of visual representation between the world of Islam and the West, taking a close look at a list of subjects that include Internet images of ISIS and the Syrian civil war, cartoons of Charlie Hebdo and Jyllands-Posten, photographs of Guantanamo and Abu-Ghraib detainees, TV images of the destruction of the Twin Towers on 9/11, images from Nazi concentration camps, the on-camera death of Palestinian child Mohammad al-Durra, the photograph of the body of the Syrian child refugee Alan Kurdi washing ashore in Turkey, French postcards of nude Muslim women of North Africa in the nineteenth century, and the spectacular humiliation of the Syrian rebel queen Zenobia in the third century. The book’s central argument is that spectacularization has repeatedly been used as a form of political humiliation by the West, leading to our current visual crisis of the total collapse of the visual as a reliable means of communication.

The urgent impetus for writing this book, therefore, comes from a desire to free oneself from the contamination of vision, to free oneself from confirmation bias as a technology of seeing, and to identify ways of perception that continuously question the assumed meaning of images while encouraging a certain self-awareness to always see things as if we’re seeing them for the first time. One may acknowledge, as has been already explained by Laura Marks in *Enfoldment and Infinity*, that scientific experiments in optics by Muslim polymath Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen) over a thousand years ago have shown that perception is always an embodied experience and that memory and perception are directly and inextricably connected (62–63). In other words, we never see with our eyes only.

Rather, our bodies, our brains, our thinking, and our memories are all involved in giving meaning to the images we see. What we see is not what we get. Therefore, it could be argued that more than ever, we are in need today of a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, to exercise an ability to have a fresh eye of perception, where we ask ourselves, what does this image really mean? What does it mean for me? Now?

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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 book 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 questions like, “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 starting points 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 from 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 restructured 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 Jacques 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 unsettlement of the refugee, 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, or even in the video films of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). When the question of visibility is considered to have been assaultive, as in the *Jyllands-Posten* and *Charlie Hebdo* comic images of Prophet Mohammed, which were viewed as a visual insult against Islam, 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, the banning of burkinis and other conservative Islamic dress at the French Riviera, 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 as 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 many, including the pioneering and amazing scholarship 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 there is a consistent notion of the West's Orientalist gaze. Although, the later Said makes it clear that

there always existed a “counterculture” that did not conform to the 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 on research on the question of visibility—specifically in the form of photography and media images from the vantage point of the viewer’s consumption, as opposed to the work performed by Said in *Covering Islam*, where he focused on the media as a producer of images. Finally, it is important to confirm that there is a counter-gaze to the “Oriental” that does not always act in a way that contradicts the Orientalist view, but that is also informed by an equally totalizing view of an “imagined-West.” One can easily observe that the fundamentalist videos and literature of ISIS and the like are replete with essentializing views of the West as an absolute evil.

I copiously draw upon concepts and methods suggested by Edward Said, but, at the same time, I stray from Said in my attempt to focus my work exclusively on images, especially in video and photography in order to locate the self-referentiality of power (also suggested by Rey Chow, in *The Age of the World Target*). Second, 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 postcolonial 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 (*The 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 an image becomes itself 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, its reception. In other words, I search for a technology of vision that eventually becomes that which imparts on the image its meaning.

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 civilization, extremists, and so on, where these terms are often used as if they can refer collectively to a homogenous group of people with no difference or distinction among 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. Hence, the call of some US politicians to ban “all Muslims” from entering the United States regardless of nationality, political status, or otherwise, becomes no longer a political ploy but morphs into a serious electoral platform.

Although this book 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 generalizing terms such as the “West” or “Muslims.” I attempt to use these references from the perspective of the Other, as a way of exposing that perspective, and therefore to expose a general stereotype. In other instances, the use of these terms may just show the impossibility of navigating problematic topics,

such as 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 manifest my position relative to how they function, I would easily choose the latter.

Similarly, I faced a question of working on late nineteenth-/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 oppositions between the image and what one keeps in mind about how the Muslim woman (is stereotyped to) look like, in a veil or hijab, and so on? 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 is 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 literally redeposits 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 decades.

*The Visual Divide* is not intended to be necessarily read in any sequential order. A reader may enter the work at any point and make their own connections or exits. The book comprises seven chapters: in Chap. 2, “Technologies of Seeing,” I introduce the reader to the various themes to be discussed in *The Digital Divide* 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. The 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 visibility? Do they tell us who we are? And who the “Others” are?

In Chap. 3, “The Sounds of the Revolution,” 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 4, “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 nineteenth 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 Charlie Hebdo, the Abu Ghraib photographs and the Mohammed cartoons, and so on.

Chapter 5, “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 visuality, and which transforms the act of seeing into an act of targeting.

In Chap. 6, “The Martyr Takes a Selfie,” 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 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.

In Chap. 7, “Cinematic Terrorism,” I use the concept of time-image used by Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema 2* as a heuristic tool for thinking about the nature of seeing within a changeable perception of time and space. By considering that Internet films of the Islamic State (ISIS) primarily operate on two different axes, a time-image that presents a recollection of a mythic past and a movement-image that reverses roles of power and sovereignty with a Western antagonist through mimesis, I discover that although we are unable to consider the ISIS films strictly as documentary, they are nonetheless not representational either. Within this context, I argue that ISIS films may be experienced as actualizations of a global schizophrenic delirium. The ISIS films demonstrate what Deleuze describes as the “powers of the false.” They show a reality that is unbearable to witness. In the same way that the Marquis de Sade exhibited in life and fiction a physical violence and perversion that were symptomatic of the chaotic and brutal

realities of the French Revolution, ISIS itself, and not only its film productions, becomes the foci of a symptomatic and cinematic realization of the failures of our globalized society in the post-Cold War/Arab Spring era. We experience the unbearable violence in the form of schizophrenic delirium, as if this violence is being performed somewhere else, by someone else, to someone else. These forms of spatial and temporal shifts, detachments, and interchanges are emphasized by the arrival of war refugees to the Western world from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. In this process of becoming the Other, there is no escaping the delirium of Otherness. The only possible conclusion is that the problem of the act of seeing lies in its condition as delirium.

*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” (*Frames of War* 32), and as such, violence and suffering could be presumed to also cut across all identity categories as well as multicultural maps.

One could point out that some in the world feel that their suffering is not perceived as deep as the suffering of others or that certain violence against a certain community, or group, or ethnicity does not hurt as much as it does for 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, is 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 certain 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 visibility with violence and what situates perception in delirium. What we are left with is what Jacques Rancière describes in “Misadventures of Universality” as the “heterogeneity of the opposite.” We may have to accept that images, on their own, constitute only partial messages, and that only by being able to recognize the inherent lack of innocence of one’s eye that we are only able to truly see.



## Technologies of Seeing

An observer of the US military involvement against the regime of Colonel Qaddafi in Tripoli, Libya, in 2011 will notice that the position of the United States could be described as one of overt reluctance and careful hesitation. Although we know now that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had played an instrumental covert role in pushing military action at the time,<sup>1</sup> one could also surmise that not only was the US government ill at ease to embark on a third military confrontation with yet another Muslim nation within a short period of time but that there may have also been an undesirable history of US military involvement with that North African nation. An outright US military movement toward Tripoli would be 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 US 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 US military was already engaged in a war against a North African Muslim