Introduction. Visual Cultures of Islam: The Seen, Unseen and the in Bwteen

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In our modern world, we are continuously bombarded with visual images as a means of communication. The large variety of constructed visual cues that we see everyday, including everything from still images such as antique oil paintings to modern abstract art, photographs, posters, to moving visual feats of physical impossibilities on our televisions and computers received by way of advertisement, movies, YouTube clips, and news images, all contribute to the way we decipher the world around us; they, all collectively, inform and create what we call a visual culture. Just like the way various cultures are formed through social etiquettes, political desires, our histories and religious beliefs, and even the geographical location in which we live, visual cultures, too, are informed by repeated visual cues that we encounter in our everyday life. These visual cultures – which stem in our social cultures – not only shape how certain images should be read and understood but they also influence and affect our opinions, beliefs and values in powerful ways. Namely, they also influence our social cultures and attitudes. So, in effect, especially in today’s world where the visual image in its various forms has become the most powerful tool of communication, it is difficult to separate the two. Our social cultures and visual cultures are continuously and seamlessly feeding off each other in extraordinary ways to help us make sense of our changing world. Unless we tune into this connection, it is easy to miss the influence of visual cultures in the way we understand and see our world. That is because visual cultures, like and as part of other aspects of our social cultures, are deeply embedded in our collective psyche, influenced by our national and personal histories, reinforced by politicians and businessmen, and our biases, to the degree that unless we stop and think about how we have been directed to read those images around us and their meanings, it is easy to miss this connection and be blindly guided by the very images we see in front of us.

As much as providing us with clues on how to navigate this complex world around us, visual cultures can also lead to the construction of certain repeated images, biases, stereotypes, and definite ways that we can position ourselves in the world against the Other. While infinite opinions are being visually reflected and formed – and studied - on the representations of every aspect of our human lives and others,' for example, anything from
how we see queer and transgender people, the human body image, various wars, poverty and wealth, etc., this
collection brings into focus a diverse study on the visual cultures surrounding the representation of Islam and
Muslim people. The understanding of certain ways Islam and Muslim cultures are visually represented and the
way they are approached by the authors in this book – not only by non-Muslims in the West, but also by Muslims
themselves – however, requires some contextualization as this book sits on the cusp of where visual cultures feed
into debates surrounding the historical, social and cultural representation of Islam in the West. Neither the visual
representation and analysis of Islam and Muslim identities nor the concept of visual culture, however, is a new
phenomenon that we claim to establish in this collection. On the contrary, this book is rooted and inspired by
already existing theories and analyzes of visual cultures as well as the visual representations of Islam. For us to
situate this collection fully, however, we need first a fuller grasp of the definition of visual cultures that we engage
with, as well as the history and situation of visual representation of Islam and Muslim people within a Western
context.

Although it has only been recently, since the visual image has become our most powerful tool of
communication, that there appears to be an interest in visual culture, the human engagement with the images
we see and construct has deep roots in history. Ever since the Age of Enlightenment knowledge and information
began to be systematically and regularly retrieved from observation and display; from then onwards through the
eras of industrialization and colonialization to the current globalized world, visual culture has continued to form
the way we think and interpret the world (Kromm & Bakewell, 2009). While the undercurrent of visual analysis
in a social context has played a significant part in our human history's perception, the term, visual culture – in
the way we understand it today - to refer to the system of study of images in a social setting, is only a 20th
century phenomenon, dating back only to scholars and writers such as John Berger, Laura Mulvey, and Maurice Merleau-
Ponty in the 1970s. The first book-length study of this topic dates only to Pal Miklos's 1976 Hungarian book
Vizuális Kultúra – Visual Culture.

In the modern interpretation of it, as a term, visual culture refers to visual aspects of culture and Visual
Culture as a discipline. Visual culture and the importance that is placed on it, emphasizes the crucial significance
and the potential power of images in our cultural life. Social sciences, in the past, were always assumed to be
‘disciplines of words’ which left very little space for images. It was thought to be the miniature scale of the
logocentric world. The “social sciences had either depreciated or relegated the use of images to simply a
secondary documentation or supplementary illustrations to written text” (Zeiny, 2017, p. 76). However, over the
last two-and-a-half decades, the interest in the visual aspect of social life has risen significantly to the extent that
Visual Culture as a discipline has emerged to figure out the significance of the roles of images, still or moving, in
our culture, to "realize how pictures and their viewers make meaning, and to consider what it intends to negotiate a great number of images in our daily lives" (Zeiny, 2017, p. 76).

Visual Culture, as a spin-off of Cultural Studies, is interested in studying how a visual culture is produced, enacted and consumed. Visual Culture which contains many forms of still and moving images ranging from fine art to film and television advertisement to YouTube clips etc., has now become an interdisciplinary field of study abandoning the conventional and traditional practices of art historical inquiry to include theories and perspectives from fields such as sociology, anthropology, cultural theory, literature, gender studies, film and media studies. What is vitally important to Visual Culture Studies is marking boundary crossing between these fields. For example, it is important to realize “how and why art images take advantage of commercial imagery or what it means when images, still or moving, improve or deteriorate the status of a group of people in a society” (Zeiny, 2017, p. 77). With the recent spate of images and the relevant technologies, 'visual culture' is the everyday life rather than just a part of it (Lister & Wells, 2000). This phenomenon of visuality of culture has become considerably significant that it requires its own discipline of study regarding all kinds of visual information, the meaning that images produce, pleasure and consumption, containing the study of all visual technologies from “oil painting to the internet” (Mirzoeff, 1998, p. 3). It is now obvious that Visual Culture is not just the study of images but rather the centrality of vision in our everyday life and the production of meaning which is a major backbone of 'visual culture.'

Of essence in understanding visual culture is the close relationship between ‘representation, meaning and culture.’ But what is the connection between these three components that makes it so essential in this study? Culture, as a highly complex phenomenon, is a broad concept with a variety of different definitions which keeps changing over time. On the conventional level, culture was assumed to be a whole body of outstanding and noble ideas represented through the fine arts such as the classic works of literature, painting, music and philosophy. This sort of notion described culture as the “best that has been thought and said” (Arnold, 1932, p. 6) in a society and categorized the culture into the 'high culture' for the elite and the sophisticated; and 'low culture' also called ‘mass culture’ or ‘popular culture’ for the widely distributed forms of popular fictions, television programs, and comic books for the general population (Zeiny, 2017). However, the recent definitions of the term have it that culture, by and large, is considered as learned and communal values, beliefs, perspectives and customs. In terms of Anthropology, culture is considered ‘a whole way of life’ accommodating a vast range of activities within a society. Apart from this all-encompassing anthropological perspective, Irving (1984, p. 138) believes culture is “the shared and learned information people use to generate meaning and order within a social system.” Following this view, culture is not inherited, but learned; it is not instinctive but origins from one's social milieu.
Drawing upon Stuart Hall's definition of culture, we argue that culture is the shared practices of a community, society or a group through which meaning is produced from the textual, aural and visual world of representations. Culture is not just a fixed set of components such as paintings or television programs but it is also a set of practices which assist individuals and groups make sense of those things (Hall, 1997). It is, indeed, the manufacture and transference of meanings between individuals in a group or a society. Thus, it is safe to contend that there is a diversity of meanings and interpretations about any particular given topic or object in any culture. People may share the same culture but there other different individual interpretations of a certain topic, object or image. It is precisely this diversity and plurality of meanings and interpretations that scholars of Cultural Studies are studying. The Cultural Studies scholars focus upon the "patterns and practices of culture, their links to social groups and the power connections between those groups as they are made and mediated by forms of culture" (Zeiny, 2017, p. 77). In the vein of this view, culture is the everyday symbolic and expressive practices that happen as we live. It is highly impossible to take out the cultures of everyday life from practices of representation, visual or otherwise. What has emerged to be termed as the 'cultural turn' has now been replaced by the 'visual turn' where images and representations saturate our world.

Representation has seized an important place in the study of visual culture as it connects meaning and language to culture. Representation is the process by which meaning is created and exchanged between members of a culture through the use of language, signs and images which stand for or represent things (Hall, 1997). Languages are the medium through which feelings, ideas, and thoughts are represented in a culture. More than ever, our language is ultimately becoming more visual. Representation through language, in this case a visual language, as Hall (1997) further argues, is therefore crucially important to the process through which meaning is constructed in a culture. In the vein of this view, meaning is a matter of intervention or creation which is created and constructed by people. Hall (1997, p. 3) says: “it is the participants in a culture who give meaning to people, objects, and events... it is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them—how we represent them—that we give them a meaning.” Therefore, it is now clear that meaning is the result of social convention, produced and constructed through representational processes. Visual representations, in today’s globalized world, have become the predominant “representational system” (Hall, 1997, p. 1). That is how they can be considered as an increasingly powerful medium for the production of meaning.

In this context, the term “visual culture” places great importance on the visuality of our world, and describes a philosophical and epistemological posture that endorses visuality as fundamentally important to the constitution of the world. This growing centrality of the visuality in our life, argues Martin Jay (1994, p. 3), is “ocularcentrism” or “scopophilia” where the practice of looking help people understand the world and their
surroundings (Cartwright and Sturken, 2001). The world which was once so logocentric has now been progressing towards a shift where images and visuality have saturated our surroundings. While the shift from lexicality to visuality popularizes the status of visuals and enhances engagement with them, it engenders a fear about their potential capability to shape and change attitudes. After all, visual pronouncements are almost always cultural products loaded with values, ideologies and taken-for-granted beliefs of the cultures which produce them, and the ones which consume them. As critical theorist Douglas Crimp elucidates, “an image [still or moving] isn’t simple negative or positive but rather is the product of social relations...” (Takemoto, 2003, p. 85). Despite it all, whether we like it or not, visuality is the way in which particular ways of seeing the world are conceived and it has a dramatic influence in “how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see” (Foster, 1988, ix, in Ros, 2007).

Derived and informed by socio-political and historical changes, this conceiving of a particular practice of looking and seeing is influenced by the “information that exist both prior to and separate from the [visual] text itself” (Howells & Negreiro, 2012, p.17). Therefore, understanding the influence of the visual pronouncements requires special consideration of the relation between particular images and the audiences’ underlying notions, beliefs, narratives, and ideologies. Given the fact that images have the ability to quickly influence viewers both cognitively and emotionally, these visual representations would gradually form a desired method of reading and viewing. Once reproduced repeatedly, these visual representations construct a fixed set of meaning for certain issues, perspectives, cultures, and groups of people. Often times, when these visual codes are constructed towards making sense of a different culture, or other people who are unlike us, they can lead to a process of Othering or a kind of hierarchy. Informed by political, social, and historical thoughts and belief systems, they can lead to pigeonholing the represented in specific ways. Especially if these representations occur in a loaded setting, for example, where a historical, political and social binary is already embedded in the culture, for example, such as East vs. West, these representations more often than not feed off and into that unbalance and hierarchy.

While giving the viewers the power of subjectivity and judgments, these visual pronouncements, especially if they are continuously misrepresenting or selectively representing, could lead to the objectification, silences and oppression of those represented. This defines what we may refer to as visual imperialism; it is the ubiquitous form of representation that manufactures our perceptions, determines our desires, and regulates our choices in a way that one mode of representation and the reading of a group or another culture become dominant. This type of representation also often leads to a kind of gap between representation and the reality of the lives and cultures of those who are represented. As Susan Sontag explains, images are potent entities that profoundly intervene with one’s perception of ‘reality.’ She states: “Notions of image and reality are complementary. When the notion of reality changes, so does that of the image, and vice versa.” (1982, p. 354). To
put it in another way, “images can become perceived reality, and reality may turn out to be nothing but projected image...” (Gruber & Haughbolle, 2013, p. xiii).

In the way we are conditioned to read images, misrepresentation and selective representation are part of the process of ‘Othering’ which is the backbone of visual imperialism. Visual imperialism is “the colonization of the world mind through the use of selective imagery that acts as a representation of a dominant ideology.” (Kuehnast, 1992, p. 184). Ideology plays an important role in visual imperialism. An ideology reflected in an image, which informs the audiences what and how to see and think, conjures up the pedagogical functioning of visual culture. Even when visual culture is consumed to be entertained, it functions pedagogically. This spectacle pedagogy of visual culture, to borrow the term from Garoian and Gaudelius (2004), is the risky and continual form of propaganda at the disposal of cultural imperialism. It is in this context that visual imperialism leaves no space for a possible plurality of interpretations. Bereft of such plurality, visual imperialism reproduces ideologically informed images that are often easy to read as one-dimensional by the uninformed viewer. An example that best illustrates such short of plurality is the often Western cliché representation of Islam and Muslims, which sums up Islam and those who practice it to very few reductive images. What resists and challenges this dominant reductive vision is a plurality of vision which enhances the feasibility of multifaceted perspectives, discourses and understanding.

This is where this volume comes together. It intends to open up a space for dialogue, to highlight and examine the dominant and sometimes not-so-dominant visual cultures that have informed the way Islam is represented at both local and global levels through the inclusion of multiple realities, media, perspectives, discourses and interpretations.

The idea for this book was also conceived at the cross-section of multiple realities of what it means to Muslim when we, Esmaeil Zeniy and Sanaz Fotouhi, met in Kuala Lumpur where Sanaz was invited to Malaysia to present a paper as part of the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS) seminar series in National University of Malaysia (UKM). The presentation brought together an interesting mix of people who identified themselves, in one way or another, as Muslim, each of whom was unique in their approach and understanding of what it entailed. Here was Sanaz, a Muslim born Iranian woman, a selective practitioner, who has been living in Australia for the last decade or so, alongside Esmaeil an Iranian Muslim man who had been in Malaysia for the last seven years. We were in dialogue with the Malaysian staff at UKM’s School of Language Studies & Linguistics, the majority of whom are feisty Muslim women, some of whom observe the hijab, and some who do not. In dialogue, we realized that inherently we shared a common thread, our association with Islamic thought and culture. Yet, in this similarity, we were also very inherently different. While the similarities
and differences were utterly clear to us, for which we respected each other, we were also aware that the diversities and complexities of Muslim identities are usually unseen to those who are unfamiliar with it.

We also recognized that each of us has grappled with the representation and misrepresentation of Islam and Muslim people both in our own personal lives and scholarly work. Sanaz, who has worked extensively on Iranian writing in diaspora, has always grappled with the representations of Iranian Muslim women in texts and to some extent visually. She has examined aspects of this in her book *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora*. Esmaeil has also always been dealing and concerned with this sort of (mis)representation in the course of his study on the post-9/11 Western representation of Islam and Muslim women, and diasporic Muslim women’s life narratives.

What both of us realized in our studies of this topic is that the visual representation and analysis of modern day Muslims people and Islam, especially in the West still has its roots deep in a history that informs Westerns and Eastern understandings of each other. One can argue how the Middle East, Islam and Muslim people are portrayed today on our glitzy computer screens and through various visual platforms in the West dates back to the way Western painters recorded and depicted certain regions and areas of the East in a way that served the purposes of the larger missions of Western Empires. If we trace this back, during the colonization era, it became “a major preoccupation of nineteenth-century painting, an East which was, in turn, 'Imagined, Experienced, [and] Remembered’” (MacKenzie, 1995, p. 44). As an obsession for the West, representing the Orient has its roots in the first Westerners’ journey to the Orient in search of exotica and excitement whose travel accounts encouraged many male artists to travel there for painting. The creation of these paintings led to the emergence of the Orient as a source that provides the West the deepest and most recurring images of the Other. These visual representations of the Orient, over the centuries, have continued to bolster the stereotypes of the ‘Other’ and celebrate the differences to sustain the power of the dominant culture. These differences that are constructed imaginatively as the real ones are being contracted are the result of what Benedict Anderson (1983) calls "imagined communities." “Imagined communities” are formed through the invented links out of which emerges exclusive group identities The creation of Western identity delineates who is part of the community and who is on the other side. Baily Jones (2007, p. 8) argues that it is precisely “this creation of imaginary difference that separates one group from another.”

Of the groups of people who have been left outside the Western communities and who have been historically and constantly subjected to Orientalist stereotypical depiction are Muslims, especially Muslim women whose body has long been a site of contention. The visual and pictorial representations of these women,
over the centuries, have been created to reinforce differences and has denied the representation of their personal
and individual experiences. Thus people in the West have been presented with the cliché portrayals of Muslim
women as veiled and powerless victims of patriarchal societies in primitive lands, tribal, and frozen in a hazy
past. Created often by male members of the society, and most times with a larger political agenda, this depiction
continues to date, becoming darker after the events of 9/11, and even more misconstrued with the emergence of
ISIS and other extremist Islamic groups. What we see in post-9/11 visual contexts is thus a continuation of a
colonial strategy and rule in depicting the ‘Other’ but in a new form that serves the purposes of our current era.
The 9/11 events and President Bush’s ‘Axis of Evil’ speech gave birth to the explosion of visual discourses about
Muslim women’s oppression in Islamic societies. It now seems an established rule in the West to represent the
East in need of Western liberation. The rule is the same in every medium including painting, photography, news,
film, literature and music. What gives power to this stereotype is a persistent repetition that associates Muslims
and East with the ‘veil,’ ‘Orient,’ and ‘Arab.’ These are all words with different layers of textual and visual history,
referring to real places and real times but the meaning of which have been weighed down with certain negative
and historically rooted associations that grossly stereotypes and pigeonholes those who are represented – and
even sometimes those who are representing them.

We all know that “Islam is not homogenous; it is a diverse set of practices that vary from culture to
culture” (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005, p. 4). Yet, for various complex social, political and historical reasons, the
diversity of Islamic cultures, thoughts and practices of the global Muslim population in the West has been glossed
over. For the majority, in our highly image dependent world today, these reductive perceptions are constructed
visually. And most times, what is seen, or what is at least projected, is enough to construct an image around
which many can claim a certain degree of understanding, even if that representation is misinformed, simplistic
or far from the truth. But for the complex and critical mind, it is what is unseen, what is under the veil of
representation that can offer a multifaceted and truer understanding of Islam and Muslim identities.

At the other end of the spectrum, Muslim countries within themselves are prone to this type of visual
exploitation. Muslim local home-grown ideologies and perceptions yield to imperialist representations as well.
A prominent example is the use of visual culture by the radical terrorist organizations of Al-Qaeda and ISIS. In
the context of ‘war on terror,’ the visual culture of conflict began to appear and images became weapons. Al-
Qaeda has begun its ‘Electronic Jihad’ by producing images that invited jihadists to a fight against America and
its allies. In constructing these ‘call outs,’ they were careful to employ and produce images that feed off and
increase anti-American/British sentiments. When images from Abu-Gharib prison became public in April 2004,
they were instantaneously appropriated and re-circulated in a wider culture. This redistribution was in the visual
forms of murals, posters, ads, comics and websites (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2007). The most iconic image of this abuse scandal is the picture of the hooded prisoner standing on a box. His wide open arms stand for Christ on the cross which conjures up devotional images that depict revered and tormented figures that remain decent in spite of their humiliation (Mitchell, 2004). The hooded man was regenerated as murals and posters in Baghdad and along with the images of Lynndie England holding a detainee on a leash, it made it to the murals in other Muslim countries such as Iran (Apel, 2005). The transformation of these private shots into public visibility was to augment the anti-American/British sentiments. Having exploited the Abu-Gharib pictures, Al-Qaeda recruited more mujahidin to launch its operations. Abu-Gharib images drove jihadists to new lengths and Al-Qaeda started filming its hostage taking and beheading episodes to communicate its power of violence to target populations. This is nothing new. Just as much as the West has used certain images of Islam and Muslims to highlight certain differences, Muslim states have also historically been using visual representations to instill their cultural ideologies.

The problem with these types of visual representations is their extreme power and potency to lure people into holding beliefs that compromise or complement the state's or a specific group's ideology. They possess the power to persuade others to share certain views and values. That is why we refer to this kind of control as visual imperialism. The most important facet of ideologically constructed images, or visual imperialism, is that "they appear to be natural or given, rather than part of a system of belief that a culture produces in order to function in a particular way" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, pp. 21-2). The persuasion of people to hold the same perspectives as that of the state, which results from the dominant ideology, could be linked with Roland Barthes's concept of myth (1977). In Barthes's concept of myth, there are two levels of meaning of images. These two levels are denotative and connotative meanings. The denotative meaning is based on its literal and descriptive meaning whereas the connotative meaning hinges on the cultural and historical context of the image. Connotative meanings also rely on personal and social knowledge of those circumstances; thus, connotations could be different personally and culturally. At this level of connotation, Barthes uses the term ‘myth’ to refer to cultural beliefs and values. 'Myth' for Barthes is "the hidden set of rules and conventions through which meanings, which are in reality specific to certain groups, are made to seem universal and given for a whole society" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, 19). Therefore, myth makes the connotative meaning of a particular image seem denotative, literal and natural. Akin to Barthes's notion of myth, the ideologies of the West towards representations of Islam and Muslims are usually connotations parading as denotations in the context of visual imperialism. Thus, visual imperialism of Islam in this context refers to the collection of visual images, defined in the broad sense, that perpetrate and perpetuate the myths about an Islamic race, geography and culture. These images which have
been used to substantiate imperialist rhetoric to extend their colonial projects gave birth to a dominant reading of certain races and issues.

This is the context in which this collection is set. Deriving from this broad definition of ‘visual imperialism,’ essays in this collection thus tease out, explore and analyze how various mediums within the Western and Muslim visual culture have constructed a limited perspective or understanding of a certain issue and groups of people. Anchored in this belief, this collection, *The Seen and Unseen* seeks to question these dominant readings, to agitate the singular and fixed meanings and to proffer in the audience the feeling that ideologies can work through seemingly simple artefacts and sympathetic images. This edited volume takes the position to demystify the visual representations of Muslims, to interrogate the naturalness of the given reality and to highlight the carefully orchestrated construction of any given reflection of reality on Islam and Muslims. Instead of simply reiterating the meaning of stereotypical representation, the task of this volume is to detect and interrogate the apparent taken-for-granted assumptions made of the images of Islam and Muslims. *The Seen and Unseen* deals with this fixed and stereotypical way of looking at Islam and Muslims, and explores alternative and challenging visual representations which have set out to reconstruct and dismantle these already existing belief systems.

While in dialogue with, and adding to the already existing scholarship, this volume approaches this topic from a vantage point of diverse multiple perspectives and through an analysis of multiple visual resources. The unique attribute of this volume is the diversity of voices and global representations that it offers. Covering issues from Indonesia to Brunei, Iran, Egypt, France, and England and even on cyberspace, by international scholars, this volume provides examinations of different ways that visual cultures have formed the way representations of Islam and Muslim people are understood, misunderstood, misrepresented, or even embraced visually. The scholars in this volume draw on historical images in paintings, books and their covers, photography and modern art, news representations, and images on cyberspace to demonstrate their arguments. What adds to the uniqueness of this collection is its representation of the diversity and sometimes contradictory – yet reality of – visual perspectives that construct and adhere meaning to the way Islam and Muslim people are seen in a Western context.

The three parts in this volume each explore a vastly different approach to visual representations of Islam from around the world. Essays in part I, Imaging Histories, explore and expand some of the historic approaches to the visual depiction of Islamic worlds, not only in their historical context but by tracing their impact into the modern world today. In his essay “The Arrest of Diponegoro: Visual Orientalism and its Alternative,” Syed Farid Alatas, for example, analyzes the function of Orientalist representation of the historical event ‘The Arrest of
Diponegoro, the Indonesian anti-colonial hero, painted by the Dutch painter, Nicolaas Pienaman and compares it with the Indonesian painter, Radin Saleh’s version of the same event painted in 1857 which suggests a ‘counter-orientalist view.’ Whereas the study of visual orientalism is a well-developed field in the context of Middle East, it has never been a well-trodden path in the context of the Malay world of Indonesia and Malaysia. Utilizing Ibn Khaldun’s the Science of Human Society as a normative method, Alatas makes a case for art as poetics as a valid method and demonstrates how art as poetics can complement the sociological study of ideologies such as Orientalism. In “Images of the Prophet Muhammad: Brief Thoughts on Some European-Islamic Encounters,” Christiane Gruber, a multilingual Swiss-American-Turkish scholar traces some of the historical myths surrounding visual representations of Prophet Mohammad in different Islamic thoughts, and engages with the way those historic ideologies have affected the way the modern world responds to the visual representation of the Prophet and the various consequences of it.

Part II, Unseen Reality, includes essays exploring the impact of visual representations of what it means to be a Muslim in the West in the socio-political context of our modern. They explore a vast range of representations from the male Islamic fantastic terrorists, to the way Muslim women celebrate their own culture of veiling, and a visual association between Muslim women, patriarchy and oil. Jared Ahmed, in his “Nightmarish visions? Shifting visual representations of ‘Islamic’ terrorism throughout the ‘war on terror,’” takes us into a specific local understanding of the concept of terrorism and its specific visual association with Islam in the West. By drawing on examples from the UK news images, he investigates the various ways in which the phenomenon of ‘Islamic’ terrorism has been made visible within the mainstream western news media. In “Oil and Women: Invisibility as Power in Nawal El-Saadawi’s Love in the Kingdom of Oil,” Layla Hendow, makes the connection between two seemingly unrelated and unseen issues of women and oil as pieces of commodity in El-Saadawi’s highly visually depicted novel in the Islamic world, offering us a new way of reading the book, and seeing the connection with oil and power at large. In “World Hijab Day: Positioning the Hijabi in Cyberspace,” Raihanah M.M, takes us onto the platform of social media and examines the representation of Hijab as a form of empowerment by Muslim women from around the world. She examines the relatively unheard of World Hijab Day through analysis of the celebrated day’s Facebook page. Engaging with the photos and comments, it brings to light a new perspective of the hijab as a symbol of pride for the women, and a celebration of its solidarity on the social media platform.

Part III, Interrogating Visual Representations, brings together essays that examine the self-representations of those from Islamic countries through a variety of visual mediums, through photography, cinema, and book covers. Papers in this section bring to our attention the conflict and conundrum of visual
representation. They remind us that no matter how certain authors or artists try to represent a certain idea or even themselves outside of the stereotypical modes of representations, there is still a chance that they will be read within the established framework. This part examines the way artists and writers are using the already known image of Islam as a way to challenge it, reframe it, and offer alternative readings. In “Contemporary Bruneian cinema in the context of Sharia Law,” Bruno Starrs an Australian film lecturer in Brunei, explores Bruneian cinema, as an unseen representation of the Islamic experience. Situating the film in the seemingly strict Islamic context of Brunei, Starrs brings to the fore how Yasmine, a government-funded film from a female director about a martial arts-obsessed schoolgirl who happily defies her father, rarely wears a veil, enthusiastically chases boys and drives a racy, eye-catching car, challenges stereotypes and offers alternative perspectives on Islamic female empowerment within Brunei’s society. Esmaeil Zeiny’s “Visual Discourses of (Un)veiling: Revisiting Women of Allah” reviews Shirin Neshat’s much-written-about Women of Allah (1993-97) series of photography to highlight its immediacy and relevancy in today’s world. This relevancy origins from the rife anxiety and uneasiness towards Muslims and Muslim women in the West where hate crimes and Islamophobia are on the rise. While emphasizing the series potentiality in shattering the centuries-old stereotypes and questioning Iran’s confining rules upon women, he accentuates its dialogical and pedagogical function. Moreover, he brings to surface images of veiled women in murals, posters and paintings of the 1980s and 90s Iran which bear uncanny resemblance with Neshat’s Women of Allah. Exploring the series’ relationship with these images, Zeiny contends that Shirin Neshat’s series is dramatically influenced by these images and calls them the ‘Iranian Women of Allah.’ He further suggests that both of these works merit comparison because they are both dialogical and pedagogical in function. On a similar theme, as a unique attribute to this volume, in her “Visibility and veiling: Iranian art on the global scene,” award-winning Australian-Iranian photographer and academic Hoda Afshar draws on her own experiences and work to demonstrate the challenges and trepidation of being a ‘Muslim’ identified visual artist in the West. Zeroing in on the ‘interpretation and reception’ of some of the works of well-known Iranian artists in the West, Afshar criticizes the exorbitant visibility of the veiling in their works and reveals how these works in the global art scene can serve ideological interest. Finally, Sanaz Fotouhi’s “Changing the Cover Page,” concludes the collection, as it explores the shifting nature of book covers by Iranian writers in diaspora. She examines the unseen relationship between Iranian book covers in the West and their transient nature in relation to social media and social interests emerging from Iran and how social media has opened up a new kind of interest in the visuals that represent Iran for the Western world. Here she directs us towards a world where we are seeing the beginnings of a new kind of movement of visual
representation, beyond the hackneyed images of half-veiled women which have, over the last several decades, come to represent Islamic cultures.

Moving across geographical borders and political boundaries, and going beyond the margins of disciplinary practices, this volume questions principal presumptions that have long held sway in debates on Orientalist representations of the Middle East and Muslim people, and visual cultures. In particularly distinctive ways, each of the diverse essays in this book provokes a reassessment of political reinterpretation of visual cultures of the way Islam and Muslim people are produced and reproduced in a Western context. The diversity of these essays, formed at the intersection of the different opinions and experiences of the scholars researching them, provides a lively and unique perspective in the way visual representations of Islam is understood and addressed across a range of platforms and a wide geographic space, with the hope that the collection will offer alternative and fresh perspectives for analysis and understanding of already existing visual cultures that define the Western relationship with the Islamic world.
References


