Dying to save us: Multimediality in constructing mythical and religious narratives of islamic fundamentalist martyrs

Larissa Soares Carneiro

Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais Belo Horizonte, Brazil
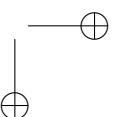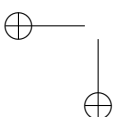
E-mail: `larissa.grau@gmail.com`

THE Islamic Hamas website may be characterized as an archive of narratives. Although these narratives tell the story of suicide attacks perpetrated by the politically motivated, they are framed by religious fundamentalism. Allegorical, mythical, and religious elements permeate the narratives. Real life acts come not only from intentional human practice, but also from miraculous divine intervention.
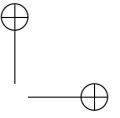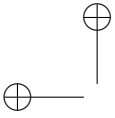
In these narratives, people who commit religious martyrdom, shahada, leave their profane lives to be archetypically represented as mythical heroes. Their biographies published on the website are constructed on the hagiographic model, similar to medieval Christian martyrs. Their images become an iconographic gallery. Each martyr has his virtual page, his digital images associated with his biography telling his life story from birth, his infinite love of God, to the glorious end that led him to a promised paradise. Videos, photographs, audio, and text articulate a spectacular story. Thus, the multimediality of contemporary digital media interweaves various elements to construct a religious narrative, deploying such traditional religious forms as hagiography and iconography within new media.

In the virtual environment, these martyrs are immortalized and honored through their digitized video, audio and visual portrayals. In their video testaments, they communicate the political and religious motivations that justify the supreme act they will perform: martyrdom.

Using multimedia technology as a resource to build a self-representing mythical story is an ancient technique. Medieval religious manuscripts, analogous do the cyberspace, brought together images and texts. On the website, all these different media give rise to the pictorial hagiography of the martyr where religious texts and images give materiality to the sacred.

Using resources and characteristics of digital media, Hamas website is a multimediac interface, where one can dive into the political and religious nar-

rative with its gallery of mythical transcendental heroes: the martyrs or warriors of God, those who challenged and defeated death. There, contemporary digital media and religion intertwine to each other where multimediality of the network is at service to build a supernatural story that turn into eternal those who have died. A narrative that aims to transform the profane into sacred and where the transformation of an individual history in a mythical archetype of religious character can be observed.

Mythical narrative: religious mediation in contemporary digital media

The beginning of the story warns of divine wrath. It states that when Its time has come, his *seizures* would be so terrible that mothers will forget their children, pregnancies will be miscarried; men will behave as drunken for the divine punishment is terrible. To the wicked, there will be no forgiveness. Those infidels who fear death and do not believe that God can give life to the dead. Story also describes that the Almighty created rites of sacrifice, so that his name is mentioned. He does not abandon His children to be defeated [1]. "He allows the fight for those who fight because they were flouted. God is powerful and can sec them" [2].

The narrative tells the story of one of the heroes who stand against the invaders. A hero of a people who will not hesitate

> "(. . .)to burn with the flames of his anger all those who come from all corners of the world to live and squeeze the breasts of our people; (. . .) [who will not hesitate in] rubbing down the noses of Zionist invaders and tread with the feet of the virtuous guerrilla fighters, soldiers in the unbeatable army, unable to further swallow the consecutive defeats in the hands of someone who insists on fighting him (. . .) [3]".

So, at dawn on 13th of Rabia al thani of 1429 [4], "with the grace of God", four car bombs, led by *Mujahideen* martyrs, moved towards "the line that one
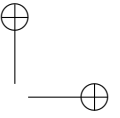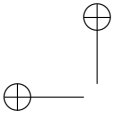
---

1. All official declaration of the Islamic Fundamentalist Palestinian group Hamas on its website begins with a sentence in the verse 38 of the 22 th. Sura of the Koran.

2. Verse 38 of the 22 th. Sura of the Koran (*Al Hajj* or The Pilgrimage).

3. Military's official declaration of the Izzedeen Alqassam published on April 19, 2008, on the martyrdom operation named "Explosion Alarm".

4. 19th of April of 2008, at the Gregorian calendar.
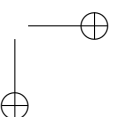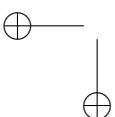
day will be destroyed [border between Israel and the Gaza Strip], towards the military post of the enemy Caram Abu Salem, considered the most protected in the region. The four vehicles, loaded with explosives, broke the line of defense of the enemy under cover by intense bursts of machine guns and missiles. Two cars were exploded in the post, the third, at the gateway, the fourth withdrew so that *Mujahid* could tell what had occurred in the areas of the attacker: the heroic operation was a success and had caused a large number of dead and wounded.

Among the three heroes who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of their people were Ahmed Mohamad Abu Sleiman, 21 years [5]. With his stories, you can enjoy the pictures where he perpetuates as real shaheed, for he is the soldier of God. He chose the Shahada path and sacrificed his life in an operation called "Explosion alarm." However, its needless to mourn him. His death was not in vain, because he died for the Palestinian people, for his families, for fellow prisoners in Israeli prisons, for the souls of their dead leaders and for God, sacrificing what most valued to him: his own life. He died as hero because he had no fear, he fell in the line of fire and fought a "Jihad, the holy war, for victory or martyrdom [6]".

Text and images: thus, the Lord will teach you how to interpretate the story
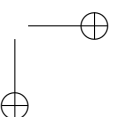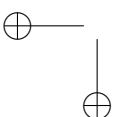
On the website of the Izzedeen Alqassam Martyrs Brigade [7], operational armed wing of Hamas, political confrontations and terrorist suicide attacks are narrated in this allegorical and heroic style.

On the website section called Shahada, many different stories of martyrdom operations and its martyrs are made available. In a digital database that includes the time span between the years 1988 to 2009, only in the file of 2004, it is possible to know the story of 184 martyrs. Each has its own page in which, from right to left, are the links (small green boxes) that direct the user

---

5. Report issued by the organization *Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center* (IICC) of Israel on April 22, 2008.

6. All military official declaration of the Izzedine Alqassam Martyrs Brigade ends with this sentence.

7. Available at: http://www.alqassam.ps.

to the biography of the martyr, the official military statement of the group, the pictures file and his farewell video (Fig. 1).


Figure 1: Page devoted to virtual martyr Ahmed Abu Mohamad Sleiman on Izzedeen Alqassam Martyrs Brigade website.

Together, all these elements, these different media, give rise to the pictorial hagiography of the martyr, or to its mythical narrative where religious texts and images multimediatically related in a single hierarchy, give materiality to the sacred.

The website works, primarily, as an archive of these stories. In spite of the narrative of political events occurred in real life, those stories are framed by the orthodox religiosity of the Islamic group, configuring a mythical-religious narrative. Acts, in this sense, do not stem purely from intentional human practice, but from the teophany, or actions performed under divine intervention. In stories, men and women conducting the attack leave their profane condition to be represented as the archetype of the mythical and santified hero.

On the digital environment, words and images work together. The image illustrates the text, establishes an imagetic interface and history, in turn, calls
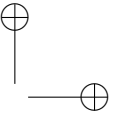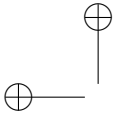
for a represented character [8]. The "image answers the need people bring to the. (. . .) They need to find the one spoken of, and this is where the imaginary arises [9]" (20-21).

According to Wittgenstein, images are polysemic and in order to acquire sense, they require a con-text [10]. Thus, if the purpose is to confer materiality to the sacred, the image alone is insufficient. In order to make any religious sense, that face that stares from within the imagetic representation needs a story to identify it, that gives a name to it, a path, a trajectory, a life. It is through text that image is explained, contextualized and modified. It is a textual narrative that transforms the status of the image from the profane to the sacred condition.

On the website, there is no hierarchy between image and text. There is no hegemonic media. Both are equally important: image and text integrate to each other. There is complementarity between the media: there is multimediality. This relationship, Roland Barthes called relais, in other words, where images and text function as fragments of a single term, that must be articulated and linked in order to mean something.

Besides their stories and pictures, "beyond death" [11], these people speak directly to the user. In their "farewell videos" recorded before the shahada, they testify before the camera their political religious motivations that justify the act to be undertaken: religious suicide.

Thus, videos, photographs, audio and text associate to each other in a story that is spectacular, mythical and heroical and where the multimediality [12] of the contemporary digital media allows the interaction of these various elements in order to build a religious narrative.


8. Lúcia Santaella and Winfried Nöth, 2001.

9. David Morgan, 2008.

10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1953.

11. Images and texts are only available on the website after martyrdom operations are complete, that is, when young men are already dead.

12. The possibility of integrating various types of media - images, audio, text and video - in a single one, the convergence of these media in a particular environment.
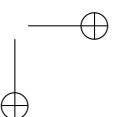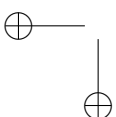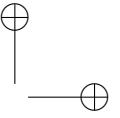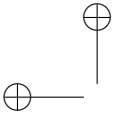
## The multimediality in the logics of contemporary digital media and religion

The use of technological multimediality as a resource to build a religious history is not contemporary. Medieval religious manuscripts, analogous do the cyberspace, brought together images and texts. Churches and temples of many beliefs are created as a multimedia environment with their images, stained glasses, altars, architecture, inscriptions, read or sung texts in ceremonies and rituals. The religious atmosphere, the connection to the sacred and the possibility of spiritual transcendence offered in a religious temple is not the result of a single element, of just a syntagma fragment, but the interaction of several factors within its architecture. The more we deepen our knowledge, the more we realize that religious practice has always been associated with the use of some mediation technology, multimediality and hypermediality that comes from the connection and interaction among all kind of media.

Using resources and characteristics of digital media, Izzedine Alqassan Martyrs Brigade website is both a multi and hipermediatic interface, where one can dive into the political and religious narrative with its gallery of mythical transcendental heroes: the martyrs or warriors of God, those who challenged and defeated death. There, contemporary digital media and religion intertwine to each other, in a configuration where multimediality of the network is at service to build a supernatural story that turn into eternal those who have died and whose stories are told and kept in databases that may, in any place and at any time, be accessed. A narrative that aims to transform the profane into sacred and where the transformation of an individual history in a mythical archetype of religious character can be observed: the hero.

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur defined the concept of narrative as an array of events together as a unified story that can be recounted. Reflecting on the nature of religious and mythic narratives, Ricoeur states that they are accepted as "worthy of faith by all members of the group with no other guarantee of authenticity but the belief of those who transmitted it" (248) [13]. On them, someone who really existed is mythicized, their biographical history is rebuilt

---

13. Paul Ricoeur, 2006.
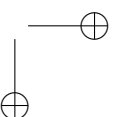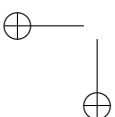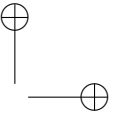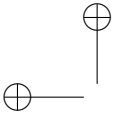
"according to the rules of the myth" (40) [14] and their images are constructed based on the ancestral and archetypal images of very old heroes.

The hagiography: constructing a santified man through a biographical illusion

Man is built according to an archetype, says Mircea Eliade [15]. Inferred from the pragmatic perspective of Charles S. Peirce, archetypes are signs coming from a purpose (an ethic) which aims to achieve and build an aesthetic ideal capable of affecting the individual. According to Peirce's own words, every human practice aims at reaching a kind of *summum bonum*, or an ideal capable of ordering ethically and aesthetically the practice of ordinary daily life and to organize practical experience.

For Peirce, every *semiosis*, every decoding process, the whole understanding of the experience and phenomena is given through a triadic relationship that is, at the same time iconic, indicial and symbolic. The iconic relationship refers to sensorial phenomenon, to the *pathos* and is the aesthetic element of the whole experience. Indexical points to the concreteness of the act and the world, it's what is experienced, seen and sensed consciously. Symbolic, instead, belongs to the order of laws, since a given law may determine and influence future actions. According to Charles Peirce, all these instances are necessary in the process of *semiosis* or mediation, that is, in producing a meaning [16]. Hence, the signs won't ever been apprehended only from rationality, but comes from an a*esthetic* dimension as described by Aristotle: through the senses, the visual perception that apprehends images and reads sacred texts, by auditory perception of the sound and words you hear. From the perspective of pragmatist Peirce, images and texts always contain information in addition to its materiality and its indexical concreteness. Signs are the ones which protect its portion of feelings, values and ideas, and therefore influence, move and change the perception of things in the world.
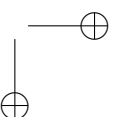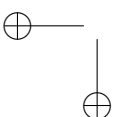
Izzedeen Alqassam Martyrs Brigade website builts a pictorial hagiography that aims to affect the listener through its aesthetic dimension. It belongs,

---

14. Mircea Eliade, 2005.
15. Ibidem.
16. Júlio Pinto, 2007.

therefore, to the iconic order. Meanwhile, it has a route, an action, an experience, an index that is repeated (the attack, the martyrs and their representation). It also seeks a way, a sublime ideal, a s*ummum bonum* that reverses the positive value of the practice of martyrdom, symbolically represented in the narrative of the mythical-religious hero. Thus, in order to build their mythic, religious and political narratives through its multimediatic signs, the website of Hamas does more than simply tell its version of events, it states and exhibits its own set of feelings, values and ideas.

Since its inception, this research has been referring to Islamic martyrs either as *saints* or *as men and women who have been sanctified*. Similarly, it has not hesitated to call the stories told on the Hamas group website of *hagiography*. However, it is known that the traditional Islamic belief does not have in its structure a gallery of legendary saints.

However, if one seeks the origins of the concepts of *hagiography* and *saint*, will see that the structure and content of the narratives of the martyrs on the website does not differ from the hagiography responsible for the sacralisation of Christian martyrs.

Originally, the term hagiography refers to a narrative style of the Middle Ages which had as superficial objective to report the lives of Christian martyrs and their wonderful deeds motivated by divine will. The martyrs were then those who had their lives recalled through narratives that represented them as saints [17]. These texts, permeated by mythical elements, change the historical reality. They have no commitment to a literal speech about the events narrated and individuals, but brought a metaphorical redescription, "a surplus of meaning, an iconic increase" (33) [18].

Thomas Head, a scholar on the subject, says that under the most superficial objective of a hagiography (write a biography containing facts that can't be proven true) is the main goal: to built a portrait of the saint who, beyond the purely descriptive representation, act as a model of religious life to be followed. Thus, a hagiography main goal is to provide a standard and an ideal of virtue (a *Summum bonum*) and propose a pathway towards redemption. More than a life described, an example of moral virtue [19]. Already in 9 century, the

17. Jacques Le Goff, 1996.
18. Ricoeur, 2006.
19. Thomas Head, 2001. *Hagiography*. Available:
http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/hagiography/hagindex.html
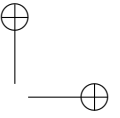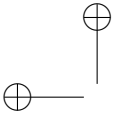
monk Bertholdus of Micy stated that "the most common type of hagiography, which is the [history of] life of the saints (vitae), served to record the actions that demonstrated their compliance and holiness."

In this way, a hagiographic narrative does not describe only the life of the represented martyr. It also shows the values of their authors, and often, explains more about the social cultural and religious world in which its creators live rather than as a portrait of the person whose story is narrated. Therefore, the process of sainthood, more than a question concerning a specific religion, is an important social and cultural aspect of a particular group: an ideal that is regarded as an example of virtue for a particular people [20].

Indexically, the hagiography has a standardized format. Regardless of the saint, the themes, motives and conduct of the narrative are very similar to one another. In addition to aspects of their lives, the merits of virtue and morality, sometimes a divine revelation is added, that would have occurred after his death, proving the legitimacy of the saint.

Since the Middle Ages, another crucial point for the recognition of a state of holiness is a celebration of the day that marks the death of the martyr and its recognition by any religious authority. Here an example is worth recalling in contemporary Islam: the Martyrdom Day celebrates precisely the date of religious sacrifice of the Prince of all Martyrs, Ahmad Qasir [21]. That title was granted and legitimized by the religious leader Hassan Nasrallah, the Shiite group Hezbollah.

For medieval Christianity, in turn, the concept of holyness refers to "holy people" who, after death, often by means of martyrdom, won the right to live in Paradise. A small number of people was honoured with the title of saint. When narrating the life of St. John Chrysostom, John of Damascus, defined as saints the soldiers of Jesus who acted according to His will. Saints were then those involved with a religious cause and who sacrificed their lives for it.

Proceeding to the analysis of one of the many biographies of martyrs in the Islamic fundamentalist group Hamas website, one may notice that in all respects they are built over the hagiographic model of Christian saints. They tell the lives of martyrs and their wonderful acts. Their pretext is remembering and not allow the true heroes are forgotten. They stablish an ideal of virtue

---

20. Head, 2001.

21. Member of Hezbollah group, martyrized in a suicide attack ocurred on November,11, 1982.
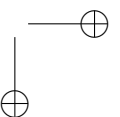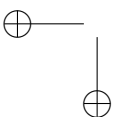
and religious behavior. They are made by the same and and there divine revelations are current. The martyrs are identified as soldiers and warriors of God. Due to these arguments explained above this research assumes that both the terms hagiography and saints can be adopted here without fear of incurring in a senseless act of inference.

If a hagiography had no commitment to a literal speech about the events narrated and individuals, Pierre Bordieu argues that any biography can describe the real life. The French sociologist states that the act of narrating a life requires the belief that life can be taken as a linear story, so that its point of origin would give clues to justify the arriving point or the end of this narrative.

To this form of reporting, Bordieu called "biographical illusion". In this narrative form, the perception of life is given as if it were a path, a mythical destination, blazed in one objective direction: the outcome. Thus, every biography is something invented, after all, bridges are built to join extremities of an existential gap and needy for logic. Unconnected facts are gathered in a perfect structure and placed side by side as if it were a cause and consequence relationship. Others are added, and details that should not be told, or which can not be remembered, are extracted from the plot. The format of this report tends to approach an ideal vision of the individual, and in a religious narrative, this biographical model tends to be similar to a hagiography, where the individual is portraited according the ideal of holiness.
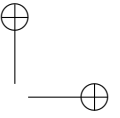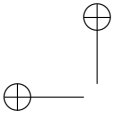
In this manner is the history of Ahmed Abu Mohamad Sleiman, one of three authors of the "Explosion aAlarm" (Fig.1), avaiable in a virtual page on the website Izzedeen Alqassam Martyrs Brigade.

Like in a hagiography, in the first part of the narrative he is presented as a mythical and heroic character, an ideal of moral and virtue, capable of inspiring others devotees. "Ahmed (. . .) His eyes flashing in the sun with his wounds bleeding eyelashes (. . .) Ahmed, a star that appeared and flourished our valleys and our mountains and planted in our hearts, the infinite love of *Jihad*[22]".

The myth of the hero is one of the most persistent themes of the oral tradition and literature, easily identified in hagiographies. A mythical hero or a saint is that who runs to heaven or to hell and performs wonderful acts

---

22. Ahmed Mohamad Abu Sleiman biography, contained on Izzedeen Alqassam Martyrs Brigade *website* . Available at:
http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/sohdaa5.php?sub_action=sera&id=1041

during his trajectory [23]. This type of journey, according to Joseph Campbell [24], as archetypical, is universal. It occurs in all cultures and all religions of all times.

> "Ahmed, you took their lives. You hold them with your gun, and kept them from crossing your land. However, it was you alone who crossed their fortresses, with your fire and explosives; fortresses they mistakenly took by well protected against you [25]".

In the biography of the martyr, according to Pierre Bordieu's 'biographical illusion' and hagiography, there are details of the beginning of his life that points out his pure soul and the source points out to the outcome: an inevitable mystic destiny. His origins reveal his vocation to future holiness.

> "Our lion hero was born on September 29 of 1987, the blessed year of the *Intifade*. He was born in the city where the project of Islamic civilization began over 14 centuries ago: the city of Prophet Muhammad, Medina. Ahmed was the eighth among his brothers and the youngest of them, a Palestinian family, the city occupied in 1948, Asdud. Ahmed grew within the conservative family that gave him a religious base. (...) Our martyr hero was polite, calm, well tempered and always smiling. All who knew him loved him at the first sight. (...) After his martyrdom, all felt the absence of his good mood (...)".

In the story of Ahmed, even his date of birth that marks the beginning of the first Palestinian intifade, and his place of origin, the hometown of prophet Mohammad, aim at suggesting a predestination to santicty.

In a hagiography, saint is that who represents some ideal of virtue, a model of faith and religious bahavior, a *summum bonum*.

> "The hero Ahmed was known for his love for the Pakistani Islamic dress he was wearing at the time of his martyrdom. Who are we to judge his isolation, spending nights praying in mosques, O Hero! Ahmed, may God have you, who fastened all times and every Monday and Thursday. Every day, he would wake up his friends to pray the prayer of dawn and recommended them, always, not to miss the calls from mosques. He was faithful and loyal to his religion, avoiding illegal things, not fearing, with the help of God, no one".

---

23. Eliade, 2005.
24. Joseph Campbell, 2007.
25. Ahmed Mohamad Abu Sleiman biography, contained on Izzedinee Alqassam Martyrs Brigade *website*.
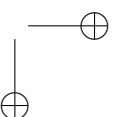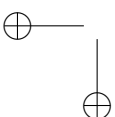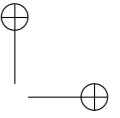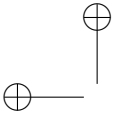
In this type of narrative, every acts are miraculous, resulting from a theophany and cosmic order. At trial, he must die to reborn sanctified. This is a major source of magic and aesthetic pretension of the heroic world. The myth of the hero is linked to another myth: the myth of religious sacrifice motivated by faith and performed for the first time by Avraham. The martyr is the one who dies to save his people.

> "The love of Ahmed for the surveillance would sent him out of this region in Tal Sultan, which is far from the Zionist enemy, towards the areas where he felt in danger and near the oponent. (. . .) It is impossible to describe his desire and his insistence on being a martyr. His wish was carried out with the help of God. (. . .) The hero is prepared for the operation in the Zionist area Caramés Abu Salem (. . .). The martyrs departed, accompanied by the care of God the merciful, invaded, exploded, showing the Hell the people of Zion and left dozens dead and wounded, with the support and success of God the merciful. The hero Ahmed and his comrades offered their souls in the name of Allah. Thus, Ahmed managed his so wished martyrdom, facing battle with all his courage and heroism".

The saint's death is always blessed. He was a soldier who served God and died for the divine glory. Therefore, he is rewarded. He shall gain eternal life and sentimental appreciation of his people. As the hagiography intends to transform men and women in santified people, the narratives on the website have miraculous and divine signs to confer legitimacy to the saint and to the act performed by him.

> "Ahmed, may God be with him, (. . .) said repeatedly that he wanted a sign that Allah after his martyrdom to have the certainty that God was pleased. As Ahmed wanted, God showed his satisfaction through many ways. The word Allah "الله" appeared in his hand instead of the sores. His index finger was lifted as the sign of the *Shahada*, their surrender to Islam. A smile was drawn on his face at the time of his burial, as a laugh of joy and satisfaction at the mercy of God. Thousands of people in his town of Rafah took part on his funeral".

As in a hagiographic model, the narratives available on the website are standardized: the theme and trajectory of the people do not suffer major changes, regardless of which story is being told. The most important is to establish, through standardization and repetition of elements, an ideal of religious and political conduct. Through them, it is possible to witness the meta-

morphosis of a historical character into a mystic one. The transformation of a profane individual in a sanctified being.

However, for having a object of cult and identification, story needs to be associated to a image. The holiness is then result from an image and a text: hagiography and iconography are the means, the media, in connection with the sacred.

Iconography: constructing a santified man through a imaginary illusion

No belief exists on abstract. According to Eliade, the heroes are formed according to the image of other very old heroes [26]. On the website, two types of images interact with the written history: the farewell videos and pictures of martyrs. In both, there is the same image representation of *Shaheed* through their typical attires of a Muslim warrior, and manipulated the objects in the scene (guns and religious artefacts) and through the framework that emphasizes the face and eyes. There, representation of heroic *Shaheed* are visualized, there is the realization of the sanctified interface and no longer profane the individual.

Just as the narrative on the website, the elements mentioned are repeated in the pictures of all martyrs. They are standardized. By the indexical elements contained in the image, they tend to build a symbol that represents an ideal of religious behavior and moral virtue. Images, however, are far more than indexical representations. Maybe more than any other media, they are iconic, they relate to feelings, to emotions, to aesthesis. They have the power to retain the attention and cause a whole set of emotions. When they are considered sacred, they seem to have the ability to externalize the thing to which they relate and are, therefore, a means of identification and cult [27].
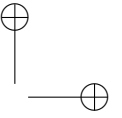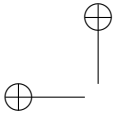
Francis Wolff says the images engender an extremely powerful illusion, of ancient religious origin, that he calls "imaginary illusion". For him, the illusion is, which, paradoxically, create "the belief that images are not images, they are produced by what they play [28]" (18).

26. Eliade, 2005.

27. Morgan, 2007.

28. Francis Wolff, 2004.
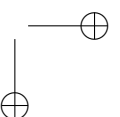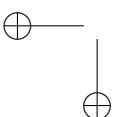
Yet the image ignores the past and the future. It exists beyond the chronological time. It is an eternal and ever present moment, according to Roland Barthes [29] and this is what gives the image its almost religious force. It revives the dead and shows the past time as if it were now. Imaging system has a magical power to make permanent those who are gone.

For Wolff, the image has some degrees of absence which gradually correspond to its three types of powers. In first grade, the absence is accidental. A person is temporarily absent and in that degree, the image is only a representative of something visible. In a second degree, the absence is substantial: the person is irreversibly missing, is dead and belongs to the past. However, in its third grade it represents the image that is completely absent: the divine, the mystical and transcendental. Thus, when the image is sacred, the real illusion appears more clearly, because here, it wants to represent what is invisible. It is when it changes its status and "the human becomes divine, the profane becomes sacred, the manifestation of man's power to make images of gods becomes demonstrations of the power of the gods to manifest themselves in images of men. It is the moment of "consecration of the image [30]" (33).

In his photo, Ahmed Abu Mohamad Sleiman has the serene gaze (Fig. 2).

Indexically, he has his finger pointing to a symbolic heaven, foreshadowing the Shahada, source of the aesthesia. He wears the clothes of a warrior. A strip in hid head depicts him as a Shaheed and a future member of the group Hamas. The dress features, as a biography, the origin and purpose of the young: he is a Shaheed. An outfit is never a random element and it indicates that the young man is ready to take his hard heroic journey where he will face the enemies. In his hands, a weapon also points to the sky.

Along the picture background, behind the martyr and occupying all the frame, the flag of the group, with a representation of Dome of the Rock Mosque, in Jerusalem, sacred place of Islam, stamped in the centre. At the top, a small map of historic Palestine, without the State of Israel, reveals the purpose of the conflict. Surrounding the drawing, two Palestinian flags. The right states that "there is no God but Allah", the left preconizes that "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah", symbolizing the mythical-religious ideology of the group. Below the Dome, two swords are crossed, representing the hon-

---

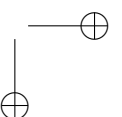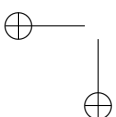29. Roland Barthes, 1982.
30. Wolff, 2004.

Figure 2: Ahmed Abu Mohamad Sleiman

our and pride of the Arabian people. Under the sword, the word Palestine and below it, Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas. Flags are not just symbols. One can die or kill for a flag. It is a source of deep emotions. In front of the flag, Ahmed is not alone: he has his group and his God to accompany him in his journey.

Due to the close imagetic plane, our gaze is focused on the face of the boy. It is in his quiet expression that the belief in the truth of his purpose is established. Far from being bloodthirsty, he is driven by religious love. Faces are the material interface which provide access to feelings and belief in his expression. In the face, we look for clues that point out to iconic information coming from the soul.

If in many respects aspects the narrative on the Hamas website is similar to medieval hagiography, its iconography is not far from the former Byzantine icons (Fig.3).

In the Middle Ages, Byzantine religious icons were sacred images made by artisans, structured on the same system of symbolic icons and signs that are always repeated. The iconic paintings have a significance zone, such as

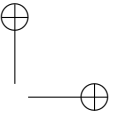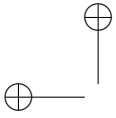Figure 3: Byzantine icon at Hagia Sophia, Istambul.

right and left, above and below, center and periphery that encode the meaning
of its pictorial elements [31]. David Morgan defines a religious icon as an image
which gives access to a reality or a to being that it represents. In this sense, is
a medium that connects the human to the sacred. It is an image that promises
access to a holy something or someone [32].

As the digital images on the website, icons were done the same way, with
the same technical procedures and repeating the same elements of visual rep-
resentation, easily recognized by all. At looking at the Byzantine icon of
century 11 (Fig. 3), it is possible to regard likeness between the painting and
Ahmed's photograph. The same framing, facial expression, the right hand that
points to the symbolic heaven and the left hand that holds a sacred artifact.

31. Santaella and Nöth, 2001.
32. Morgan, 2009.

One cay say the representation of Ahmed covers the two concepts of an icon: the Byzantine (symbolic) and the Peircean one, linked to iconicity or emotions.

Just as religious icons, their pictorial elements are collectively recognized. The structure of its image is repeated and is no different from many others that preceded it or which will come after it.

In icon, all the attention is attracted by the immense look in the eyes, turned to the spectator, said Alain Besançon[33]. Through the eyes, the icon calls for the aesthetic sense, for its Peircean iconicity[34]. As the painting of the religious icon was always focused on the face of the saint who was probably martyred one day, also the pictures on the website privilege the face who provides access to the martyr.

So, like in the ancient religions that also related texts and imagens, the multimediality of the website attends on constructing an iconographic hagiography. In the digital environment, text and images together orchestrate an interaction that transforms the imagetic representation of the young martyrs in a simulation of the mythical-religious saints.

The interaction between the "biographical illusion" described by Pierre Bordieu and "imaginary illusion" of Francis Wolff creates a third and more powerful illusion: the young men who smiles to us, who affects us, who speaks to us through his video testament, who had his biography told by the mythical archetype of the hero's journey, is not dead. But ascended to heaven, instead, because he was God's soldier. Fulfilled its heavenly destination. Abandoned his profane condition and is aside God now, being able to intercede for those who are still here on Earth, since he is a man, whose actions undertaken in his concrete life were sanctified. A man who died to save us.
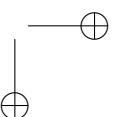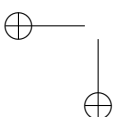
Bibliography

ALZAMORA, Geane Carvalho. "Da semiose Midiática à Semiose Hipermidiática: Jornalismos Emergentes". In: Paiva, Raquel & Melo, José

---

33. Alain Besançon, 2009.
34. Referring to Charles S. Peirce.

Marques (Eds.): *Ícones da Sociedade Midiática: da aldeia de McLuhan ao planeta de Bill Gates*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Mauad. 2007.

BARTHES, Roland. *Camera Lúcida: Reflections on Photography*. United States of America: Twenty-fourth printing. 1982.

BENJAMIN, Walter. "O narrador: considerações sobre a obra de Nikolai Leskov". In: *Magia e Técnica, Arte e Política: ensaios sobre a literatura e história de cultura*. Chosen books. Volume 1. São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense. 1994.

BESANÇON, Alain. *The Forbidden Image: an intellectual history of iconoclasm*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2001.

BORDIEU, Pierre. "A ilusão biográfica". In: AMADO, Janaína & FERREIRA, Marieta de Morais (Eds.): *Usos & Abusos da História Oral*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV. 2006.

CAMPBELL, Joseph. *The hero with with a thousand faces*. Novato: New World Library. 2007.

CRW Flag's Online Catalog. Retrieved on 21/11/2008, from http://www.crwflags.com

ELIADE, Mircea. *The myth of the eternal return*. New York: Princeton University Press. 2005.

FOUCAULT, Michel. *Des espaces autres*. 1984. Retrieved on 07/03/2009, from
http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.fr.html

HEAD, Thomas. *Hagiography*. 2001. Retrieved on 10/03/2009, from http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/hagiography/hagindex.html

INFORMATIONS Office Ezzedeen Alqassam Brigades. Retrieved on 21/11/2008, from http://www.alqassam.ps

JUNG, C.G. *Os arquétipos e o inconsciente coletivo*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2007.

MARTIN, Marcel. *A linguagem cinematográfica*. Belo Horizonte: Livraria Itatiaia. 1963.

MORGAN, David. "Finding Fabiola". In: ALYS, Francis (Ed.): *Fabiola: an investigation*. New York: Yale University Press. 2008.

MORGAN, David. "Image". In: MORGAN, David (Ed.): *Keywords in Religion, Media and culture*. Canada: Routledge. 2008.

MORGAN, David. *Icon and Interface from Byzantium to the Present*. Duke University. 2009.

MURRAY, Janet H. *Hamlet no Holodeck: o futuro da narrativa no ciberespaço*. São Paulo: Editora Unesp. 2003.

PINTO, Júlio. "Doctrina Signorum". In: PINTO, Júlio (Ed.): *CASA NOVA, V. Algumas Semióticas*. (to print).

SANTAELLA, Lúcia. "Construções do Pragmatismo de Peirce para o avanço do conhecimento". Revista de Filosofia, Curitiba, v. 16 n.18, p. 75-86, jan./jun. 2004.

SANTAELLA, Lúcia & NÖTH, Winfried. *Imagem: cognição, semiótica, mídia*. São Paulo: Editora Iluminuras. 2001.

SODRÉ, Muniz. *As estratégias sensíveis: afeto, mídia e política*. Petrópolis: Vozes. 2006.

SODRÉ, Muniz. *Antropológica do Espelho: uma teoria da comunicação linear e em rede*. Petrópolis: Vozes. 2002.

STOLOW, Jeremy. "Technology". In: MORGAN, David (Ed.): Keywords in *Religion, Media and Culture*. Canada: Routledge. 2008.

THE Intelligence & Terrorism Informations Center. http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/site/home/default.asp.

VOGLER, Christopher. *A jornada do escritor*. Rio de Janeiro: Ampersand Editora, 1997.

WAINBERG, Jacques A. *Mídia e Terror: comunicação e violência política*. São Paulo: Paulus. 2005.

WOLFF, Francis. "Por trás do espetáculo: o poder das imagens". In: NOVAES, Adauto (Ed.): *Muito além do espetáculo*. São Paulo: Editora Senac. 2004.