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Visual Representation, Propaganda and Cyberspace: The Case of the Palestinian Islamist Movements

Attila Kovacs

Comenius University in Bratislava

Abstract:

The article analyzes the changing position of the visual representation in the context of Islam from the starting point set up in the Qur'an and more specifically in the prophetic tradition to the theoretical positions of Islamic reformism and radicalism and the practice of Islamism movements. To understand this changing relationship is crucial for the research of ideology and propaganda of the contemporary Islamist movement. In the second part, the article illustrates this new position of images in the visual representations of Palestinian Islamist movements, specifically of Hamas – The Islamic Resistance Movement and its military wing the Brigades of the Martyr 'Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine and its military wing the Phalanges of Jerusalem and finally the Popular Resistance Committees and its military wing the Victorious Salah al-Din Brigades.

Keywords:

identity, social media, media studies, communication studies, websites, conflict, Internet studies, Palestine

"One image is more powerful than a million words"

("Sister Harb," the leading anchor of the al-Qassam brigades' online discussion forum)[1]

The introduction and propagation of basic views and ideas, or ideology, to the widest possible audience plays the same vital role in the existence of Palestinian Islamist Movements as in that of nearly all political organizations. This is the goal of the creation, publication and distribution of large numbers of text materials, including the party's platform, charter, various leaflets and sound materials, as well as and picture materials, such as posters, billboards, graffiti, audiovisual materials and computer graphics. The aim of this study is the closer inspection of the latter, specifically the

Corresponding author: Attila Kovacs, Comenius University in Bratislava, Gondova 9, 814 99 Bratislava 1, Slovakia. E-mail: attkov@yahoo.com

"visual ideology" of Palestinian Islamist movements - their representation in pictures and propaganda materials - and the influence of cyberspace and the Internet on them.

The examination of such issues poses two main problems concerning methodology. The first includes the selection and interpretation of analyzing the images; the second concerns the relation of Islam, specifically the Islamist movements, to the visual, or more accurately, figurative, representation. It is therefore essential to include a brief characteristic of these two issues before examining the relationship between cyberspace and the visual representation of Palestinian Islamist movements.

In this article I am going to analyze the changing position of the visual representation in the context of Islam from the starting point set up in the Qur'an and more specifically in the prophetic tradition to the theoretical positions of Islamic reformism and radicalism and the practice of Islamism movements. To understand this changing relationship is crucial for the research of ideology and propaganda of the contemporary Islamist movement. In the second part of my article I am going to illustrate this new position of images in the visual representations of Palestinian Islamist movements, specifically of Hamas -The Islamic Resistance Movement (*Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*) and its military wing the Brigades of the Martyr 'Izz ad-Din al-Qassam (*Kata'ib al-Shahid 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam*), the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (*Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami fi Filastin*) and its military wing the Phalanges of Jerusalem (*Saraya al-Quds*) and finally the Popular Resistance Committees (*Lijan al-Muqawama al-Sha'biyya*) and its military wing the Victorious Salah al-Din Brigades (*Alwiyya al-Nasir Salah al-Din*).

Image and representation in Islam

A number of scientific methods have proved to be useful in the analysis of images, for instance iconology and visual representation (for methodology see: Emisson and Smith 2000; Mitchell 1986; 1994; 2005; Rampley 2005; Rose 2001; in the context of contemporary Islam: Gruber and Haugbolle

2013; Elias 2012; Khatib 2013) The basic thesis of these approaches says that similar to texts, an image provides an abstracted viewpoint mirroring the social, religious and political context of its place and time of origin, and as such is of at least the same value as a source and material of interpretation as a text. Of course, the basic qualitative differences between a text and an image make the use of different methods of interpretation necessary. The essential differences between them may be explained by examining their effect on their target audiences, the readers (or listeners) or viewers. Whereas the use of the written word requires certain acquired skills (for instance literacy in the case of written texts and comprehension abilities in both the case of reading and listening to texts) and an "active approach" or an "intellectual effort," an image induces an immediate and, importantly, emotional reaction in its viewer. This may lead to the impression that "understanding" an image is an easy task, but one could not be farther from the truth. When interpreting an image, the scientist steps on very uncertain grounds. When interpreting a text one can easily rely on a well-defined methodology with an established and serious tradition; by contrast, the methodology of image interpretation is new and its tools have not yet been fully established. Responding to this new challenge is not a simple matter, but it is, as many other new methodological approaches, able to present the object of research in a new or different perspective, which is in most cases the basic criterion to a better understanding and interpretation.

Islam, idols and visual images

Visual representation has always belonged among the sensitive, in certain periods even highly problematic, issues of the Islamic tradition. This was especially true for various depictions of living creatures, or "creatures possessing a soul," which in the Islamic view show human and animal beings (see: Baer 2004; Elias 2012:84-99; Naef 2007:12-22). When taking this basic Muslim viewpoint into account, one could assume that the movements and thinkers of radical Islam, which emerged during the 19th and 20th centuries, further stressed the fundamentals mentioned above, the same as in many other issues, and would pursue forbidding and refusing images as such for their movements and followers. However, the situation is much

less unequivocal. Despite theoretical prohibition, or, more accurately, strict control, one often finds themselves facing an extensive visual culture while examining the various radical and reformist Islamic movements. The aim of this work is to briefly introduce the factors behind these ostensible contradictions, that is to characterize schematically the viewpoints of leaders and thinkers of various Sunni[2] Islamic radical and reformist movements concerning visuality.

There is no direct reference concerning visual depiction or its prohibition in the Qur'an. When discussing the issue, the verses concerning the prohibition of idolatry are the most frequently cited (see mainly 7:148 and 21:51-54, as well as 7:191-198; 16:20-22; 25:3-4; 35:40; 53:23). This is where the explicit prohibition of depicting human and animal figures hails from, since they correspond the most with the forms of the idols. Various expressions are used to describe them in the Qur'an: *awthan* (sing. *wathan*) (22:30; 29:17, 25) "idol," "depiction of God," especially made of metal; *tamathil* (sing. *timthal*) (21:52; 34:13) "picture," "pictorial representation," "statue, "*ansab* (5:90) or *nusub* (5:3; 70:43) especially with the meaning of "sacrificial stone" (for more information see Hawting 1999, Naef 2007:12 Mirza 2005:414-417).

The word *sura* (plur. *suwar*), used in modern standard Arabic for "picture" is mentioned in the Qur'an several times (3:6; 7:11; 40:64; 64:3), but always in connection with Allah as God - Creator and as a meaning of stressing of "forming" or "shaping" as a privilege of God. "He is Allah, the Creator [al-khaliq], the Inventor [al-baqi'], the Fashioner [al-musawwir] (...)" (59:24) In summary, the Qur'an gives an exact and at the same time banning viewpoint concerning visual representation only in relation to idolatry and/or its potential dangers. The opinions offered by the Sunna, *the prophetic tradition, are much more unequivocal*. Numerous references concerning images can be found in the classical *hadith* collections.[3] They can be roughly categorized in the following way:

> (1) The first category includes the hadiths which consider images "unclean" and preventing human obligation (*'ibadat*)

towards God, for instance the practice of prayer (*salat*). This group is well characterized by the prophetic tradition, which claims that "Angels will not enter a house in which there is a dog or there are pictures."[4]

(2) The next category of *hadiths* commenting on the prohibition of images could be characterized by concern over creating images and statues, since this activity itself violates Allah's exclusive right of creation and forming. This group is well characterized by this statement, attributed to Muhammad: "Those who make these pictures will be punished on the Day of Resurrection, and it will be said to them. "Make alive what you have created. But they will be unable to do so."[5]

(3) The following group includes traditions, which allow the portrayal of non-human and non-animal creatures. This field is not free of troubles either, since not all the standpoints concerning plants are unequivocal.

(4) The fourth and last group of hadiths is created by the exceptions of the categories mentioned above. We mean the prophetic tradition concerning the "most favorite" wife of Muhammad, 'A'isha. It is well-known, that 'A'isha became the Prophet's wife at a very young age and therefore Muhammad made an exception and allowed her to perform her daily prayers accompanied by her dolls - anthropomorphic visual representations![6]

As the examples and categories presented above illustrate, the Sunna has a firm and, compared to the Qur'an, very definite view concerning visual representations. Naturally, this theoretical viewpoint changed numerous times in various historical periods and in various geographical settings. It covered or tolerated various practices and ranged from firm prohibition to permissive, even supportive standpoints. However, this short work does not allow detailed elaboration of the issue, therefore attention will be paid to Sunni reform or radical movements in the following part.

Islamists and the visual images

The re-definition of visual representation belongs among the numerous challenges, which the nearly two-hundred year-old reformist Islamist movements need to face in modern times. There exist two fundamentally disparate standpoints concerning visual representation (*taswir*):

> (1) The first was formulated by the Wahhabism, a movement leaning on a neo-Hanbali tradition led by Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792). The early definition of this standpoint opts for a complete refusal and visual representations are, among many other things (for instance the veneration of saints, coffee, smoking etc.) listed among the impermissible innovations (*bid'a*) or things to be destroyed. This standpoint is kept by most modern Saudi religious scholars and various radical groups following the neo-Hanbali or neo-Wahhabi traditions.
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> (2) The second standpoint, which differs significantly, relies on the teachings of the representatives of the Egyptian *Nahda*, especially those of Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) and Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935). This standpoint retains a certain lenience, while keeping in mind the prohibition of idolatry.

This line is followed by the Muslim Brotherhood (*Jama'at al-ikhwan al-muslimin*) and the thinkers and movements connected to it, both in theory and practice. The fairly rich visual culture of, for example, the Palestinian Hamas movement relies on this standpoint as well. In the next part of this article we shall further examine the development and relationship between these two interpretations.

We may begin with the neo-Wahhabi tradition and the practice of individual Neo-Salafi, Jihadi and Takfiri groupings. The interpretation of Islamic doctrine formulated by Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab has changed signifi-

cantly in the past centuries, but despite this, the thought and practice which creates the essential character of Saudi Islam is based upon his teachings. One of the defining official representative organs of this standpoint is the Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Issuing Fatwas (*al-Lajna ad-da'ima li 'l-buhuth al-'ilmiya wa 'l-ifta'*). For a long time, the leader of the Committee was 'Abd al-'Aziz b. 'Abdullah bin Baaz (1909-1999). Its members included Shaykh Salih al-Fawzan (born 1933), Shaykh Muhammad b. Salih al-Uthaymin (1925-2001) and the present leader of the Committee, Muhammad b. Hadi al-Madkhali (born 1931). These key figures of neo-Wahhabi thought have paid a lot of attention to the issue of visual presentations.[7] Their fatwas, despite representing the "hard line," do not refuse the use of images in all cases. It is tolerated as necessary (*daruri*) in cases such as ID photos, pictures in newspapers "mediating information" or portraits on banknotes, but they may never be self-serving.[8]

This standpoint was followed at the turn of the 21stcentury by those radical Jihadi groups which, like al-Qa'ida for instance, rely on many aspects of the neo-Wahhabi tradition. However, there is a field where the thought and practice change completely, namely the audiovisual depiction. The video-messages of Osama bin Laden (1957-2011), Ayman az-Zawahiri (born 1951), and Abu Mus'ab az-Zarqawi (1966-2006) are well-known. How is this possible despite strict refusal and banning of visual representations? The answer is more simple than one may expect: the judgment of modern telecommunication devices and technologies in the neo-Wahhabi tradition is very pragmatic, since they may be viewed as excellent and highly effective tools of the mission (*da'wa*) and therefore serve the common interests of the Muslim community. As for the human depictions occurring in such cases, they are not viewed as images but only as "shadows" of humans or other beings. This standpoint created space not only for the videos carrying ideological messages mentioned above, but also for other film material directly ordered by the Saudi government, such as cartoons presenting the life of the Prophet Muhammad or religious TV channels, for example *al-'Iqra*. In a slightly paradoxical way, these visual forums often feature the vehement opposers of visual representations as well. However, in the past centuries several jihadist movements have turned away from this Wahhabi

tradition marked by the policy of al-Qaeda and, despite applying several restrictions, assigned visuality a much more important place in its propaganda. The most typical example could the so-called Islamic state in Iraq and the Levant (*Da'ish / ISIL / ISIS*), which created its own visual world, hand-in-hand with "classic" video messages and fighter videos (see Winkler and Dauber 2014).[9]

Besides the strict stances mentioned above, there exists a different and much more lenient tradition, which led to the creation of several new reformist-radical movements, which have a rich and fairly diverse visual culture. The Palestinian Islamist movements presents the best and most decorative example, even though such a progressive use of imagery as seen here is definitely not a Palestinian characteristic.

This contemporary moderate Islamist interpretation of pictorial tools can be traced back to the leading personality of the Egyptian *Nahda* movement - Muhammad 'Abduh. He is the main thinker who established this lenient, even approving tradition. He devoted a separate text to the issue, titled "Paintings and sculptures: their usefulness and ruling" (*as-Suwar wa 't-tamathil wa fawa'iduha wa hukmuha*) ('Abduh 1972). ᶜAbduh of course kept in mind the dangers of idolatry hiding behind visual culture, but he kept a stance allowing the use of images, which he called "a form of poetry that one sees instead of hearing" ('Abduh 1972:206).

The second important representative of the *Nahda*, Muhammad Rashid Rida, is not so enthusiastic about visuality. In a writing published in *al-Manar*, the main text of the *Nahda* movement, he systematically names the fields in which he considers visual representations to be allowed. They are the following: (1) "beings possessing a soul" in books, in case their verbal description is not possible or sufficient; (2) in works concerning the natural sciences, especially anatomy; (3) in works concerning military technology (first of all in the case of weapons and topography); (4) in works concerning security policy and spying (cf. Naef 2007:114). In his work titled "The Caliphate or the Great Imamate," Rida sharply commented against the, in his consideration Ottoman, practice of the public depiction of high-ranking

statesmen. This seemingly strict standpoint in many ways approaches those of various radical jihadist groupings, which, not accidentally, often refer to Rashid Rida, and not only on the issue of visual representation.

However, the viewpoints of 'Abduh have found their followers as well. Among these can be found personalities of no smaller significance than Hasan al-Banna' (1906-1949), the founder and first leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. In his pamphlet titled "Our Mission" (*Da'watuna*), Banna' even calls visual propaganda praiseworthy (al-Bannā' 2006:60-62). The later ideologist of Egyptian Islamists, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), shared the same position. The Brotherhood retained this standpoint in later periods as well, not only in Egypt, but also in the organization's branches abroad (e.g. in Syria, Jordan, Palestine etc.) and in movements inspired by them, for instance the aforementioned Palestinian Hamas movement.

This is the basis of the standpoints of Shaykh Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradhawi (born 1926), which are best described in his well-known book "The Lawful and Prohibited in Islam" (*Halal wa haram fi 'l-Islam*) (al-Qaradawi n.d.:48-56). Qaradhawi is one of the most influential and controversial representatives of modern radical Islam. Being of Egyptian origin, he began his activities in the Muslim Brotherhood, but then he was forced into exile. He lives in Qatar, where he regularly explains his viewpoints on issues of all kinds. The most significant discussion among the above-mentioned radical standpoints is connected to Qaradhawi. Several renowned Saudi scholars, including Muhammad Nasr ad-Din al-Albani (1914-1999) and Salih al-Fawzan, have sharply criticized Qaradhawi' s lenient views concerning images. Salih al-Fawzan dedicated an entire book to this issue, "The rules of Islam on Visualization" (*Hukm al-Islam fi 'l-taswir*). However, despite all criticism, Qaradhawi cannot be accused of extensive permissiveness. In fact, he applies the standard Islamic tradition to the challenges of the modern era. His standpoints are moderate, yet still characteristic of a certain "puritanism." A proper example is his view on the use of images, for example portraits of family members, in Muslim households. This is permissible according Qaradhawi; however, it should not be overdone and rational thinking should be kept in mind (al-Qaradawi n.d.:53). Despite

this standpoint, Qaradawi, similarly to Rashid Rida, refuses the public displayal of historical figures or "heroes"[10] (al-Qaradawi n.d.:54). Qaradhawi, together with numerous religious scholars holding moderate views on visual depictions, forbids three-dimensional representations, that is, statues of all kinds (al-Qaradawi n.d.:102).

However, besides scholars who permit the use of visual representations while obeying certain rules, such as Qaradawi, there are ones who pronouncedly support it. One of the most important of them is without a doubt Hasan at-Turabi (born 1932) from Sudan. In his article "The Dialogue of Religion and Art" (*Hiwar ad-din wa 'l-fann*) (at-Turabi 1991) Turabi presents the view that images, photographs, and even sculptures (!) are allowed, as long as they depict the persons appropriately (respectfully, fully dressed etc.). Furthermore, visual culture - together with poetry and theater - should, according to at-Turabi, become the most suitable tool of Islam's fight against the "Western cultural invasion" (at-Turabi 1991:243).

Visual representation and Palestinian political movements

Though not in at-Turabi's decorative way, numerous Islamist organizations view visual representations as the first and most important carrier of their political, religious and ideological messages. Visuality is complex, does not struggle with language or other similar problems, has a direct effect on emotions and is probably the most straightforward method of communication, and therefore it became the basic propaganda tool of several Islamist movements. They opted for the largely pragmatic and indoctrinative use of images and imagery, which in many cases led to the creation of a new, rich and widespread visual culture of radical Islamist movements, which might be "foreign"[11] in its formal elements, but whose content is undoubtedly Islamic. This new world of images became an important and inseparable part of these movements' way of expression and the researchers examining these movements are required to involve the new visual culture in their analyses besides the traditional reading and interpreting of texts.

But the practice of using visual representations and images for spreading a political ideology isn't the invention of the Islamist in the Palestinian context. Leftist and national Palestinian movements invented an impressive visual culture starting from the early 1960s (Ridwan 1992).[12]

The Palestinian issue soon after its genesis became one of the most important multi-dimensional problems of regional and world politics. In the context of the Cold War it was one of the main subjects of the conflict between the West and the East; for the Arab nationalist, it was the "main" issue and, later, from the 1970s on, it also became an important issue for Islamists. Because of this multi-dimensional characteristic, Palestinian visual culture was not only inspired by the visual representation of all those contacts, but also became one of the basic topics in the visual production of all those ideological contexts. It led to the creation of a large and rich Palestinian political visual culture, which became in the 1980s on one of the most established in the Middle Eastern and Muslim contexts (Boullata 2003).

Many prominent authors and artists participated in the Palestinian political visual production: for example, Naji al-Ali (1938-1987), who created the most iconic visual symbol of Palestine, the figure of Handala, a ten year-old boy portrayed from behind, who, according to the author, is the self-portrait of himself at the time of the *an-Nakba* (al-Ali and Sacco 2009). On the other hand, international attention and peace movements also did their part in the further development of Palestinian visual culture. Such artists as the cartoonist Joe Sacco or the graffiti artist Banksy made many iconic visual representations inspired by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which had a great influence on global Palestinian visual culture.

Leftist and nationalist Palestinian movements had the strongest and earliest impact on the development of Palestinian political visual culture. Their inspiration came naturally from the "comrades," for example, from Soviet and Cuban political posters. In this visual context, political posters are the main form of visual representation. Such groups as, for example, the far leftist / communist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (*PFLP*) produced a numerous posters created by Palestinian artists and authors, but

also some by Cuban and other internationalist figures. In that early period in the cultivation of politically motivated images and representations, the PFLP was probably the most active Palestinian leftist movement, but many other posters and images were created by the Fatah, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (*DFLP*), and the PLO. The largest collections of those political posters, mainly from the 1970s and 1980s, are located at the American University of Beirut and in the Arab press archive of the Dayan Center at the University of Tel Aviv. One of the best analyses of these posters is the book by Zeina Maasri, *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War* (Maasri 2009).

Besides political posters, the Palestinian leftist and nationalist movements cultivated their visual representations in magazines and pamphlets, where images play an important rule. Before the brink of the first *Intifada*, political posters and pictures used in printed propaganda were the main form of politically inspired visual representation of Palestinians, but the main symbols and topics (for example, the key as a symbol of *an-Nakba* etc.) of Palestinian visual representations had already been developed in that context and later were adapted by the Islamists as prefabricated building blocks for their visual culture.

The brink of the first Intifada was a turning point also for the visual representation of the Palestinian movements. Besides political posters and images in publications, another form of visual representation started playing a central role in the "visual weaponry" of the Palestinian movements: murals and graffiti (for the Palestinian context see for example, Arnoldi 2015; Gröndahl 2009; Heffez 2013; Olberg and Smith 2013; Steinberg and Oliver 1994). We already had this kind of visual representation in Palestine before the *Intifada*; in the contexts of refugee camps and occupied territories, those verbal and visual sentences "written on the wall" played a central role in the development of the collective national or ideological identities, but during and after the first Intifada their role became more important.

The building of the Israeli "security barrier" started a new chapter in the history of Palestinian murals and graffiti. Such a huge wall naturally pro-

voked many graffiti and mural artists and became one of the main media for visual and verbal political messages for Palestinian and international authors as well.

After technical developments made it possible, the Palestinians adapted many new methods and routes for the creation and spread of their images. All the Palestinian movements made video tapes, CD-ROMs and DVDs, created websites and Facebook accounts, and utilized new technical possibilities for creating text and images as well.

This visual culture rooted in leftist and nationalist ideologies was the cradle and main source of inspiration for Palestinian Islamist visual representations. In some cases this leftist influence can be quite evident, as in the case of the logo of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (*fig. 9*), where the upraised fist is originally one of the main political symbols of the left and the civil rights movement.

The leftist-nationalist context was the main, but not the only, inspiration for the Palestinian Islamists. A second visual inspiration came from a rather unlikely source: the Shi'i based visual representations of the Iranian Islamic revolution. The Iranian revolution of 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran was the beginning of the richest modern-day politically based visual culture in the Middle East (Balaghi and Gumpert 2003; Chelkowski and Dabashi 1999). Post-revolutionary Iranian Islamist visual culture is rooted in the Shi'i tradition, while the Palestinian Muslims belongs to the Sunni branch of Islam, but in this case common political goals were more important than any sectarian division. We can find minor traces of some Iranian or Shi'i visual symbols and signs in the productions of the Palestinian Islamists, for example the red tulip as the symbol of martyrdom, etc. These Iranian influences many times came through the mediation of the Lebanese Hizballah, in spite of the fact that Palestinian perceptions of Shi'i Islam, Iran and Hizballah itself can be very negative (*fig. 35*).

A third and quite important source of inspiration is commerce-many times western visual culture. Like most of us, Palestinian Islamists are living

in a globalized visual world and they don't hesitate to use visual symbols rooted in a western visual context, but transform it into a messenger serving their Islamist ideology (*fig. 16, 35*). Commercial visual symbols such as geographical maps, postcards (Semmerling 2004), Hollywood movies, etc. can be used for this purpose.

The fourth important source, not only for Islamist Palestinian visual representations, is the visual culture of the military and political occupation. Any occupation creates a typical and common visual environment of violence and oppression and symbols like the picture of the M16 submachine gun (*fig. 8*), Israeli made Merkava tanks (*fig. 17*), checkpoints, etc., became a very important part of the visual representations of Palestinian political movements (Hochberg 2015).

The visual representations of the Palestinian Islamic movement were born in this environment and under these influences. Despite being founded relatively late (the two main Islamic movements in Palestine were officially founded in the 1980s), and the humble beginnings of their first visual representations (some of the first posters of Hamas at the beginning of the first *Intifada* where only handmade drawings), the Palestinian Islamic movements have not been prevented from making a quick start. During and after the second Intifada, within the last fifteen years, the Palestinian Islamists have not only equaled the visual representations of the other Palestinian movements in terms of quality, but have significantly taken the leading position in visual propaganda and made their visual representations dominate Palestinian visual spaces.

Text-image relationships in the context of the Palestinian Islamist Movements

To illustrate this issue, let's see some examples of parallels between textual and the visual representations of the most important Palestinian Islamist movement, Hamas. The first quotation is from the Chapter of the Hamas: "Hamas is a mass movement." For a visual representation of this sentence, we can find numerous examples showing the "visual history" and

genealogy, as well as the organizing structure of the movement (*fig. 1 and 2*). The second quotation from the same source is "Hamas is an Islamic movement". We can find several visual images with Islamic symbols, such as the Qur'an (*fig. 3*) or the Ka'ba in Mecca (*fig. 4*) with the members and leaders of the movement. The third quotation says "Hamas is a Palestinian national movement." Visual representations illustrating this are also very common in the propaganda of Hamas. Leaders of the movement pose with the Palestinian national flag and/or the map of "all Palestine" (*fig. 5 and 6*). The concepts of Palestinian nationalism and Islamism are based on the ethos of Jerusalem. In the visual representation of this idea, Jerusalem is almost always symbolized by the Dome of the Rock. We can find this iconic symbol of Palestine in the emblems of all the Palestinian Islamist movements: Hamas (*fig. 7*) and its militant wing the Brigades of the Martyr Izz al-Din al-Qassam (f*ig. 8*),and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (*fig. 9*) and its Phalanges of Jerusalem. The golden dome of this building is also present in the emblems of the Peoples' Resistance Committees (*fig. 10*) and its military wing the Victorious Salah al-Din Brigades (*fig. 11*). We are also able to find many images showing the fighters of the Qassam brigades protecting Jerusalem or coming to protect the Dome of the Rock (*fig. 12*) or the al-Aqsa mosque (*fig. 13*). On some of those images we can directly find the two most important textual representations of the Palestinian Islamists according Jerusalem in the form of slogans claiming, "Jerusalem is ours!"(*fig. 14*) and "Jerusalem, we are coming!" (*fig. 15*). In the texts of Hamas we can also often read the about "the Zionist enemy" or "the Zionist occupation." Generally "Zionism," Israel and Jews are the stereotypic symbols for "the enemy" of the movement. In visual representations, this "Zionism" - which in the ideological context of the Palestinian Islamists doesn't mean the historical Jewish nationalist movement - is often symbolized by Israeli politicians in demonized form. "The favorite Zionist" in the visual representations of Hamas is definitely former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon (1928-2014). We can see him as the "butcher of Sabra and Shatilah" (*fig. 16*) or in different unpleasant positions. On the other hand, the "heroes" of the movement are also visually represented: the leader, commanders, and, most of all, the fighters of the Qassam brigades. In the ideology of Hamas, martyrdom plays a central role and more than

half of the images produced by the movement and used in the propaganda war are portraits of "those who sacrificed their lives in our struggle...". The most typical are the "martyrdom posters" (*fig. 17-21*) of different shapes and forms, but we can also see images of the martyred leaders of the movement "on the way to" (*fig. 22 and 23*) or "in paradise" (*fig. 24 and 25*). The fighters of the Qassam brigades are many times called as the "brave horses, lions or falcons of Palestine..." and the visual images depict them in this zoomorphic form. The pictures of horses (*fig. 26*), lions (*fig. 27*) or falcons (*fig. 28*), or simply fighters with wings (*fig. 29*), are also present in the visual representations of Hamas.

These few examples illustrate that there is no major or minor topic in the ideology of Hamas which is not also represented visually. However, these images are not able to "work properly" without the contributions of computers and cyberspace.

Palestinian Islamists, cyberspace and computer-mediated visual images

The development of Palestinian Islamist visual culture and its increasing role in their modus operandi and propaganda is to a great level due to computer graphics, the Internet and cyberspace. The role of the visual images as new media is far from being the only decisive factor; we cannot underestimate their impact on the content and nature of the visual representations of the Palestinian Islamist movements, as well as the role they play in the ideology and propaganda of the movements.

With the spread of computers, the Internet (at first in the form of internet cafes) and the associated "new media" (see Anderson 2000, 2003, Bunt 2003, 2009, Eickelman and Anderson 2003) had a crucial impact on the Palestinian community, both in their homeland and in the diaspora (Aouragh 2011:75-108), as well as on the visual representations of Palestinian Islamist movements. Computers, the Internet and digitalization offer a full range of possible new vehicles of visual production, from e-mails, to torrents and other freely accessible databases, to various social websites

such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as the never-ending possibilities of electronic visual production. This means that, to lead a widespread visual campaign, one only needs basic technical knowledge, a laptop and Internet access. This makes the creation and spread of information a lot easier, also in the form of basic visual materials, whether online (web-pages, e-mails etc.) or offline (e.g. DVDs and CD-ROMs). These developments offered the Palestinian movements a great opportunity, which they have taken full advantage of. In this process, the speed of digital cameras also played a leading role. We can see many images produced by Palestinian Islamists showing activists of Hamas or the Islamic Jihad posing with cameras while firing a submachine gun or a rifle (*fig. 36 and 37*). In the war of images, the digital camera became an adequate weapon.

The Palestinian Islamist movements started developing their Internet strategies in the second half of the 1990s, when visuality began playing a leading role, and slowly gained their position in cyberspace. Achieving this position was not simple, like everything else connected to the existence of these movements. By the end of the 1990s, and especially during the second *Intifada*, a conflict between the Palestinian authors of such webpages and the Israeli police, as well as sympathizers of both sides, broke out. This conflict, manifested mainly by the hacking of enemy websites and other forms of electronic sabotage, alternately dubbed the "electronic *jihad*" and the "electronic fight against terror," caused the relatively short durability of the webpages of the Palestinian Islamist movements. They continuously move from old disabled addresses to new ones, registered mainly in countries which do not tend to liquidate them, for example Iran and Russia, as a sign of protest against the Israeli government. Despite the fight against them, each movement has not only its own webpages, even if their addresses change frequently, but also its own discussion forums and sections on sites such as YouTube, Facebook and elsewhere. The maintenance, updating and security of these webpages is taken care of by special Internet departments of the individual movements' information offices or by the Internet divisions of their military wings. Similar to the cameramen, the programmers and IT specialists of these movements like to pose in front of their "tools of the *jihad*, "that is their computers, as "cyber fighters" (*fig. 30*

and 31), in the same way as fighters do with their weapons. Visual materials started to accumulate in large numbers on the webpages of the movements, where independent folders were created for them, which led to the creation of extensive online databases of the movements' visual materials. The Internet and computers gained such a crucial position in spreading the message and propaganda of the individual movements that these themselves became an object of visual productions, whether in the case of their propagation (*fig. 32 and 33*) or, for instance, in reminding the public of the increase in the number of members of the most significant Palestinian discussion forum (*fig. 34*).[13]

As mentioned above, computers have significantly simplified not only the circulation, but also the production of visual materials of all kinds, from posters to films. For example, posters during the first *Intifada* were printed in printing stations, spread by means of manual distribution and personal contact from person to person or through mosques and only later, sometimes after years, were they digitized. In the course of the *al-Aqsa Intifada*, this process was reversed: visual materials were first created in digital formats and distributed electronically, and only a small number of them actually got a physical shape. This had a major impact on the quality and amount of visual materials. The simplification of production techniques led to an increase in the number of authors and consequently to the varying quality and content of the visual materials.

This leads to a very important aspect of the visual productions of Palestinian Islamist movements, their authorship. Who are the people who create these visual materials? The issue of authorship is enchanting, simply because it is often untraceable. Older visual materials produced by Palestinian Islamist movements, for example posters or graffiti, are often unsigned, but the visual productions of Palestinian Islamists began later and the individual materials were signed by the organizations and not individuals, if they were actually signed at all. However, the fragmentation of authorship, the spread of electronic visual materials and the huge development of visuality in propaganda and the presentation of Palestinian Islamist movements changed the situation significantly. When taking a closer look at posters and especially at the electronic visual productions which began after the breakout of the *al-Aqsa*

Intifada, one will find a great number of names and signatures. According to the author's experience, almost two thirds of the electronic materials of Palestinian Islamist movements are signed in some way. In the majority of cases, they occur in the form of pseudonyms, but sometimes e-mail addresses (*e.g.fadibox@hotmail.com, zakcall2002@yahoo.com, nour_suns@yahoo.com, Mah_isa@hotmail.com, Guvara1981@yahoo.com etc.*), web-pages (*e.g.www.paldf.net, www.alw3dnet.com, www.izzadden1980.jeeran.cometc.*) or even images. As for pseudonyms, first names (arab.: *ism*, for instance Abbas, Majdi, Muhammad, Ahmad, Mahmud, Hanin etc.) or kunya (Abu 'l-Bara', Abu 'l-Walid, Abu Bilal, Abu'Id, Abu Yahya etc.) are often used. One may encounter "speaking names" (e.g. *Mujahid* - "The fighter of *jihad*, "*Shams al-Islam* - "the Sun of Islam, "*Nur* - "Light" etc.) and *noms du guerre* (e.g. Abu Sayyaf). The signatures are often inscribed using Latin letters and sometimes they are even in English (e.g. *Predator, Action*). The signatures often feature a visual symbol (for instance a rifle, a sword, an eye, a pen or an eagle). The use of such pseudonyms, the Latin alphabet and English names partly reflect a universal Internet identity and are a sign of the individualization of the electronic jihad, even though the chosen names are often a reference to some organization (e.g.'Izz ad-Din, Abu 'l-Qassam or others). Some authors have their own websites, where not only their visual materials (posters, photographs etc.) are found, but often their poetry or pamphlets are published as well. The web and Facebook pages of the three most active authors associated with Hamas, "Wesam,"[14] "Khaleel"[15] and "Eyelash,"[16] are very good examples. The pseudonyms are also a certain security filter, which is not surprising in a Middle East "obsessed" with security and in the overall hostile cyberspace, but they make it quite difficult to identify the authors. They are very distrustful and cautious, not only in publishing visual and other materials, but also in electronic or personal communication. However, despite these obstructions, I managed to create an approximate profile of an "average" author of electronic visual materials, mainly by means of correspondence with certain authors and with the help of secondary sources.

In most cases, they are young men[17] aged thirty-five or younger, with a secondary or tertiary technical education (IT engineering, programming,

webdesign, etc.), or having completed courses with a similar content. They often work as technicians, for example in Internet cafes or in educational institutions. A typical complete profile often includes drawings and photographs, apart from webdesign. They are usually not direct employees of the movements, but sympathizers or only fans of the "Islamic solution," as evidenced by the fact that the same author often creates materials for, for example, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in Palestine. This connection slightly changed after Hamas took power in Gaza. For example, "Eyelash" left anonymity and began publishing under his legal name, Khalid Safi, but such cases were more of an exception. "Eyelash"[18] had published his CV online before; however, it did not include his real name, date of birth or photograph. Most authors remained anonymous, using their pseudonyms and remaining mobile within cyberspace. The authors of the images often view their work as a form of *jihad*, which is comparable to armed fighting.[19] On these grounds, I was able to distinguish about 45-50 different authors. Some have published one or two posters; others, like "Khaleel," put out about 2500 digitally designed posters and dozens of drawings and photographs.

Anonymity makes the identification of the time of creation of individual e-posters and other documents hard, often even impossible. The task is furthermore complicated by frequent visual citations and overlapping within the production as a whole. There exist no limitations within these processes, and commercial, Iranian and many other citations become integrated parts of posters and images of Palestinian Islamic provinces and the overtaking and mobility of certain symbols and signs are traceable as well. These processes and changes are due to the global character of cyberspace and are unlikely to change.

Conclusion

As has been shown by the preceding analysis of Palestinian Islamist movements, their visual representations to a great extent agree with their ideological principles, political goals and aspirations. An amalgamation of verbal ideology and propaganda into a "visual ideology and propaganda" is clearly visible, and the result is at least an equal part of the general representation

of the individual movements and is continuously gaining a stronger position as the distribution of materials is growing ever faster. This was enabled by, (1), a continuous indoctrination of image interpretation within the modern interpretations of Islam concerning the use of images; (2), the application of pragmatic approaches in the use of images as highly effective means of propaganda of the movements' ideology and thoughts, and, (3), commercialization of images especially by means of digitization and the use of electronic tools in their creation and distribution.

As for the process of the indoctrination of image interpretation, its roots can be found in the works of some of the thinkers of the Egyptian *Nahda* movement (e.g. Muhammad ʿAbduh) and especially within the ideology of the movements (e.g. Hamas) which take the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and its founder Hasan al-Banna as their base. Highly relevant is also the work of current radical Muslim thinkers, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi or Hasan at-Turabi. These lines disapprove of the strict Wahhabi rules that condemn or tightly regulate the use of images and have created a legitimate space for visual representations, even of figurative characters (human and animal beings). This happened with the aim of following specific ideological or political goals, but that does not change anything about the fact that images and visual culture became an indispensable part of the ideological armory of these movements. In some cases, for example, in the case of several Palestinian Islamist movements, this process has gone so far that the main protagonist of the visual representation has become the pictorial of a human, that is the representation of a human being, which the classical Islamic interpretation finds the most troublesome, has become an everyday part of the movements' propaganda. However, since these radical Islamist movements often created their ideological base around a certain "cult" of leaders or "martyrs," their visual representation copies these ideological schemes.

In the case of pragmatic approaches to the use of images as a highly effective means of propagating the movements' ideology and thoughts, a basic fact applies: images as an ideal carrier of a direct and often emotional message perfectly fit the needs and goals of these movements, since they want to address their potential audience directly, without language or other

barriers (literacy and understanding of written texts), with the aim of creating mainly an emotional reaction. In this sense, images are much closer to live speeches - a favorite verbal tool of these movements' propaganda - than written texts (pamphlets or books). One should not forget that the understanding of a written text is, compared to verbal expression or images, a much more difficult and complex task. Images, unlike books, allow an effective distribution of highly simplified ideological messages. As a plus, the ideology of radical Islamist movements is rarely significantly sophisticated; however, even if the situation were different, images could still serve the function of the first and primary level of propaganda, ideological indoctrination or struggle.

The third prerequisite of the creation and development of a visual culture of radical Islamist movements is the technological factor associated with the commercialization of imagery. As was mentioned several times above, before the era of modern technologies of reproduction (e.g. press, photography, television, computers, digitization etc.), images were a luxurious and relatively inaccessible product. That means, that no matter how effective they were as carriers of any messages, they were useless due to their low accessibility. This changed rapidly in the twentieth century, especially in its last decade, when the spread of computers and digitization became a true accelerant of the world's global visualization. Computers and the Internet provided opportunities not only for simple reproducing, but they became unprecedentedly effective tools of the distribution of these images. So the digitalized images of Islamists occupied a pivotal position in the cyberwars and propaganda of many radical Islamist movements and definitely did so in the cases of Palestinian Hamas or the Islamic Jihad movement in Palestine. In this context we shall remember the almost forgotten worlds of Marshall McLuhan, who - in the context of television - said that "the medium is the message" (1994:7-17). It means that the medium - in this case digitalized images - has changed the content and sometimes even the essence of the message - in our case radical Islamist ideology.

Due to these factors we have witnessed a massive "visual boom" of certain radical Islamist movements at the beginning of the 21st century.

These movements have not only created their own images and other visual representations with the aim of spreading their ideological message and propaganda, but they have connected them with an integrated visual culture. This applies especially to the visual culture of individual movements, for example Hamas, but one may also observe the creation of a larger visual area, for instance regional or national (e.g. Palestinian), or ideological, based on an ideological connection (e.g. between Iran and the Islamic Jihad movement in Palestine), where certain rules and patterns apply and exchange and citation of symbols or even of entire visual constructions takes place. A certain "emancipation" of images in relation to texts is occurring. While the "classical" Islamic tradition has been based on texts and their interpretation, some Islamist movements have begun a wide use of visual representations as well. This practice of using images (too) led to a great extent to what might be called a "pictorial turn," using the words of T. J. W. Mitchell (1994:11). For this "Islamist pictorial turn," the "digital turn" described earlier worked as a powerful catalyst. Despite the fact that Mitchell elaborated his theses in a Western context, several aspects of his iconology (see also Mitchell 1986;2005), which he applied mainly to Christianity, can be, with certain modifications, applied to Islam or Judaism.

However, in the case of radical Islamist movements, one may not say that the images can fully substitute for texts, due to the very recent shift from texts to images. The issue is more about the interconnection of texts and images, in which both components have equal positions. As seen in the examples analyzed in this work, the text is often an integral part of the image and the same applies vice versa. However, this "equal position" means a significant shift, and the process of a "pictorial turn" in the case of these Islamist movements is without a doubt one of the most dynamic and fascinating changes that we witness in the current Muslim world. Researchers focusing on present changes in the contemporary Middle East, Islam and Islamism should definitely not underestimate them.

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Appendix - Image Gallery

Figure 1. Image showing the "visual history" and genealogy as well as the organizing structure of the Hamas movement. (author: Abu'l-'Izz, source: http://www.hamasonline.org)

Figure 2. Image showing the leaders of Hamas Ahmad Yassin and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rantisi with the fighters of the Qassam Brigades. (author: Khaleel, source: http://www.khaleelstyle.com)

Figure 3. The female activists of Hamas with the copies of Qur'an and with the gest showing "there is no god but God".
(author: Wesam, source: http://www.palistinianforum.net)

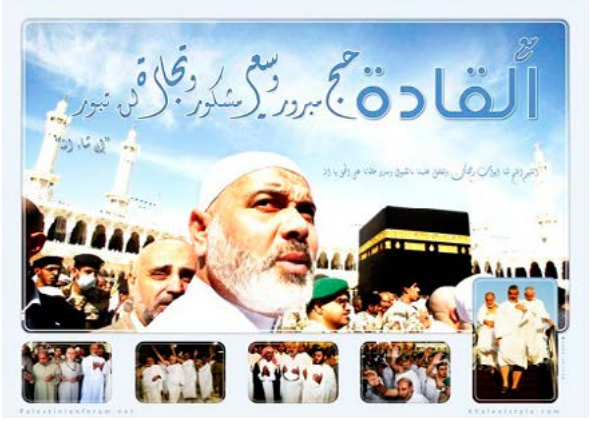

Figure 4. Isma'il Haniya, the "prime minister" of Hamas on the great pilgrimage in Mecca with the Ka'ba.
(author: Khaleel, source: http://www.khaleelstyle.com)

Figure 5. The leader of Hamas Khaled Meshal with the Palestinian flag and the map of "all Palestine". (author: anonym, source: http://www.paldf.net/forum)

Figure 6. The spiritual leader and founder of Hamas sheikh Ahmad Yassin prostrated with the Palestinian national flag.
(autor: Abu 'l-Walid, source: http://www.paldf.net/forum)

Figure 7. The emblem of the Hamas movement.

Figure 8. The emblem of Brigades of the martyr 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam.

Figure 9. The emblem of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine.

Figure 10. The emblem of the Peoples resistance committees.

Figure 11. The emblem ofthe Victorious Salah al-Din Brigades.

Figure 12. The fighters of the Qassam brigades protecting the Dome of the Rock. (author: dwarq, source: http://www.alaqsa-online.net)

Figure 13. The fighters of the Qassam brigades protecting theal-Aqsa mosque. Poster to the 19th anniversary of the founding of Hamas. (author: Khaleel, source: http://www.khaleelstyle.com)

Figure 14. "Jerusalem is ours" and "No to the third temple", a fighter of the Qassam brigades "protecting" the Haram al-sharif in Jerusalem. (author: anonym, source: http://www.almotlaqa.ps)

Figure 15. "Jerusalem, we are coming!" a fighter of the Qassam brigades "coming to" Jerusalem. (author: Wameed, source: http://www.hamasonline.org)

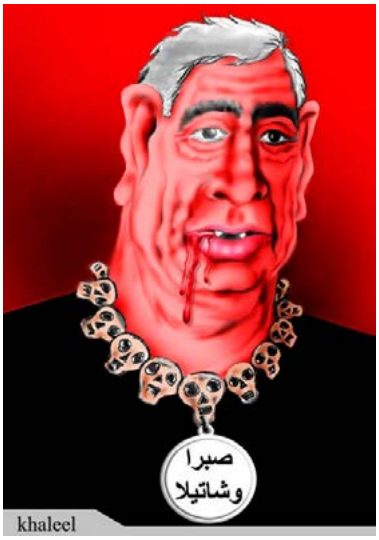

Figure 16. Ariel Sharon as the "butcher of Sabra and Shatilah". (author: Khaleel, source: http://www.khaleelstyle.com)

Figure 17. The "martyrdom poster" of 'Abd al-Karim Bikroun from the Qassam brigades. (author: anonym, source: http://www.almotlaqa.ps)

Figure 18. The "martyrdom poster" of Muhammad al-Ghulfrom the Qassam brigades. (author: AbuMukin, source: http://www.palestinegallery.com)

Figure 19. The allegoric "martyrdom poster" of Raid Jalil Musafrom the Qassam brigades. (author: al-Bara', source: http://www.almotlaqa.ps)

Figure 20. The allegoric "martyrdom poster" of Ibrahim Abu 'r-Rabb from the Qassam brigades. (author: AbuNabit al-Hamsawi, source: http://www.almotlaqa.ps)

Figure 21. The "martyrdom poster" of Muhammad 'Ali al-Ghalbanfrom the Qassam brigades. (author: anonym, source: http://www.almotlaqa.ps)

Figure 22. A poster about the assassination of sheikh Ahmad Yassin of Hamas. (author: Abu 'l-'Izz, source: http://www.almotlaqa.ps)

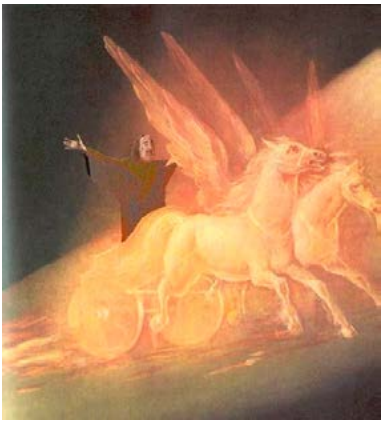

Figure 23. Sheikh Ahmad Yassin of Hamas "on the way to paradise". Yassin is riding to the paradise on a carriage like the Helios or prophet Elijah. (author: anonym, source: http://www.paldf.net/forum)

Figure 24. Sheikh Ahmad Yassin of Hamas "in paradise". (author: Khaleel, source: http://www.khaleelstyle.com)

Figure 25. "To the garden of paradise", sheikh Yassin and other "martyrs" of Hamas as "the sunflowers of paradise".
(author: Abbas, source: http://www.palistinianforum.net)

Figure 26. "The brave horses of Palestine".
(author: anonym, source: http://www.almotlaqa.ps)

Figure 27. "Qassami lions". (author: Khaleel, source: http://www.khaleelstyle.com)

Figure 28. A fighter of the Qassam brigades with an eagle or falcon as a symbol of brewery. (author: Hamas, source: http://www.almotlaqa.ps)

Figure 29. A fighter of the Qassam brigades with wings from Gaza. (author: mif min, source: http://www.paldf.net/forum)

Figure 30. A photography of an activist "cyber fighter" of the Phalanges of Jerusalem, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad in Palestine working on computer. (author: Jihadi media, source: http://saraya.ps)

Figure 31. Two activists "cyber fighters" of the Phalanges of Jerusalem, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad in Palestine working on computer. (author: Jihadi media, source: http://saraya.ps)

Figure 32. Poster advertising the new website of the Qassam brigades: http://www.alqassam.ps

Figure 33. Poster advertising the multiple websites of Islamic Jihad in Palestine: http://saraya.ps

Figure 34. A poster reminding the public of the raise of the number of members of the most significant Palestinian discussion forum. (author: Khaleel, source: http://www.paldf.net)

Figure 35. An example of the influence of popular visual culture on the visual representation of the Palestinian Islamist: Hassan Nasrallah of Hizballah as "a leader of the gang" in the style of the pirate Jack Sparrow from the movie The pirates of the Caribbean. (author: Wesam, source: https://ar-ar.facebook.com/wesamstyle2)

Figure 36. A digital poster showing the cameraman of the Qassam brigades "in action". (author: Information office of the Qassam brigades, source: http://www.alqassam.ps)

Figure 37. A photography showing the cameraman of the Islamic Jihad in Palestine in the fields. (author: Jihadi media, source: http://saraya.ps)

Notes

[1] Cited from: http://www.alqassam.ps/vb3 (no longer active).

[2] Due to the significantly different standpoints and practices of Shia Islam, this work only deals with the Sunni interpretation and practice.

[3] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 1: 8: 419, 426; 2: 23: 425; 3: 34: 318, 428, 440, 659; 4: 54: 447, 449; 4: 55: 570, 571; 5: 58: 213; 5:59: 585; 7: 62: 110; 7: 63: 259; 7: 72: 833-844; 8: 73: 130, 151; 9: 93: 646-647; *Sahih Muslim* 24: 5252, 5246, 5249, 5253, 5258, 5262, 5264-576.

[4] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 7: 72: 833 and elsewhere.

[5] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 7: 72: 835 and elsewhere.

[6] *Sahih al-Bukhari* 8: 73: 151 and elsewhere. Among others, this precedent enabled the creation of the "Muslim Barbie doll," distributed under the name *Fulla*.

[7] See CREED Pictures and Photographs n.d.

[8] Shaykh Abdul-Aziz bin Baaz: "The Islamic Ruling Concerning Tasweer" (see Islamic Law 2006).

[9] As an example: http://alplatformmedia.com/vb/index.php

[10] This is probably closely connected to the cult of Gamal 'Abd an-Nasir and his followers in the post of Egyptian president, who harshly stood up to the Muslim Brotherhood several times.

[11] E.g. rooted in leftist, nationalist political or popular visual culture (see *fig. 23* and *35*).

[12] For examples see Palestine Poster Project Archives 2009 and Jafet Library n.d.

[13] See for example Paldf.net n.d.

[14] See WesamStyle 2010.

[15] http://www.khaleelstyle.com (no longer active); KhaleelStyle 2011.

[16] http://www.eyelash.ps (no longer active).;

[17] However, women are present as well, and not only the famous "Umayya Jaha," but others, as documented for instance by the signature "Haneen."

[18] See: http://www.khaledsafi.com;

[19] Based on e-mail communication with authors.