

# The Role of Photographs and Photography in Representation of Martyrdom Mythology in the Murals of Tehran\*

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**Abstract** | After Imposed war (Iran-Iraq War) had ended, it was needed to inform the new generation with the Sacred Defense (Iran-Iraq war) heroes. One of the ways for achieving this aim was painting murals around the city so that ordinary people could see martyrs frequently and remember them. Displaying and visualization of martyrs on the walls of Tehran started from 80's, and it has been continued up to now. After two decades the war ended, most of the murals of martyrs, were following new realism to images of martyrs communicate with audiences without any false interpretations. In this style, the martyr is not of above earth creature but the believable human that is present in the urban landscape. In this way of visual representation, the photographs remained from martyrs have an important role. In this article with reviewing causes and context of usage of war photographs in murals, the relation between moral and city landscape of Tehran studied.

**Keywords** | The wall painting, War, Urban landscape, Photography, Martyr.

**Introduction** | One of the most important streams in the contemporary art of Iran is the art of representation of values in the Iran-Iraq war. In the Iran-Iraq war, many artists display conflict with their spiritual and sacred beliefs. Artists with the help of sacred symbols tried to show war as a jihad for God and represent as a holy war.

Analysis of Sacred Defense artists' work can create grounds for reproduction and representation of discourse to understand historical and contemporary events. During the war, the purpose of creating these works was obtaining legitimization, holiness and build enthusiasm to participate in this historical events. At the end of the war, artists started to reproduce discourses, signs of Sacred Defense values and elements to display, learning, remembering and sharing the experience of war with the new generations.

In fact, by looking at the murals, we can find cultural and socio-religious discourses that cultural managers confirmed for the community. In this article, Critical Discourse Analysis used to understand to an unknown culture that should consider in wall paintings and photos. This article can apply for planning to produce or restoration of murals. In this article, Tehran as the capital and center of culture, politics and the arts of Iran chosen as our example evaluated. This Article describes and analyzes some of the murals drawn in the next two decades of war between Iran and Iraq.

## Hypothesis

Photographs, as one of the best tools has a vital role in representing sacred defense in a realistic timeframe of two decades after the war.

Background of murals after the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

The artistic community during the revolution faced with several fundamental changes, developments, and changing values. Artists who experienced social and political changes after the revolution-tested different styles. Revolutionary artists and cultural officials were defined, art is not considered to belong museums and galleries but to the public and also to all the various social classes. Graffiti's at the beginning of the revolution might be considered the first step of making murals. A spontaneous movement among the people to expressing their objection with the help of simple images and manuscripts. The majority of these works are staying away from realism and represent the symbol for showing myths of the holy war. In these Pictures, the signs of meaning in discourses have the ability to reproduce their age. Staying away from realism and give the audience an opportunity to ignore the evils such as murder, destruction and irritability, an opportunity for war-picturers to see war as Utopia and that fits with the martyr's thoughts of early Islam. It is the same approach in "Reeva ate Fath" by adding a divine voice narrating to create a surreal atmosphere, a space in which the forces of good picturing evil forces because of the defense of the Holy Land that has chosen by world Savior. In the meantime, continuing a holy war until

victory considered as a social decision and the social context is the production and reproduction of Sacred Art.

After the war, showing the image of those who had sacrificed their lives for the country and the revolution was particularly important in urban spaces and lots of walls in Tehran, as the nation's capital, was adorned with portraits of martyrs. These works were kept the distance from mysterious abstract and expressionist style murals during the war. Most of the painters chose a style that closes to realism or popular realism to show martyrs Pictures of martyrs without false interpretations to communicate with the audience. In this new approach, the martyr is not an extraterrestrial but a believable human being that exists in society. Paintings without any interpretation or adding of what existed in the world. Here the artist is just trying to portray a martyr better. In this realist paintings, photographs have the unique role; because of the nearest and most similar object to the image of a martyr, the photograph of martyr's portrait.

This type of wall paintings in the city are trying to remember the martyrs and can say photographs of martyrs are the very efficient tool in building this relationship. Simplicity, common language and the way of representing the Pictures on the walls of the city, helps the martyr to show himself to the audience at a glance. These realist paintings are in contrast with previous styles of Iran murals, so that the main features of realistic murals, are their social acceptability.

## Decorations as Text

Artists with using symbols and signs of the Iran-Iraq war began to represent a religious and mythical ePic. This representation was made with the help of familiar elements and between the trends of the post-war murals, it has found a special place. Realistic paintings of martyrs after the Iran-Iraq War as a movement of cultural values, social and artistic portraits represent the martyrs, in this part of the article are examined. Staff photos of martyr (Pic. 4) are a common theme in many of these works. It was society tends to represent realistic images of martyrs and display their Pictures in the urban landscape, feel the need to converge to show to the community after the war. At that time, the national-religious community values needed to represent. Many young people in everyday life not concerned with war and martyrs and its values that have no place in society or at least in life problems of the society where the individual is left to remind ePic of warriors as it is an extraterrestrial being. Realistic frescos give citizens in their daily lives experience with the martyrs. Convergence theme of murals from personal photos of the martyr is the cause of identification for the audience. Painters are painting according to their interests, thinking, time of creation, discourses and even dependence on the centers of power, drawing up the single subject in different ways. That's why different painters may give different reality nodes. Maybe not all the artists in this style could be fitted in one group.

By browsing murals drawn in this period shows that some of

these artists are painters from armed forces or propaganda division of troops. Other artists belonged to the younger generation who have a different view to defend and its values that the subject of the paintings is preventing to be repetitive.

In some paintings, only the portrait of a martyr, painted. In some of them, several separated personal photos depicted, and some of the personal photos have been combined but unrelated to each other. But in these paintings, there is not a logical connection between personal photos. For example, in Pic. 2 personal photographs of five martyr painted without regarding the rules of composition, and lack of attention to the fact that the light source must be the same in painting, which is one of the worst writers has observed.

In some paintings, martyrs of a family painted, that is potentially the most influential works

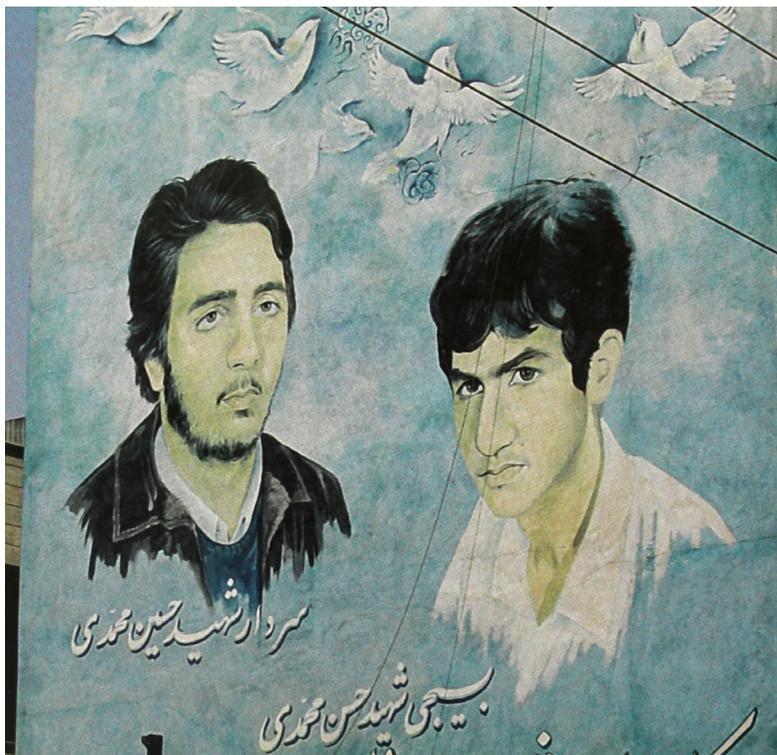
A few of the paintings, painted from the Pictures of the body of the martyr after martyr demonstrated. One of the most famous murals implemented on the Modares highway. Farewell of two or three years old child when the father's face is out of his shroud. The child had a rose in her hand and kept it in front of the nose of her dad that the Father could smell the scent of the flower. Perhaps the only memory of child from her father without the image is impossible to remember. In other words, " Martyrdom is meaningless without memorialization and memorialization is not possible without a photograph" (Varzi, 62 :2006).



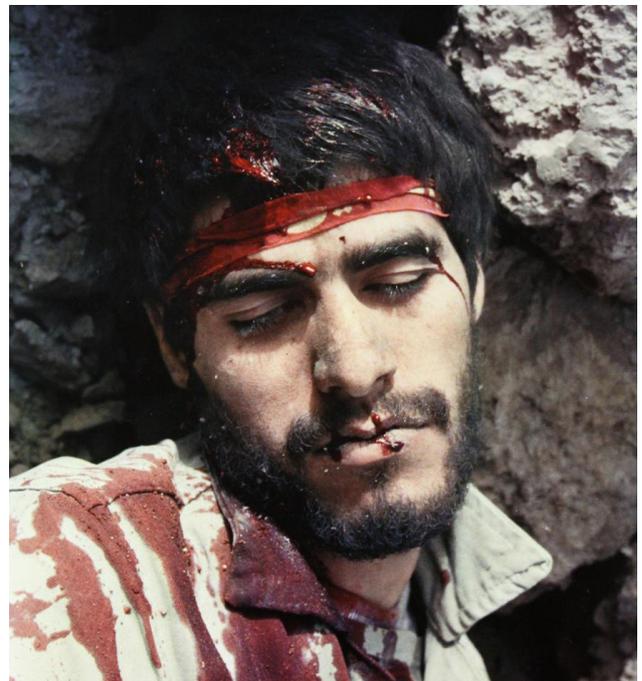
Pic1: A number of staffing photos with unacceptable composition (due to the lack of compliance with each other's face size and improper composition). Source: Ghazban-pour, 2010.



Pic3: the Picture of the martyr and his child which was painted on the Modarres highway. Source: Ghazban-pour, 2010.



Pic2: mural of Martyr Brothers. Source: Ghazban-pour, 2010.



Pic 4: tMartyrdom and redemption.photo by: Ehsan rajabi. t Source: Rajabi & Asgtari, 2015.

The photo which used for this painting is not very close to reality. But the Picture of martyr taken by Ehsan Rajabi is one of the photos that have reproduced in murals and posters is very close to reality. The beauty and harmony of the colors of headband's martyr and fresh blood on martyr's face, multiply the power of the image.

Some paintings from the time of dispatch of soldiers to the frontline painted from documentary photos. For example, one of the murals of Pasdar forces parade, ePic space determined that period by looking at the soldiers, hands tied on their arms and walking mode, displayed. Soldiers wear green clothes with red headbands, written on headbands with yellow color created a vivid and dynamic image.



Pic 5: Soldier's green Uniform, red headband and yellow paintings on the headbands.  
Source: Ghazban-pour, 2010.

Some wall paintings show the martyrs walking or sitting in military uniform with a weapon (based on documentary photos). In these paintings, we are not seeing any sign of frontline conflicts and image martyr is in peace. Background of murals also divided into several groups:

1. A team has cheerful colors and geometric shapes that will help to attract the eyes of the beholder.
2. Vast plains with plants which have symbolic meanings such as cypress tree and flowers (mostly tulips and roses). The buoyancy of meanings that represent roses as a sign of love. That is the purpose of a word or an image that represents a different meaning and these codes used in various cultures and languages (Hall, 2003:24-25). Roses in frescoes of sacred defense is a symbol of love of the country. As in the English culture, the field poppy is a symbol of World War soldiers who died in action, and tulip flower is the symbol of martyr and martyrdom in Iran.
3. Some images depict martyrs among the clouds. There are elements that in some paintings, plaques, boots, flags, helmets and headband with writings like Yaa Hussein, Yaa Saarollaah, Yaa Zeynab (Kafshchyan Moghaddam & Ruyan, 2008:109).
4. Some leaders of the revolution can be seen in the background

of the image and in some of the paintings the central part of the Pictures are leaders of the revolution. Given the role of Karbala discourses in society, the image of revolutionary leaders is as one of the most important elements in these paintings.

Texts may were written in these Pictures, divided into several groups: part of the team quoted martyrs will. In some paintings only name of the martyr written. A group of texts also are from statements state officials, and it is about the memory of the martyrs should not forget.

These documents transfer the message directly to the audience. Some of the texts are short and succinct, and some passages are long. If we consider that, many of these paintings have painted on the side of the highways, and many people passing by these Pictures in their cars, long texts are not readable, and Short versions have more power and influence than long texts.

### Social Contexts and Dominant Discourses

War can be considered one of the most influential events of a community. It has effects such as identity, stabilizing and integrating our or the destruction of society either physically (loss facility) or otherwise of such sweeping changes the population pyramid and the family (Abazari, 2002 :32) to change major institutions of society such as Government. In Islam, jihad in Allah's way is a religious duty. In the Qur'an: " Picht those who do not believe in Allah or the Last Day. Who does not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture - [picht] until they give the jizyah willingly while they are humbled? ". In another verse to the good news to God's warriors are told: But the Messenger and those who believed with him fought with their wealth and their lives. Those will have [all that is] good, and it is those who are successful. Allah has prepared for them gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide eternally. That is the great attainment. The war in Islam is called Jihad. The art of war depends on the social context of the creation of these works. Artists using war as sacred symbols as it introduced to the community and the war presented as a divine gift for human perfection and closeness to their God. This way of representation of war itself was a reproducing discourse that its interpretability will be from by recognizing the social context.

In the Iran-Iraq war, Islamic war (Jihad) and the defense represented. In Islam but all wars are forbidden except Jihad and it is pichting in the cause of God. Jihadists' task is confronting the infidels and pagans in the way of God. Prophet Muhammad also fought in God's cause with the unbelievers and infidels.

During the war, the concept of Jihad and imposed war are highlighted and by calling this war as a Holy War, people walk into the battlefield (Gieling, 1999:1). After the war, the discourse holy defense became more dominant. That's why in some wall paintings of the war, good versus evil and

good against evil drawn. Goods are, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and the army of Satan are the Iraqi troops and to show the Iraqi army they used negative symbols and surreal contexts. While during the post-war defense discourse became bold and display of the enemy removed from the paintings and painters consecrate on the Iranian army to show how they defended the sacred soil, and Ba'ath army withdrew from the paintings.

Reproducing the symbols the early period of the Islamic Revolution and the imposed war on Iran's society context continued as the dominant discourse in the community, but the purpose and goal of creating these works changed. In wartime duty of artists were to produce works of art to stimulate people to participate in the fight by using religious symbols but decades after the end of the Iran-Iraq war the revolutionary artworks are to survival and continuity of values (Sreberny, 2013: 160-205).

Social developments, culminating in the second decade after the war ended. After the war, except for basic needs and spiritual needs should be provided and young people needed to learn from the glorious past. Realism from the frescoes came to country's artistic and academic spaces. However, due to the impact of Western pictorial art and Photorealism in the art community and art community, there are differences between modern style and academic realist style. But the Structure of awareness in both styles are noticeable, and if we consider the primacy of famous realism murals, we can say popular realism is one of the elements affecting the poetic realism in paintings. In the second decade of the war, new ideas in the field of religion among the Shiite thinkers challenged. Of course, governments attempt to join the global market as well as many traditional notions of revolution (such as self-sufficiency) criticized. The Internet and social media are also made more difficult to control the mindset of citizens. All of these of factors catalyzed social change in Iran. As far as the Iranian authorities spoke of cultural invasion and youth crisis and murals were one of many ways to deal with this aggression, became the center of more attention. For these reasons, walls in the wall of cities painted more. These paintings were not only for the government, and the public welcomed these Pictures in the city and popularity of

**Conclusion** | Murals with the context of a martyr, are present in the city in every historical period, with a selection of different modes of representation, establish a relationship with the social space. In the period of two decades after the war, because of the need to recognize the national heroes and war, mural painters to display martyrs chose a style close to realism or simplified realism. A photograph is the nearest and most similar to the image of a saint, will be a very useful tool to making the connection between ordinary people and values of Iran-Iraq war, because people have seen saints in their daily lives and remembering them. Realist paintings give citizens an experience to be with martyrs in daily living. Using martyr photos martyr in this Picture makes a believable human being without false interpretations, the mural communicates with the audience. The only manipulation painter does, is trying to portray better the image of a martyr than the reality. Realist paintings affect the collective memory of the community and

the style should be addressed (Kafshchyan Moghadam, 2006: 25 ). Many of the painters who painted in this style, those who are not academic artists and some of them painted cinema screen advertisements. In contrast, painters during the war were academic painters or those affiliated with the Art Institute of Islamic Propaganda Organization. One of the most important debates affecting wall paintings and an entire culture of Iran formed is Islamism and Anti-Western culture. Although some of the artistic works of the revolution, influenced by western art, revolutionary artists continue to claim they are against western culture. That's why the revolutionary-Islamic painters supported by the government for years and these artists were the dominant power in Iran art world (Idem: 18). After the war and change of the political discourses because of socio-political change, the power of the revolutionary painters decreased. For this reason, abstract expressionist paintings replaced with favorite realistic style. Realist discourse approved by middle class and the working class because of its simplicity of Pictures as a valuable dialogue between the new generations by revolution age. Murals caused a peaceful juxtaposition between martyr discourses and everyday life. Realistic paintings of martyrs in the city show discussion of "living martyr." Iranian society and even foreign tourists have the opportunity to experience to be next to the martyrs and to have dialogue and witness the history preserved in different times and places. In fact, these realist paintings affect the community's collective memory. Realistic paint discourses with the help of simple structure with a broad audience established the intimate connection. Mural discourses of martyrs are trying to make the audience to think (Sreberny, 2013 :219).

Karbala discourses in the background of some of the murals with themes such as persecution, martyrdom, thirst, sacrifice, dedication, love of religion, the triumph of truth over falsehood, salvation and so on appear.

This point of view, from the beginning of the war, has been dominated by the official media until this day. Symbols and signs that in some paintings included are understandable to the public (Sreberny & Ali Mohammadi, 1994: 86-87).

to Discourses of realistic murals with the help of its simple structure can establish the intimate dialogue with a broad range of audiences.

Simplicity in the manner the Pictures represented in the paintings of martyrs helps ordinary people have seen and learned from saints in their daily lives.

Realist murals are in contrast with the other styles of wall paintings in Iran, The main feature of realistic murals is their social acceptability.

Although many of these works belong to a particular time (holy defense), by representing the martyrs it made able to experience history and for the viewer by providing straightforward and understandable works (in form and content) shall be invited to participate in a social dialogue.

At the end of this article, we should say, a discourse of war due to the stable relationship with the audience, regarding the aesthetics, became more acceptable.

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