

# NAVIGATING LOSS AND EXISTENTIAL ANGUISH IN SOCIAL MEDIA: RELIGIOUS STRIFE AND GRIEF IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

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**Abstract:** Conflict and war give rise to grief and feelings of loss experienced by the victims. This feeling of grief and loss is no exception in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The prolonged warfare results in anxiety about death and raises concerns about the uncertain fate of humanity. This research elucidates how religious beliefs alleviate the anxiety about death and cope with the grief caused by conflict and war. Questions addressed in this study explore the influence of religious beliefs towards the perceptions of death, the helplessness of life, and existential efforts against the sorrow of loss. The researcher examines consistent social media accounts expressing the impact of the Israel-Palestine conflict, namely the Instagram accounts Eye on Palestine (@eye.on.palestine), Gaza journalist Motaz Azaiza (@motaz\_azaiza), and another Gaza journalist Anas Ali Al-Syarif (@anasjamal44). The findings of this research indicate that religious beliefs can alleviate death anxiety, aid in coping with loss, and enhance acceptance of destiny. Through religious tenets, death due to war is interpreted as martyrdom, thus fostering optimism in accepting fate. Furthermore, religious beliefs impact a strong belief in positive compensation in the afterlife, giving rise to a narrative of optimism in navigating life amid the turmoil of war.

**Keywords:** Israeli-Palestinian Conflict; Grief; Religious Strife; Philosophy of Religion.

## Introduction

The conflicts and wars occurring in Palestine evoke grief and a sense of loss experienced by the victims. The recent conflict that erupted on October 7, 2023, has resulted in a significant loss of life. By the 83<sup>rd</sup> day of the war, on December 28, 2023, the Israel-Palestine conflict had claimed the lives of more than 21 thousand Palestinian civilians, with 21,320 reported dead in the Gaza Strip and 304 individuals in the West Bank. Beyond the loss of lives, as per data released by the Gaza Ministry of Health, approximately 1.9 million people, or 85% of Gaza's population, are forced to live in displacement, facing limitations in essential food supplies. The majority of refugees are grappling with malnutrition and even a shortage of drinking water.<sup>1</sup>

The conflict between Israel and Palestine cannot be separated from religious factors. The presence of two contrasting cultures within each religious tradition, namely the teachings of holy war and the peaceful afterlife (which encompasses teachings and values of compassion), makes the role of religion crucial in conflict resolution efforts.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, with the conflict between Israel and Palestine, religion, often viewed by some observers as a triggering factor and a significant impediment to peace efforts between the two parties, can paradoxically be considered a crucial element in building peace. There are numerous humanistic values in the teachings of Judaism and Islam, emphasising compassion for fellow humans. The teachings of compassion in both religions need to be emphasised to each party, hoping that religious doctrines can serve as a starting point for reconciliation efforts.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of the role of religion in the Israel-Palestine conflict, as outlined by previous researchers, serves as a crucial foundation for this study. This research aims to interpret how faith in religion mitigates the anxiety of death and addresses the grief caused by conflict and war by analysing public perceptions on social media.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on data from United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) compiled from the Ministry of Health Gaza and the Israeli Government, accessed from <https://www.unocha.org/news/todays-top-news-occupied-palestinian-territory-syria-sudan> (accessed January 26, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> E. Boulding, "Two Cultures of Religion as Obstacles to Peace," *Zygon* 21, no. 1 (1986): 501-18.

<sup>3</sup> Hassan, "Importance of Religion in Israel and Palestine Conflict."

Many studies on the conflict between Israel and Palestine predominantly elaborate on the role of religion in conflict resolution efforts, including the research conducted by Shiekh Qazafee Hassan,<sup>4</sup> Acheoah Ofeh Augustine,<sup>5</sup> and A. Perliger.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, research on public perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict tends to explore the perspectives of outsiders, exemplified by the study conducted by Aarsal Imtiaz et al.,<sup>7</sup> Berdal Aral,<sup>8</sup> and Lea Stahel and Christopher Cohrs.<sup>9</sup> Drawing upon this data, conducting research on the perceptions of social media Instagram users, particularly insiders, regarding the role of religion in the Israel-Palestine conflict becomes critically important.

The Israel-Palestine conflict, one of the most enduring and globally impactful conflicts, evokes profound grief and a deep sense of loss among its victims. The recent escalation on October 7, 2023, underscores the ongoing nature and intensity of this struggle, which continues to claim lives and displace countless individuals. The importance of addressing this conflict can be understood from several fundamental reasons across various aspects: academic, social, and historical. Academically, the ongoing crisis in Gaza, with its overwhelming impact on a predominantly young population, highlights the critical need for academic exploration into social conflicts. Thus, this emphasizes the importance of understanding how such tragedies shape young people's futures, particularly in education. The fact that many of the victims are students further underscores the necessity of addressing how conflict disrupts educational opportunities and future prospects. Socially, the situation in Gaza is dire, with millions facing life without basic necessities like power, clean water, and enough food. From my perspective, this is a crisis that demands more than

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<sup>4</sup> Shiekh Qazafee Hassan, "Importance of Religion in Israel and Palestine Conflict," *International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences* 6 (2016): 84-92.

<sup>5</sup> Acheoah Ofeh Augustine, "Israel-Palestine Impasse: The Unidentified Panaceas," *Addaiyan Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2019): 47-64.

<sup>6</sup> A. Perliger, "Terrorism and Religion: Palestine," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2019).

<sup>7</sup> Aarsal Imtiaz et al., "Taking Sides: Public Opinion over the Israel-Palestine Conflict in 2021," in *In Proceedings of the International Workshop on Social Sensing (SocialSens 2022): Special Edition on Belief Dynamics* (2022).

<sup>8</sup> Berdal Aral, "A Critical View of the Scholarly Discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian Problem," *New Middle Eastern Studies* 8, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>9</sup> Lea Stahel and Christopher Cohrs, "Socially Shared Representations of the Israel-Palestine Conflict: An Exploration among Conflict Outsiders," *Conflict & Communication Online* 14, no. 1 (2015): 1-19.

just observation; it calls for immediate, informed action. Raising awareness about these conditions is essential for mobilizing support. Indonesia, as a nation that has consistently declared its support for Palestinian independence, has reinforced this stance through President Joko Widodo's clear and strong condemnation of Israel's attacks on civilians in Gaza. The severe trauma inflicted on the young generation, as documented by media reports despite restrictions, highlights the urgent need for global engagement in addressing these social crises. Lastly, from a historical perception, the importance of the Palestinian region cannot be understated. It's a place that holds deep significance as the cradle of the three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For anyone studying or reflecting on this conflict, it's crucial to grasp the historical weight and the enduring impact it has on both local and global levels. This historical context adds a profound dimension to the conflict, making it not just a current humanitarian issue, but one with deep roots and long-lasting implications.

Given the conflict's significant impact on global politics, religious dialogue, and humanitarian concerns, it presents a crucial case for examining how religious beliefs shape public perceptions in contexts of prolonged conflict. The perspectives of social media users regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict need to be examined because several studies indicate that social media perceptions are reflective and can have real-life implications. The intense stream of information on social media opens up opportunities for two-way information exchange for information providers and recipients. This aligns with what Wawaysadhya et al. expressed in their writing "Indeed, openness in accessing information is directly proportional to the ease of access for information providers."<sup>10</sup> In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the struggle to shape perceptions in the media (including social media) is equally crucial as the efforts on the ground. Rami Qawariq's research indicates that the discourse on social media spread by marginalised groups can compete with the dominant discourse in Palestine, which tends to have a top-down approach. The discourse spread through online media serves as a representation for marginalised groups to demonstrate power, representation, and legitimacy for

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<sup>10</sup> Wawaysadhya et al., "Moderasi Beragama di Media Sosial: Narasi Inklusivisme dalam Dakwah," *Al Munir* 13, no. 2 (2022): 118-32.

them.<sup>11</sup> Thus, internet-based social media can be utilised to uncover their perspectives on the conflict they experience. Palestine has a relatively large number of social media users, with 3.3 million Palestinians using the internet and 2.4 million engaging in social media. These figures are significant when considering the Palestinian population, which stood at 6.75 million in 2016.<sup>12</sup> Based on the previously mentioned background, this study will explore the influence of religious beliefs on social media users' perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict. It adopts a qualitative research design employing literature review and document analysis approaches.

Considering that this research aims to explore social media users' perceptions regarding the relationship between religious beliefs in the Israel-Palestine conflict, it is necessary to outline the conceptual framework developed based on predefined criteria and variables. This study investigates content and comments related to the conflict between Israel and Palestine on the Instagram accounts Eye on Palestine (@eye.on.palestine), Gaza journalist Motaz Azaiza (@motaz\_azaiza), and another Gaza journalist Anas Ali Al-Syarif (@anasjamal44). These three accounts were chosen because they consistently portray events of the conflict in Gaza-Palestine from an insider's perspective. Data retrieval is specifically limited to content uploaded during the escalated period of the Israel-Palestine conflict, around mid-October 2023.

Subsequently, data retrieval involves exploring content on those three Instagram accounts mentioned related to four aspects: the initial fall of victims when the conflict broke out on October 7 2023, the casualties among children, attacks on public facilities such as houses of worship and hospitals, and the killing of journalists in Gaza. Besides the content itself, examining netizens' comments on the narratives is crucial to understanding outsiders' perceptions of the ongoing conflict. The selected comments are filtered based on the following criteria: receiving responses from other Instagram users, comments sent from genuine accounts (not fake accounts), and being relevant or not deviating from the content's substance.

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<sup>11</sup> Rami Qawariq, "Political and Ideological Tensions in Palestine," *Connection Science* 1 (2008): 68-78.

<sup>12</sup> Nermeen Sayyad, "Importance of Social Media in Business Firm in Palestine and Its Effects," *International Journal of Managerial Studies Research (IJMSR)* 6, no. 10 (2018): 46-54.

Based on the previously mentioned variables, three hypotheses have been developed. The first hypothesis will attempt to elaborate on the influence of religious beliefs on perceptions of death. Subsequently, the second hypothesis will elaborate on the insider's perceptions of the challenges of living amidst the uncertainty of war. Meanwhile, in the context of netizens' perceptions as outsiders, this second hypothesis will outline the powerlessness and limitations of netizens in contributing to the ongoing conflict. The third hypothesis will outline how existential efforts counter grief. This third hypothesis explores the extent to which religion is utilised as a guide in facing the uncertainties of life resulting from prolonged conflict. A qualitative method is used to analyse the data. The hypotheses are developed based on the theoretical foundation of the philosophy of religion. The philosophy of religion theory will aid in researching and identifying the role of religion in conditions of human powerlessness.

### **Fear of Death and Grief in the Context of Philosophy of Religion**

Religiosity is a complex phenomenon that profoundly impacts the daily lives of human beings and is related to aspects of individual subjective experience such as meaning, personal happiness, and the effects of traumatic life events.<sup>13</sup> Religiosity is closely tied to religion. Emile Durkheim defined religion as a system of beliefs and practices associated with the sacred.<sup>14</sup> Grief is one of the themes of discussion in religious philosophy. Nonetheless, discussing optimism in religion is essential to knowing its role in the good life and practical considerations.<sup>15</sup> Hope is a crucial component of human life, representing an ideal association with the future. In the context of the Philosophy of Religion, the hope for a reward in the afterlife is believed to influence optimism in living a worldly life and encountering unpleasant emotions such as grief. Hope in religion propels the attainment of the

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<sup>13</sup> Ilanit Hasson-Ohayon, "Religiosity and Hope: A Path for Women Coping with a Diagnosis of Breast Cancer," *Psychosomatics* 50, no. 5 (2009): 525-33.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Blyth and Ruth Landau (eds.), *Faith and Fertility* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009), 24.

<sup>15</sup> G. Scott Gravlee, "Hope in Ancient Greek Philosophy," in *Historical and Multi-disciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, ed. Steven C. Heuvel (Cham: Springer, 2020), 3-23.

highest justice as individuals, both as singular beings and social creatures, always contemplate the consequences of their actions.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to hope, religiosity is also associated with the fear. In this case, it is the fear of death. Several studies indicate that the fear of death can motivate an increase in faith in religion.<sup>17</sup> The fear of death is considered a crucial explanation for religion. Intellectual figures in the theory of religion who position the fear of death as the primary cause of religious beliefs include David Hume, Feuerbach, Sigmund Freud, and Ernest Becker. According to Becker, the fear of death is not only related to the functional analysis of religious beliefs. Still, it serves as a fundamental driver of all social and cultural activities of human beings.<sup>18</sup>

Centuries ago, on the night before his execution, Socrates reflected on his approaching death.<sup>19</sup> Despite the passage of centuries, his words appear to have been largely ignored. The fear of death, or Thanatophobia, continues to be a prevalent source of anxiety among the world's citizens. The fear of death is unwarranted, that the value of life is not absolute, and that, in certain situations, it may be rational for some people in a certain situation to choose death over life. However, in the current situation facing the people of Palestine, even the choice between life and death is not available for them. It seems as though their fate, whether to live or die, is determined by others beyond their control—others who have no rightful authority over their destiny. It caused not only existential anguish but also suffering.

Tom McClelland wrote that suffering takes many forms, one of which comes in the form of grief.<sup>20</sup> In the aftermath of losing a loved one, individuals are confronted with a profound shift in their mental and emotional state, requiring a complex process of adjustment. This

<sup>16</sup> Lou Matz, "The Utility of Religious Illusion: A Critique of J.S. Mill's Religion of Humanity," *Utilitas* 12, no. 2 (2000): 137-54.

<sup>17</sup> J. Jong, M. Bluemke, and J. Halberstadt, "Fear of Death and Supernatural Beliefs: Developing A New Supernatural Belief Scale to Test the Relationship," *European Journal of Personality* 27 (2013): 495-506.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Jong, "Death Anxiety and Religion," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 40 (2021): 40-44.

<sup>19</sup> In *Phaedo*, the discussion starts with the question of suicide. If philosophers are so willing to die, ask Cebes, why is it wrong for them to kill themselves? Socrates' initial answer is that the gods are our guardians and that they will be angry if one of their possessions kills itself without permission.

<sup>20</sup> David Bain, *Philosophy of Suffering Metaphysics, Value, and Normativity* (Oxon: Routledge, n.d.).

mental state, now shaped by the absence of the deceased, permeates all aspects of one's emotional and cognitive life. Emotions such as longing, sadness, fear, anger, and guilt often surface, reflecting the deep impact of the loss. On a cognitive level, beliefs once tied to the presence of the deceased must be reassessed, sometimes challenging one's sense of identity and future. The loss also brings forth difficult questions that demand introspection and reflection, highlighting the often overwhelming and incomprehensible nature of grief. This complex interplay of emotions and thoughts underscores the profound and multifaceted impact of bereavement on the human psyche.

### **Existential Anguish**

Existential anguish emerges from profound reflection on the fundamental complexities and uncertainties of life. It is also known as existential dread, anxiety, or anguish, is a concept frequently discussed by existentialist philosophers. It is commonly understood as a negative emotion that arises from confronting the realities of human freedom and responsibility.<sup>21</sup>

A German philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach, expressed his views on religion and humanity in his work *The Essence of Christianity* (1841). According to Feuerbach, God is a projection of the noblest qualities and virtues of humanity.<sup>22</sup> Feuerbach argues that religious concepts, including God, are projections of human qualities and desires. Feuerbach's critique centers on the idea that religion alienates humans from their true nature by attributing divine qualities to a supernatural being. He believes that recognizing these qualities as inherent to humanity can lead to a more authentic self-understanding and self-realization. He suggests that the divine attributes ascribed to God—such as love, justice, and wisdom—are actually reflections of human ideals that are externalized and idealized. For Feuerbach, religion is a way for humans to externalize their best qualities and aspirations.

Meanwhile, an existentialist Philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre does not explicitly discuss God as a projection of human qualities. However, his existentialism implies a rejection of any pre-existing divine essence or inherent meaning. Instead, Sartre argues that individuals cre-

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<sup>21</sup> Patric Plesa, "Reassessing Existential Constructs and Subjectivity: Freedom and Authenticity in Neoliberalism," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (n.d.).

<sup>22</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, "On the Evaluation of The Essence of Christianity," *Historical Materialism* 27, no. 1 (2019): 241-52.



ate their own essence and values through their choices and actions. While Sartre focuses more on the individual's freedom and responsibility rather than on projecting qualities onto a divine being, both thinkers agree that traditional religious concepts are human constructs rather than inherent truths. Sartre's existentialism places a strong emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility. He argues that without a divine essence or predetermined purpose, individuals are entirely free to define their own meaning and values. This freedom comes with the burden of responsibility, as each person's choices and actions not only shape their own identity but also set an example for others. Sartre's focus is on how people must confront the weight of their freedom and create meaning in a godless universe.

Nonetheless, Heidegger also talks about his seminal work *Being and Time*. Heidegger discusses existential anguish (or 'Angst') as a fundamental aspect of human existence. Heidegger explores how the awareness of one's own finitude and the inherent uncertainty of existence leads to a profound sense of anxiety. This anxiety reveals the individual's freedom and responsibility to define their own being.<sup>23</sup>

## **The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Insider and Outsider Perspectives on Instagram**

*Instagram @eye.on.palestine*

A post on the Instagram account *@eye.on.palestine* on January 9, 2024, depicts an incident involving a child receiving medical treatment after being a victim in Rafah, Southern Gaza.<sup>24</sup> Two days earlier, in the exact location, a journalist lost his life due to an Israeli attack.<sup>25</sup> In both posts, comments are conveying a similar meaning, emphasizing God's promise for the victims and fighters in the conflict.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Being and Time," eds. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts* (New York: Harper & Row, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/C15RziKqTVn/?next=%2Fnkaramanis%2Ffeed%2F&hl=id> (accessed January 8, 2024).

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/C1z4zjaqe6R/?next=%2Fnkaramanis%2Ffeed%2F&hl=id> (accessed January 8, 2024).

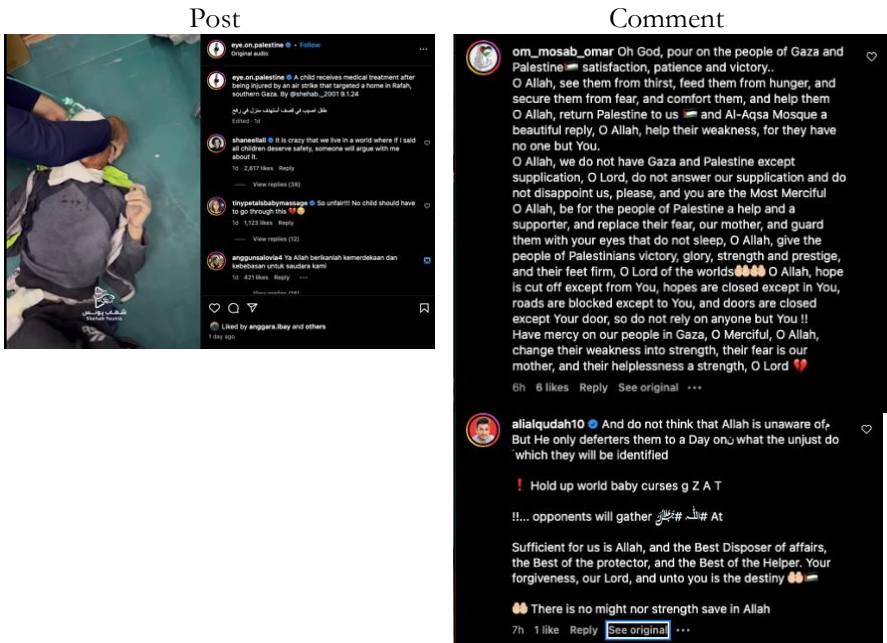
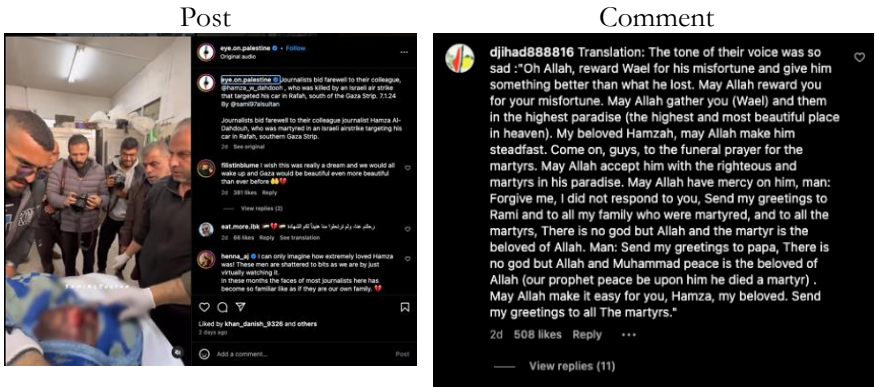
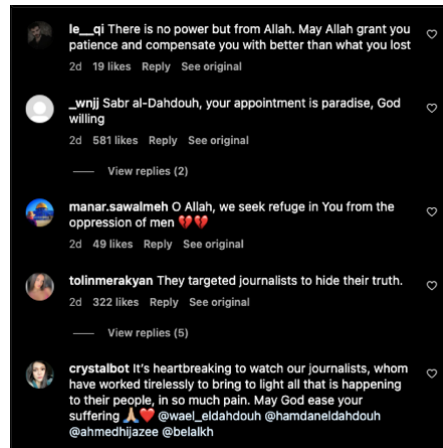


Figure 1. Incident: Child injured (9/01/2024). Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C15RziKqTVn/?next=%2Fnkaramanis%2Ffeed%2F&hl=id>





**Figure 2.** Journalist killed (07/01/24). Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C1z4zjaqe6R/?next=%2Fmkaramanis%2Ffeed%2F&hl=id>

*Instagram @motaz\_azaiza*

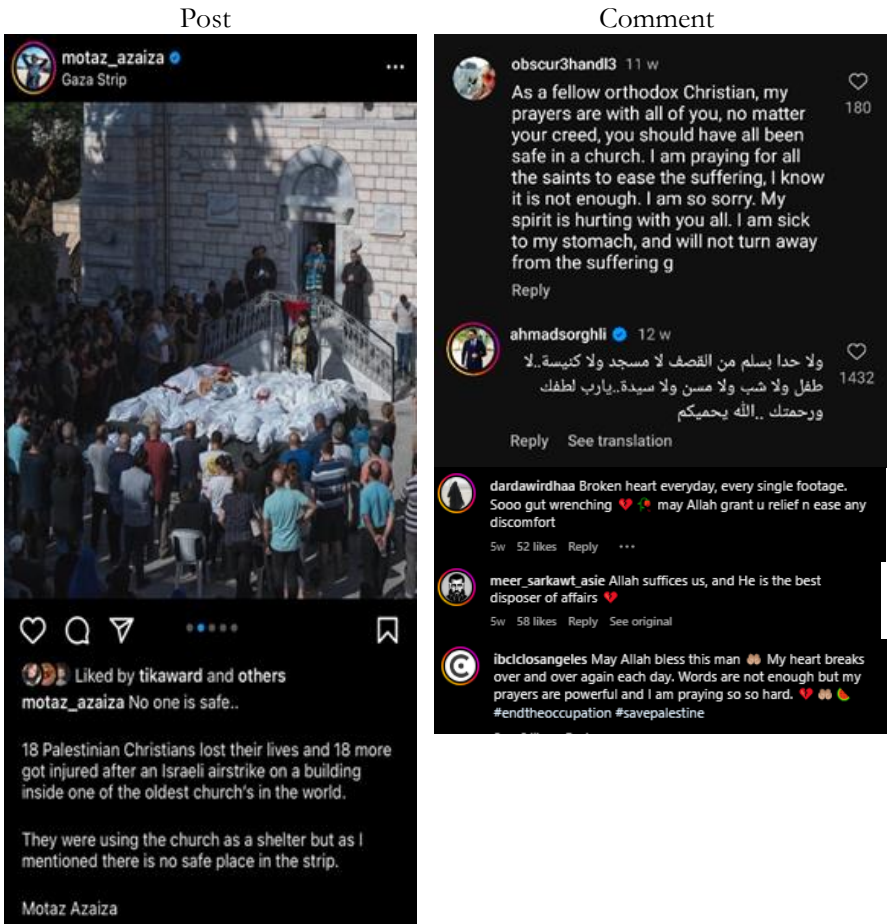
A post from the Instagram account *@motaz\_azaiza* on October 21, 2023, depicts an incident where Israel attacked one of the oldest churches in the world.<sup>26</sup> It occurred precisely 14 days after the Hamas attack, claimed by Israel, which escalated the Israel-Palestine conflict. The post mentions that no one is safe, with 18 Palestinian Christian worshippers losing their lives in the attack. Previously, Palestinian Christians considered churches as safe havens, but according to Motaz, there is no safer place left in Palestine. A comment expresses that the only thing outsiders can do is pray for the fighters and victims, even though they acknowledge it may not be enough. As an Orthodox Christian, this person also states her prayers for God to alleviate the suffering of all Palestinian residents.

On October 7, 2023, there was a post depicting Israel's attack on Gaza.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, most comments on the post asked Motaz to demonstrate objectivity in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, pointing to the Hamas attack on Israel on October 6, 2023. However, there is one comment mentioned, "May Jesus and Allah always protect Mus-

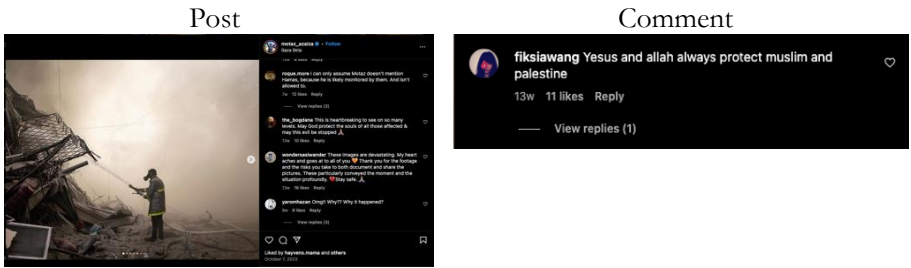
<sup>26</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/CyozryrEy4/> (accessed January 8, 2024)

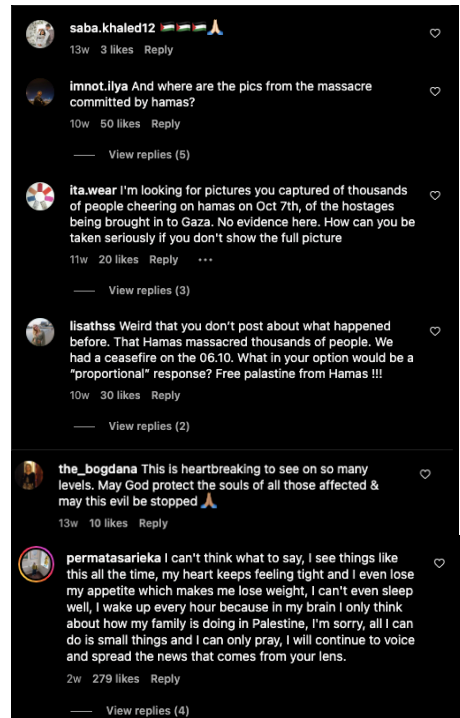
<sup>27</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/CyGq80kMPc9/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CyGq80kMPc9/?img_index=1) (accessed January 8, 2024).

lims and Palestine.” Some other comments still rely on and hope for God to provide the best for all parties involved.



**Figure 3.** Incident: Isareli air strike on one of the oldest churches in the world (21/10/2023). Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CyozryEy4/>



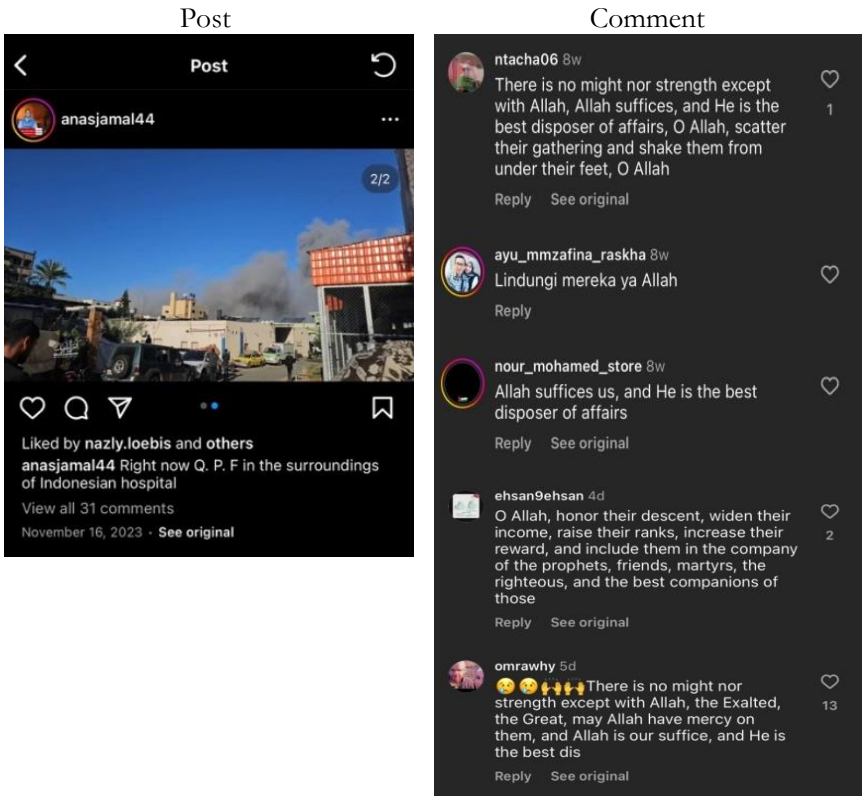


**Figure 4.** Israel air strikes in Gaza city (7/10/2023). Source: [https://www.instagram.com/p/CyGq80kMPc9/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CyGq80kMPc9/?img_index=1)

*Instagram @anasjama144*

A post on the Instagram account *@anasjama144* on November 16, 2023, shows the incident of Israel's attack on the Indonesian Hospital in Gaza.<sup>28</sup> In the post, most comments express that there is no help, protection, compassion, or strength other than from God.

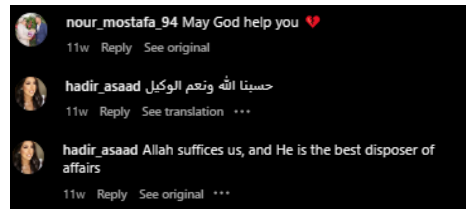
<sup>28</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/Czsn5AINiVj> (accessed January 8, 2024).



**Figure 5.** Incident: Indonesian Hospital bombed (16/11/2023). Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Czsn5AINiVj/>







**Figure 6.** Victims: Israeli air strikes in Gaza (25/10/2023). Source: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cy1LCeDMpPb/?hl=en>

## The Influence of Religious Beliefs among Instagram Users

The current news about the Israel-Palestine conflict is accessible through digital media platforms, one of which is Instagram. Users from various parts of the world share information, express support or disagreement with ongoing events, and voice their concerns about the ongoing humanitarian crisis. The three Instagram account owners, *@eye.on.palestine*, *@motaz\_azaiza*, and *@anasjamal44*, as insiders, share moments in the form of photos and videos (reels) depicting events on the ground, along with captions that describe the conditions in the conflict areas. On posts from these three accounts, there are comments and discussions from outsiders, conveying opinions, engaging in debates, raising awareness campaigns, and expressing hopes and prayers, demonstrating sympathy and a sense of religiosity. Religiosity, a multifaceted phenomenon deeply intertwined with individual experiences and subjective meaning, is pivotal in shaping human responses to life's challenges.

### *The Perceptions of Death*

Religiosity plays a significant role in individuals' attitudes toward death. In the realm of religion, death evokes two attitudes: fear and optimism, both leading to motivation driven by profound beliefs in religion. In this study, the relationship between the fear of death and the optimistic attitudes resulting from religious beliefs among the victims of the Palestine conflict will be examined. Based on the data obtained through this research, the perceptions of Palestinian society and netizens about death tend to be homogeneous—acceptance that death is inevitable and a belief in divine retribution. For example, when the *@eye.on.palestine* account uploaded a video about a journalist

who died due to an Israeli attack, almost all comments on that post conveyed a homogeneous tone—expressing promises and divine retribution for the victims. For instance, a comment from the *@djihead888816* account states: “Oh Allah, reward Wael for his misfortune and give him something better than what he lost. May Allah reward you for the misfortune. May Allah gather you (Wael) and them the highest paradise (the highest and most beautiful place in heaven).” The narrative in such comments indicates that perceptions of death are strongly influenced by religious beliefs.<sup>29</sup>

Another example is when the Israeli attack on the world’s oldest church in Gaza occurred, as narrated in the content posted by the Instagram account *@motaṣṣaṣaṣa* on October 21, 2023. It portrays that no one is safe. In this incident, 18 Palestinian Christian worshippers lost their lives. The narrative presented by the *@motaṣṣaṣaṣa* account indicates that death can befall anyone. Even in a place that might be considered the safest by some Palestinian Christians, it turns out to be incapable of saving people from death. Meanwhile, the comment given by *@ahmadsorghli* on that post reflects a similar sentiment: “There is no guarantee of safety from attacks, whether in a mosque or a church, whether infants, youths, the elderly, or even seniors... O God, only with Your gentleness and mercy. May God provide protection.”<sup>30</sup>

Based on the earlier data, the relationship between perceptions of death and religious values can be confirmed. Although some comments on the events of death in Gaza show a sense of fear of death (i.e., the anxiety regarding no safe place there, death can occur to anyone), this fear is always accompanied by an act of surrendering to God (that God will provide the best place, only God can provide protection). Furthermore, there is a strong belief that the victims who died due to the conflict are martyrs, and martyrdom is highly cherished by Allah, entailing a reward in the form of the highest place in paradise.

Several studies have elucidated the relationship between religion and perceptions of death. Among them is the research by J. Dezutter et al., which concluded that the fear of death can be alleviated by religious orientation and can motivate individuals to be more optimistic

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/C1z4zjaqe6R/?next=%2Fnkaramanis%2Ffeed-%2F&hl=id> (accessed January 10, 2024)

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/CyozryrEy4/> (accessed January 10, 2024)



toward facing death. Specifically, the study indicates that religious individuals who study their faith substantially and deeply are more likely to have an accepting attitude towards death, demonstrating that religiosity is closely linked to beliefs about life after death. On the other hand, religious individuals who tend to be more literal and less immersed in the substance of their faith exhibit anxiety about death and tend to be defensive.<sup>31</sup> Based on this research, it can be inferred that the perceptions of death emerging in Instagram accounts *@eye.on.palestine* and *@motaz\_azaiza* are more dominated by optimistic views of death. Meanwhile, narratives expressing anxiety about death on these Instagram accounts are considered as a minority. Most netizens' beliefs regarding the reward of paradise for martyrs and the belief in God's protection demonstrate an optimistic attitude from a profound understanding of religion.

The attitudes displayed by netizens, both insiders and outsiders, regarding perceptions of death in the Israel-Palestine conflict, contradict the findings of L. D. Nelson and C. Cantrell's study. In that research, it was concluded that religious individuals tend to avoid discussions about death and are unwilling to interact with dying individuals, indicating a fear of death.<sup>32</sup> Netizens' responses to news about death do not show fear and avoidance of discussions about death. Instead, netizens approach discussions about death with optimism.

### *The Helplessness of Life*

Religious beliefs are the primary guide that provides strength and hope in coping with human powerlessness. Various posts on these three Instagram accounts reflect a sense of resilience and steadfastness based on religious convictions. On the outsider side, the comments build a virtual bridge to strengthen and encourage one another. Instagram becomes a space to pour out feelings of powerlessness processed through religiosity. Comments like, 'Allah is sufficient for us as a helper, and He is the best protector', are expressions of the powerlessness of Muslim communities in the face of what befalls them. Additionally, phrases such as "May Allah bless this man," "My

<sup>31</sup> J. Dezutter, "The Role Of Religion in Death Attitudes: Distinguishing Between Religious Belief and Style of Processing Religious Contents," *Death Studies* 33 (2008): 73-92.

<sup>32</sup> L. D. Nelson and C. Cantrell, "Religiosity and Death Anxiety: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis," *Review of Religious Research* 21 (1980): 148.

prayers are with all of you,” “Jesus and Allah always protect Palestine,” and others are prayers and hopes from society regarding their response to the ongoing conflict. In uncertainty, religious beliefs serve as a guide, providing hope that there will be such an act from God to protect His people in every difficulty.

As mentioned above, for Feurbach, humans tend to create a divine entity to escape or overcome their limitations and powerlessness. Religion emerges as an expression of the human need to seek strength and meaning beyond themselves. The influence of religious beliefs on Instagram not only creates narratives about powerlessness but also shows that every obstacle in life,<sup>33</sup> in this case, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is part of a spiritual journey and religiosity. Religious beliefs create a warm and loving community,<sup>34</sup> gathering virtually in the comment section to provide support or even disagreement with several opinions. Amidst posts depicting human powerlessness, some messages are filled with hope, proving that religious beliefs bring some light that never dims in an enduring conflict.

Ibn Taymīyah, one of the prominent Muslim thinkers, expressed his views on the power and powerlessness of humans in the face of God’s will. According to Taimiyah, humans have limitations and cannot achieve success without any help and guidance from God.<sup>35</sup> Most comments found in the posts of the three Instagram accounts indicate the powerlessness of netizens regarding tangible actions taken to end the ongoing conflict. However, they also recognise that support, hope, and prayers can be offered as a form of solidarity, religiosity, and human compassion.

### *Existential Efforts against the Sorrow of Loss*

In addition to views on death and powerlessness, religious beliefs influence netizens’ perspectives on the existential efforts against the

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<sup>33</sup> Moh Huda and Iffatin Nur, “Islam, Culture, and Social Media: A Study on The Culture of The Social Media Usage in The Covid-19 Pandemic Era,” *The Journal of Society and Media* 5, no. 2 (2021): 347-61.

<sup>34</sup> Rakhimov Asomiddin Anorboevich, “Principles of Organizing the Spiritual-Enlightenment Activities of Future Teachers,” *ACADEMLA: An International Multi-disciplinary Research Journal* 11, no. 9 (2021): 400-407.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Taymīyah, *Syarab Aqidah Wasithiyah; Penjelasan Prinsip-Prinsip Akidah Ahlus-sunnah wal Jama’ah dalam Matan Akidah Wasithiyah Karya Syaikh Islam Ibnu Taimiyah*, trans. Arif Munadar (Bogor: Media Tarbiyah, 2013).

sorrow of loss. Religiosity, as mentioned earlier, plays a pivotal role in shaping human responses to life's challenges, including the profound sorrow arising from the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Emile Durkheim's definition of religion as a system connected to the sacred<sup>36</sup> gives some highlights that the captions and comments on posts on Instagram accounts, for instance, @anasjamal44, underscore how religiosity manifests in the face of adversity. The captions and comments on these accounts reflect a nuanced relationship between religious beliefs and the subjective experiences of loss, providing a profound backdrop to the existential efforts against the sorrow of loss within the context of the conflict. On one of the posts on @annasjamal44 that depicts a father holding the lifeless body of his child, an Instagram account commented, "*ḥasbunā Allāh wa ni'm al-wakīl*,"<sup>37</sup> which means 'sufficient for us is Allah, and He is the best Disposer of affairs.'<sup>38</sup>

Hope, a fundamental aspect of religiosity, is intricately tied to the Philosophy of Religion, where the anticipation of an afterlife reward influences the optimism individuals maintain in navigating worldly life. The comments on these Instagram accounts serve as a testament to the enduring hope embedded in religious beliefs, offering solace amid the traumatic events unfolding in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the comments section, expressions of hope and prayers reflect not only a collective desire for a just resolution to the conflict but also a coping mechanism rooted in religious perspectives, showcasing the intricate interplay between religiosity, existential efforts, and the human response to profound loss. When @annasjamal44 posted about the bombing of the Indonesian Hospital, people commented with various religious responses. One is from @omrawhy: "There is no might nor strength except with Allah, the exalted, the great, may Allah have mercy on them, and Allah is our suffice, and he is the best disposer of affairs."<sup>39</sup> The phrase "there is no might nor strength except with Allah" is commonly used by Muslims in various situations, especially during challenging times or moments of difficulty. It is a suppli-

<sup>36</sup> Durkheim's idea is that the members forming a group perceive a sense of unity among themselves solely because they share a common belief.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cy1LCeDMpPb/?hl=en> (accessed January 10, 2024)

<sup>38</sup> This saying is also mentioned in the Qur'an, Āli 'Imrān [3]: 173.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/Czsn5AINiVj> (accessed January 10, 2024)

cation (*du'ā'*) and a general expression of reliance on Allah's strength and power.

Nonetheless, various verses throughout the Quran emphasise seeking strength and refuge in Allah. One relevant verse is found in al-Baqarah [2]: 286, "Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear...." This verse highlights that Allah does not impose challenges or burdens on individuals beyond their capacity. Therefore, when facing difficulties, Muslims often turn to Allah, seeking His help and acknowledging their reliance on His strength. This indicates human efforts to overcome the sorrow of loss through their existential way as a worshipper of Allah.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, examining Instagram posts and comments on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict provides a rich tapestry of insights into the varied perspectives of insiders and outsiders. The diverse narratives, expressions of sorrow, and existential efforts against loss depicted through these social media interactions underscore the profound impact of religiosity in shaping individuals' responses to the conflict. The convergence of hope, fear of death, and reliance on religious beliefs emerge as central themes, illustrating the intricate interplay between existential considerations and religious convictions. As we navigate the nuanced terrain of these perspectives, it becomes evident that Instagram serves as both a virtual battleground and a sanctuary for expressing emotions, solidarity, and the quest for meaning amid the ongoing strife. Religious beliefs play an important role in shaping people's perspective regarding this horrible situation that is happening in Gaza. On facing death, most netizens's beliefs regarding the reward of paradise for martyrs and the belief in God's protection demonstrate an optimistic attitude arising from a profound understanding of religion. Furthermore, religious beliefs are the primary guide that provides strength and hope in coping with human powerlessness. Beyond opinions regarding death and feelings of powerlessness, religious convictions once again play a role in shaping the outlook of netizens concerning existential endeavours to cope with the grief of loss.

The virtual community formed by these Instagram accounts becomes a microcosm where religiosity's impact on individual and collective responses to sorrow and loss is vividly illustrated. As the conflict unfolds, the dynamic interrelation between hope, fear of death,

and existential efforts against sorrow in these online narratives underscores the profound influence of religiosity on shaping perspectives and guiding individuals through the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The significant influence of religion in fostering optimism during wartime, as elucidated in this study, provides a foundation for asserting that religious beliefs can likewise shape individuals' perspectives on war, such as promoting peace and love within the realm of religion. Suppose religion can influence the perception of society about death and the end of life. In that case, religion should be able to influence society's perception of conflict and war.

While this study has provided valuable insights, it is crucial to recognise and discuss its limitations as they contribute to the broader context in which our findings should be understood. The subsequent research could examine how religious beliefs intersect with the culture of Instagram influencers. It could discuss how influencers incorporate their faith into their content and how their religious beliefs influence the products and services they promote. The essay could also explore the potential conflicts between religious values and the commercialisation of influencer culture. The other thing that can be done by further research is to explore how social media is changing how religious communities practice their faith. It could discuss the role of Instagram in religious education, outreach, and evangelism, as well as the potential challenges and opportunities that social media poses for religious leaders and organisations. The following essay could also examine how social media changes how people experience religion and spirituality daily.

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