



Religious meaning-making among Muslim parents bereaved by homicide: Struggling to accept ‘God’s will’ and yearning for ‘Qayama’ day

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Parental bereavement by homicide is considered an extremely difficult grief experience; hence it may significantly undermine one’s meaning structures. Although bereaved parents’ meaning-making process has been extensively researched, less is known about meaning reconstruction among Muslim parents bereaved by homicide – an understudied population. The study’s goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of bereaved Muslim parents’ meaning-making process in light of their religious background using Park’s religious meaning-making model.

Methods: Employing a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were held with 12 Muslim parents bereaved by homicide. The data were analyzed using both categorical-content and categorical-form analyses.

Results: The findings indicated that Muslim parents’ meaning-making process involves silencing, which is grounded in their religious background. This process is characterized by a difficulty to accept this loss as God’s will, as expected from them by religion, given that it was caused by an intentional act of human violence. Consequently, their global belief meanings are undermined. They, then, yearn for “Qayama” day—the day of judgment.

Conclusions: The findings are discussed in light of Park’s religious meaning-making model, highlighting that bereaved Muslim parents’ coping process includes an additional challenge related to their religious background. This underscores the need for culturally-sensitive inquiry and spiritually-informed therapy.

1. Introduction

Bereavement may undermine one’s mental, emotional, cognitive and physical worlds [1]. Child loss, particularly if it is sudden, is considered traumatic, and parents are likely to experience a prolonged and complex grieving process, involving an intensive search for meaning, as they vacillate between focusing on the loss and focusing on life restoration [2]. Despite abundant research on parental bereavement, less is known about the meaning-reconstruction process of bereaved Muslim parents bereaved by homicide—a surprising absence, given the high rate of Muslim homicide in Israel (3). In addition, the way people grieve is related to their cultural and religious norms [4–6]. Specifically, in Islam the acceptable socioreligious response to loss emphasizes acceptance of God’s will [7]. Hence, the

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study's goal was to understand the meaning-making process among Muslim parents bereaved by homicide in light of Park's [8] religious meaning-making model, taking into account parents' religious context. The study may enhance our understanding of the complexities with which these parents must contend. Sounding their potentially silenced voices aligns with social justice principles and advocacy for diversity and intercultural competence [9]. It may also underscore the importance of employing sociocultural sensitivity when exploring bereavement as well as using spiritually-informed therapy.

2. A review of the literature

2.1. Bereavement by homicide

Studies indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated cases of assault violence and highlighted the need to explore individuals coping with death [10,11]. When the experience of death involves the loss of a child, it is a traumatic event that contradicts life's natural order and is perceived as the loss of one's future [12]. Hence, it is likely to undermine a parent's worldview and meaning constructs, particularly when it is sudden [13,14]. Parental grief involves feelings of sadness, longing and guilt [1], as well as anxiety over losing another child [15]. As an intended act of violence [16], homicide evokes even greater difficulty for the bereaved [17], and a greater risk of complicated grief [18].

Parents bereaved by homicide tend to feel guilty and often fantasize about saving their child and have repetitive thoughts and nightmares of the murder [17]. The intentionality of the homicide leads to anger at the injustice of this act [19,20]. Thus, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is twice as frequent among parents of murder victims compared to parents whose child was killed in a car accident [21]. Furthermore, a recent study involving mothers of murder victims in Israel reported that participants were subjected to social stigma, despite being innocent victims of a crime [20]. This finding was repeated in another recent study conducted among Malaysian Muslim bereaved fathers who, following their sons' deaths, had experienced stigma reactions that involved people questioning their parenting style and suggesting that the death of their sons was a punishment from God [22]. Thus, it appears that parents bereaved by homicide are exposed to a dual difficulty – the unnatural intentional death and its resulting social stigma.

2.2. Meaning reconstruction following loss and religious meaning-making

Following a loss, people report experiencing a collapse of their previously-held worldviews [23]. Consequently, mourners often need to reconstruct their belief systems to correspond to their new worldviews in light of the crisis experienced [24,25]. The process of "meaning reconstruction," which involves benefit finding and making sense of the loss [26] occurs most prominently after the loss of a child [27] and is essential when the loss was caused by a traumatic and violent event [28,29a], such as a homicide [20,30]. Studies indicate that meaning-making practices may relate to religious and social aspects [31]. In other words, because religion is a system that imbues its followers' lives with meaning and helps them preserve—or if needed, renew—a sense of meaning after a senseless loss, religious beliefs can provide a suitable mental framework for this meaning-reconstruction process [32]. For instance, the belief that life is controlled by God and that negative life events constitute an opportunity for spiritual growth can be reassuring [8,33]. Religion was also found to help bereaved parents accept their loss [7, 29b, 34].

According to Park's well-established theory of religion as a meaning-making model [35], people use their global beliefs, i.e., the internal cognitive structures about the nature of the world (which include religious beliefs and ideologies) to create meaning in their lives. In the aftermath of a tragic loss, these global beliefs might have been undermined and are no longer consistent with their experience of reality. People for whom religion has played a central role in shaping their global beliefs are likely to rely on the religious system to appraise the meaning of the traumatic event [35]. Indeed, studies are continuously using Park's model as a relevant and viable framework for investigating how individuals and societies, including Muslim populations, cope with life's adversities [7,22,34, 36–40]. For instance, in a study conducted among Muslim cancer patients, it was reported that meaning-making, as presented in Park's model, created a more positive outlook, by helping these cancer patients find new goals in life [7].

Similarly, Pargament et al. [41] conceptualized "religious coping" as the positive or negative appraisal of a stressful event, whereby religion plays a major role in the meaning-making process. Nevertheless, an unexpected or tragic loss often challenges the ability to uphold religion-based beliefs [18,42]. Such a response was found among Christian and Muslim mourners alike [43,44] and was referred to as complicated spiritual grief [45].

2.3. The role of culture and religion in the meaning-making process of muslims following loss

Studies indicate that religion [46], as well as cultural beliefs and traditions [47], play a role in one's coping with challenges. According to Ben-Asher and Bokek-Cohen [48], bereavement processes in Muslim society feature unique religious, cultural, and social characteristics. A Muslim proverb states: "*Al-maut haq*" (الموت حق), i.e., "death is a right." Muslims believe that from the day they are born, the day of their death is inscribed on their foreheads, and they cannot challenge what is "*maktoub*," destined. Given that Muslim society is a traditional patriarchal tribal society, the individual is a member of the tribe, and all of one's deeds and actions are connected to the collective (48, p.7). Hence, grievors are expected to display dependence and comply with the norms. The accepted cultural response to loss in Islam constitutes a system intended to provide support and structure to mourners and their community [1, 49]. More specifically, according to the *Koran*, life and death are determined by God [50]; hence, birth and death are considered God's order—everything stems from Allah and returns to Him; God gives life and decides when to end life. Events are not seen as the cause of death but as a means to perform God's will [51]. One of the six basic beliefs in Islam that every believer must adhere to is the belief that

one's time of death is predetermined according to the actions of God (al-Qadr and al-Qada). As such, prolonged and public ceremonial displays of grief are not common in Islam. The official period of mourning, *Hidad*, lasts only three days; consequently, extending the grieving beyond this period delays prevents a quick return to life's routines and the acceptance of the loss, which is interpreted as a rejection of God's will [51,52]. Indeed, Mohammad Hussin and colleagues [34], who recently explored Malaysian Muslims' coping with cancer, showed that the religious-cultural expectation is to accept one's fate and be grateful, rather than expose or confront one's feelings. Thus, for example, the study report noted that "Some participants shared their concern that gratitude has become a religious and cultural expectation for those dealing with this [diagnosis]" (34, p.279). One example was of a 26-year-old cancer patient who described how people were telling her to feel grateful rather than confront her feelings. Another 40-year-old cancer patient explained that she had the need to "pretend to be grateful" in front of her family and friends to avoid being judged by them. These examples suggest that according to Islamic religious-cultural norms, people are expected to accept adversity and that this norm must be obeyed, in order to avoid social embarrassment. Similarly, persistent grieving is culturally unaccepted and is seen as challenging the normative code and the religious tenets; hence, mourners who are slow to recover may be deprived of religious support and are likely to pay a social price [50]. Similarly, they may avoid seeking professional help, for fear of being perceived as heretics who refuse to accept God's will [29a].

The expectation of Islam to accept God's will, along with findings that coping with homicide-related bereavement is exceptionally difficult, suggests that these bereaved Muslim parents may experience compounded difficulties: on the one hand, they find themselves dealing with extremely complicated emotions; on the other hand, they might perceive these emotions as illegitimate. This dissonance makes it necessary to examine how these parents reconstruct their meanings following the loss, especially given their religious context. Given the rising rate of homicide among Muslims, i.e., from 68 to 117 annual victims between 2013 and 2020, according to the Israel Bureau of Statistics [3], this is highly relevant.

The high rates of homicide are attributed to the phenomenon of blood feuds, which lead to a chain of vendettas, a tradition intended to defend and preserve the honor of the tribe, which is common among the Arab community in Israel [53]. As explained by Shalev et al. [50], in a blood feud, the individual's action is not motivated by personal considerations but rather by a sense of collective responsibility, one's loyalty and commitment to upholding the honor of the extended family, which demands that the individual take action. According to a relevant study [54], upholding one's personal or family honor, which is an essential component of the Arab culture, precedes all other concerns, including security, financial needs, legal responsibilities, loss of income, and pain. If a member of one extended family kills the family member of another clan, the need to reclaim the victim's honor is an inherent part of the traditional culture that dictates the actions of the victim's family. Revenge is perceived as the only way to restore the clan's honor, without any consideration of what this might entail [54]. Both the initial killing and the act of revenge place all members of both clans in danger, as all of the men are expected, on the one hand, to prevent harm while restoring the offended honor, on the other hand.

The tradition of blood feuds originated among Bedouin nomads, as they needed a way to ensure the protection of their group members, who lived in tents or huts in the desert, without even the protection of solid walls and hence were vulnerable to attacks from the outside. Even nowadays Muslim men who live in a tribal society or a clan-based village learn from an early age that the killing of a clan member is an unforgivable act. Consequently, the perpetrator of a blood feud-related murder converts all the members of his clan into the next potential target of the opposing clan's vendetta [50,53].

As such, men are the most vulnerable to blood feud-related homicides, in contrast to "honor killings," which involve femicide – the killing of young women by family members on the suspicion of an extramarital liaison or a sexual deviation. Hence, the focus of this study was on parents who lost their son—as opposed to a daughter, under the assumption that in the case of the Arab community in Israel, the circumstances of the loss are likely to affect the processes of coping and meaning-making. Hence, the goal of the current study was to deepen our theoretical and clinical understanding of meaning-making processes among Muslim parents in Israel who lost their sons in a blood feud-related homicide, while using Park's meaning-making model [35]. To this end, the following **research question** was formulated.

- In what ways do Muslim bereaved parents who lost their son due to homicide describe their meaning-reconstruction process following the loss, particularly in the context of their religious background?

3. Method

3.1. Study design

Exploring Muslim parents' meaning reconstruction from a subjective perspective calls for a qualitative approach [55,56], especially in the context of loss [57]. Within this domain, the current study drew on the phenomenological approach, which elicits participants' subjective experiences to examine the meanings they attribute to a certain social phenomenon [58,59]. It should be noted that this approach offers the advantage of giving voice to those who typically remain silent in public discourse; thus, it is particularly suitable for studying bereaved Muslim parents in Israel, whose voice is rarely heard [60].

4. Participants

Twelve Muslim parents bereaved by homicide, of ages ranging from 46 to 75, were interviewed. Inclusion criteria included the loss of a son (male) due to homicide. The reason for the sampling of male victims only is bounded in the previously explained context of the "Blood feud," which mainly targets men (as opposed to "honor killings" that target women and differ in circumstances and

characteristics). Three of the interviewees were men and nine were women (an aspect that may have stemmed from the fact that women are more willing to verbalize and share their emotions, as opposed to men in general) [61,62], and particularly in the patriarchal Arab community, in which men are expected to demonstrate emotional restraint [63,64]. The time lapse between the homicide and the interviews ranged from six months to 10 years. Table 1 presents the participants' demographics.

4.1. Procedure and data collection

The study's protocol was approved by Achva Academic College's ethics committee (approval number: 2020–77). Initial recruitment was conducted via advertisements on social media and with the help of nonprofit organizations (the "Ella" organization, which supports families bereaved by traumatic loss, and has some centers that serve the Muslim community). After this initial recruitment, additional participants were recruited via snowball sampling [65], which is acceptable in qualitative research. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which research participants assist in identifying other potential participants. It is an effective way to find people who belong to groups that are difficult to locate and recruit. This "chain referral" process allows the researcher to reach populations that are difficult to sample. Fifteen parents expressed interest in participating, three of which eventually declined (as they decided it would be too difficult emotionally). Nonetheless, the parents who did volunteer discussed their experience very extensively; thus, after interviewing 12 participants, we determined that the saturation criteria had been met [66]. In addition, the number of participants [12] is acceptable in studies of a hard-to-reach or hidden population, as argued by Watters & Biernacki [67], who related to hidden populations that often deliberately try to protect themselves from exposure. The participants signed an informed consent form and were told that they would be able to discontinue the interview at will. Each interview lasted between 1.5 and 3 h.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic by the second author, a female Muslim Arabic-speaking clinical Psychology MA student, in a location chosen by the participants. We used a two-stage interview procedure, previously used in a qualitative inquiry of loss [5,68,69]. The first stage began with an open-ended question: "Can you please share how you coped with the loss of your child and how you made sense of this experience?" This open-ended question invited the participants to freely elaborate on whatever they felt was relevant to their coping, enabling an examination of interviewees' spontaneous narratives, to determine whether religious aspects arose spontaneously during the conversation. In cases when these did not emerge, several predefined questions were presented in the second stage: "Did anything change in your perception, feelings, or religious faith? If so, what?"; "Did your beliefs have any effect on the grieving process, or were they affected by it?"; "Did you experience any struggle regarding your religious beliefs? If so, please elaborate." These questions enabled us to examine interviewees' answers to questions related directly to the topic being researched. At the end of each interview, the researcher inquired how the interviewee felt about addressing the ethical concerns involving in exploring sensitive issues [70]. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then translated into Hebrew using a word-by-word broad translation. To avoid mistakes in the translation process, the translation was conducted by the second author, the Arabic-speaking interviewee, who is bilingual in Hebrew and Arabic. The translation was performed to enable analysis and mutual brainstorming with the Hebrew-speaking researchers. To ensure the participants' privacy, all personal information was omitted.

4.2. Data analysis

The interviews were qualitatively analyzed for both form and content, a methodological triangulation that strengthens qualitative

Table 1
Demographic data of participants (only pseudonyms presented).

	Name	Parent's age	Parent's gender	Child's age	Child's gender	Child's family status	Child's place in sibling order	Time elapsed since the homicide	Circumstances surrounding the homicide
1.	Sammy	55	male	26	male	single	eldest	9 months	Mistaken identity
2.	Samira	61	female	26	male	married	eldest	3 years	Reason unknown
3.	Koltum	75	female	27	male	single	youngest	10 years	Reason unknown
4.	Farid	62	male	36	male	Married +1	eldest	13 months	A feud between families in the village
5.	Farida (wife of Farid)	60	female	36	male	Married +1	eldest	13 months	A feud between families in the village
6.	Hanin	54	female	28	male	single	third child	7 months	Disagreement within the family
7.	Sugud	50	female	15, 21	males	both single	The eldest and the third child	10 years	A feud between families
8.	Wurud	46	female	22	male	single	third child	6 months	A feud between families
9.	Hiyam	59	female	24	male	single	eldest	18 months	Mistake—was in the line of fire
10.	Aida	51	female	29	male	Married+1	Eldest	2 years	Reason unknown
11.	Muhammad	75	male	22	male	single	youngest	10 years	A feud between families
12.	Kafah	57	female	29	male	Married +1	eldest	4 years	A feud between families

inquiry (see Fig. 1). In the first stage, *content analysis* was applied using Braun and Clarke’s [71] six-phase inductive thematic analysis. Initially, we read and reread the transcripts, to familiarize ourselves with parents’ inner worlds and immerse ourselves in the data. During this phase, we identified and marked key statements related to the participants’ sociocultural context. In the second phase, involving initial code generation, each researcher separately assigned initial codes across all data sets. This was followed by a collaborative discussion, to determine which codes were perceived as the most significant vis-à-vis the research topic. The advantage of this analysis is that it guarantees that no important ideas or constructs are overlooked. Third, after coding all the data, the different codes were sorted into potential themes. This process involves comparing and contrasting the codes, to distinguish patterns and overarching themes (“theme search”). In the fourth phase—theme review, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure internal

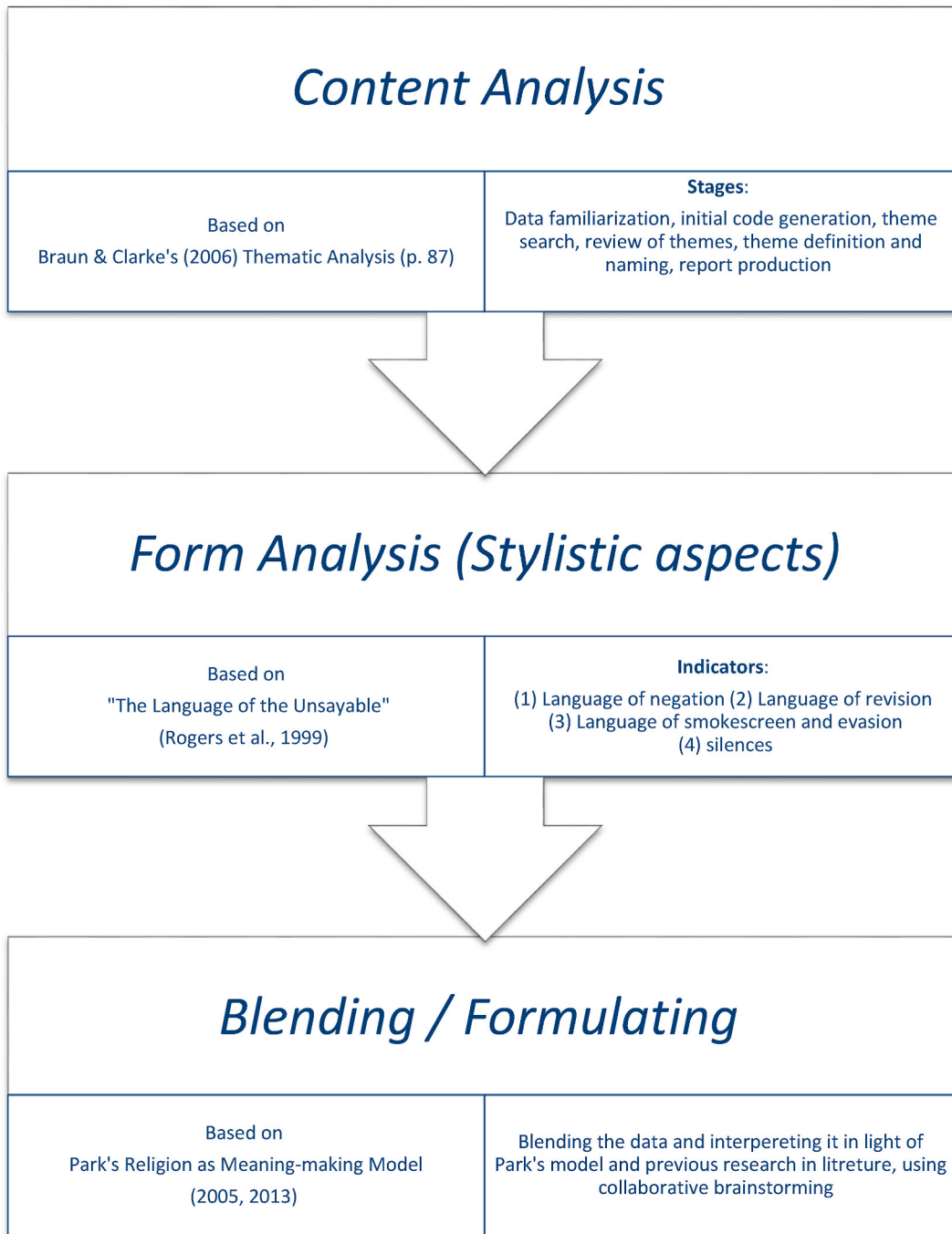


Fig. 1. A visual representation of the processes of analysis.

homogeneity and external heterogeneity. To understand the way in which the themes are linked, we noted the distinctive manner in which each interviewee addressed the themes identified. Then, to ascertain that the identified themes were comprehensive in nature and well-grounded in respondents' experiences, the data were reviewed once more. In the fifth phase, we "refined and defined" the themes, by defining the "essence" of each one, and assigning each a concise and distinct name. In the sixth stage, we were able to identify a classification that highlighted the studied phenomenon, namely, the meaning-making process of bereaved parents following their loss, and eventually to produce a report of the findings.

As mentioned, the data were analyzed separately by each coder (the second author and a research assistant), and then a collaborative discussion was held involving the research mentors (first and third authors) – both of whom are highly experienced in analyzing qualitative data. Disagreements that emerged during the discussion were addressed through conceptual clarification and consensus.

Alongside the content analysis, we conducted a *form analysis*, focusing on the stylistic, formal, and linguistic aspects of the text. This analysis was not conducted systematically but rather was used to enhance the content analysis. In other words, during the analysis of the texts, the researchers took note of stylistic and linguistic aspects in the data, and these were documented alongside the content analysis. Specifically, we focused on aspects that represent "the language of the unsayable," that is, information that the interviewees seemed to suppress during the interviews [72]. The following indicators were used to detect such instances [1]: "Language of negation" (e.g., "No, no, I don't, I didn't ...") [2]; "Language of revision," in which interviewees contradict themselves in the process of self-revisions [3]; "Language of smokescreen and evasion," and [4] silences. The theory underlying this 'form analysis' [72], attributes significance to the way things are stated as well as to that which is not stated in the interview. The unspoken is perceived as representing feelings and emotions that cause the interviewee discomfort. This analysis was conducted by each of the researchers separately, followed by joint discussions.

4.3. Trustworthiness

Qualitative inquiry traditionally does not claim to produce absolute truths but rather focuses on achieving trustworthiness [73]. To ensure trustworthiness, we performed both "investigator triangulation," by using two researchers and two mentors during the coding, analysis, and interpretation processes, and "prolonged engagement," which was achieved by conducting long interviews that enabled sufficient time to build trust and obtain rich data [74]. Moreover, at the end of each interview, the researcher documented thoughts, assumptions, and feelings in her researcher's journal, to ensure reflexivity.

5. Findings

The analysis revealed that for Muslim parents bereaved by homicide, the process of meaning-making involves silencing, which is grounded in their sociocultural background. Their coping process begins with experiencing substantial difficulty in accepting that the incident is part of God's will, a difficulty which undermines the global meanings of their belief system; the process is concluded by finding meaning and consolation in awaiting the day of judgment, known as "Qayama" Day. The following thematic descriptions are presented alongside excerpts from the data (using only pseudonyms).

5.1. Struggling to accept God's will

The analysis indicated that the Muslim worldview—especially the acceptance of God's will—plays an important role in the meaning-making process of bereaved Muslim parents. All participants described the loss of their child as inevitable, in line with the Muslim concepts of al-Qadr and al-Qada (i.e., predestination "by decree"). Explicitly, all participants claimed that they accepted God's will; however, their form of expression revealed that they also experienced an internal struggle related to this (imposed yet internalized) precept of accepting their loss as part of God's will. Yet it appeared they needed to silence this struggle because it essentially contradicts the norm of religious acceptance. Consequently, they typically refrain from extensive grieving or expressing anger about their loss and, instead, they actively silence their emotions, to conform with the religious norm. Thus, for example, Koltum, a 75-year-old bereaved mother, said:

Thank God, I have a very strong belief in God, al-Qadr and al-Qada. I did not raise my voice or cry out, because I know that is Haram— forbidden according to religion.... I thank the Lord in every situation, no matter what happens.... Demonstrating patience [**acceptance**] is not just about not screaming with the shock of the initial news, it also means not moping about afterward—it is forbidden according to religion. Demonstrating patience means keeping silent and thanking the Lord.... I'm not one to ask "Why did you do this to me," which is forbidden in our religion.... Thank God, thank God, thank God.... I didn't scream I didn't mope, and I did not tear my clothes; I simply wept.... I remained calm, thank heavens ... We Muslims believe that when the relatives of the deceased remain calm, then the deceased can rest, thank goodness.

Koltum emphasized that her acceptance of God's will was demonstrated in her patient behavior immediately after the loss. According to the religious precept, demonstrating patience in this context means remaining silent and she described this silence as avoiding public expressions of emotion and grief ("Patience means being silent and thanking the Lord").

Not unlike Kultom, Sammy (a 55-year-old father who lost his 26-year-old eldest son) described his initial reaction upon learning the news of the homicide, as follows:

I didn't do anything; I only said "Power is only in the hands of God" and "Thank God the ruler of the universe" and went back home.... That is God's will and there's nothing to do about it. Al-Qadr and al-Qada.

Both parents described their child's death as determined by God. Furthermore, they repeatedly mentioned in various ways that they "thank God" – and thus expressed their acceptance of God's will, which is how bereaved Muslim parents are expected to react. Yet, at the same time, it appears that they silenced their emotions to fit the guidelines of Islam, according to which it is inappropriate to prolong one's period of grief; instead, one is expected to quickly adapt and return to routine life. Sammy went on to describe it thus:

Our belief in God is very strong. That is God's will. There is no power that is not in God's hands. ... The grief makes us very sad, and although the official grieving time is only three days, because of my son's goodness, we will mourn him for an entire year. We will not forget him.

As seen, Sammy believes in God and accepts his child's death as part of God's will, but his sadness is immense and it seems that he yearns to express his grief at his own pace. This indicates an internal emotional conflict, between the desire to conform to religious demands and the need to mourn for a prolonged period.

The difficulty is compounded by the circumstances of the death, i.e., a homicide, which, rather than being caused directly by God, is a human act. Samira, a mother who lost her eldest son when he was 26 years old, demonstrates the conflict she experiences between these two desires. At the beginning of the interview, she said "It is destiny; it is destiny—my son's fate." However, at a later point in the discussion, she stated the following:

When someone parks his car outside our door and shoots, that is not destiny, that is the planning of destiny. Destiny is when a car crashes and someone dies, that is God's act. But that is not the case in a homicide. No, no, destiny is anything except assassination – that cannot be called destiny!"

Samira's words reveal her ambivalence in accepting the death of her son as destiny, that is, as part of God's will. Verbally, the statement regarding the assassination as a planned human act contradicts her initial acceptance of her son's death as destined by God's will. According to the "language of the unsayable" [72], this quote demonstrates the use of "language of revision," as the interviewee's revised formulation contradicts her previous words. This suggests that the interviewee was experiencing an internal conflict: on the one hand, her words were guided by the internalized religious precept of accepting the Lord's will, while on the other hand, she evidently experienced difficulty accepting this as the Lord's will, given the circumstance of homicide. This type of pattern was demonstrated by most of the study's participants, indicating their difficulty. Echoing Park's model, such an inner conflict may undermine one's global beliefs, as Fareed's words demonstrate: "If my son had died from a disease or in a car accident, we would thank the Lord and accept it– (he lowers his voice to a whisper)—but to have him murdered?!" Fareed's use of the conjunction "but" indicates that his difficulty stems from the disequilibrium between the circumstances: a loss due to a disease (presumably caused by God) or a car crash (accidentally caused by humans) is not the same as a loss caused by homicide (committed intentionally by human hand). Hence, he finds it difficult to accept this loss as part of God's will; however, lowering his voice to a whisper before admitting as much indicates his inner struggle. To use Rogers' terms [72], the whispering indicates Fareed's need to silence the unsayable.

Wurud, a 46-year-old mother who lost her 22-year-old son due to a dispute between families, similarly described her difficulty in accepting his death under these circumstances as part of God's will: "They murdered him right outside our door!! How can that be destiny? How can people call it destiny? God will avenge him."

In these examples, Samira, Fareed, Wurud represent their and other participants' difficulty in accepting their loss as part of God's will. It was evident that their experience of conflict created a great deal of distress, as most of the parents did not express this difficulty explicitly; rather, they repeatedly emphasized their acceptance of God's will, to begin with, but then later either contradicted themselves or attempted to silence their inner conflict. When asked about this directly (if the issue did not arise spontaneously), many showed signs of discomfort, such as stammering and confusion; others responded by asking if the interview was still being recorded, another indication of silencing. It should be further noted that the interviewer was a young Muslim woman and, hence, the participants were likely to be as wary of expressing their true feelings to her as they would be in public.

In addition, the conflict of accepting God's will may have also stemmed from their assumption that it might signal or be interpreted as forgiveness. Fareeda, a 60-year-old mother whose son was killed at age 36, expressed her anger thus:

We didn't lose him in an accident! It wasn't a disease – it was a murder; a human being murdered him! Not God! If it were a disease, we could see our way to accepting it – but no, this was a human being and you can't even forgive him!

Eventually, this inner conflict undermines parents' global beliefs, which they attempt to conceal and silence. Nevertheless, they need to find a way to resolve their distress and inner conflict, which they seem to do by focusing on the day of judgment, "Qayama" Day.

5.2. Yearning for Qayama Day

According to Islam, the day of judgment is known as "Qayama" Day. That is when the dead shall arise, the infidels will recognize the error of their ways and will be brought to judgment before the Lord [75]. The analysis showed that this day was perceived as a day of transition, from the difficulty of accepting God's will and the related anger and self-silencing, to a sense of closure, which would be provided by God's final judgment. All parents noted they were anxiously awaiting that day of judgment, and that it gives them hope and allays their distress. This anticipation appears as an essential part of parents' meaning-making process in the aftermath of

homicide. Thus, Koltum, for example, described the day of judgment thus:

When [our] enemies come before God on the day of judgment, justice will be revealed. Punishment is dealt by God ... God brings justice. Nothing is forgotten, thank goodness, God is the final judge and we left everything in His hands.... He will address our case ... In the end, justice is revealed, even if it takes 20 more years, God doesn't overlook anything.

As seen, Koltum believes her suffering will end on Qayama Day, and she appears to find consolation and hope in the notion that the assassin will be adequately punished by God on judgment day, and order and balance will be restored. The world will again be guided by God's hand, relieving Koltum's hard feelings. Sammy added to her words:

To the person who murdered my son, I have only one thing to say, [he recites a prayer traditionally said by those who have experienced an injustice in life, in which they ask God to intervene and provide consolation] – nothing else.... In the end, God knows who the killer is and will judge him on Qayama Day.

Similar to Koltum and Sammy, all parents mentioned that they are awaiting Qayama Day to attain justice. Clinging to this belief helps ease their pain and provides a sense of hope. Sogud expressed the same sentiment thus: "I turn to God. He is the only one that will help me. Justice is in the hands of God above, and he will not let evil prevail.... Heaven is better than our terrestrial reality." Indeed, many parents described their emotional disappointment with the current state of affairs and hoped for a resolution on the day of judgment. As they see it, that is when God will avenge them, providing consolation and restoring divine order.

In conclusion, the meaning-making process of Muslim parents bereaved by homicide involves the experience of self-silencing, which is anchored in their religious background. During their meaning-making process, these parents experience significant difficulty accepting that this event is part of God's will, a difficulty that undermines their global beliefs according to Islam. As the process develops they find meaning and consolation in awaiting the day of judgment. This anticipation comforts them, as it holds the promise of restoring their global beliefs, which have been undermined by the loss of their child by homicide. On Qayama Day, their anger and suppressed emotions will be adequately addressed.

6. Discussion

This study provides theoretical insights into the meaning-making process of Muslim parents bereaved by homicide, in light of Park's [33,35] Meaning-Making Model, while taking into account the context of their religious background. The findings indicated that parents' meaning-making process involves the silencing of their emotions, which stems from their need to abide by certain cultural and religious directives. At the initial stage of the process, the parents experience difficulty in accepting their child's murder as part of God's will; in turn, experiencing such difficulty undermines their worldview and their global belief system. This turmoil is resolved by finding meaning and consolation in the promise that justice and order will be restored on the day of judgment – "Qayama" day.

In addition to providing an in-depth description of bereaved Muslim parents' process of meaning reconstruction in the aftermath of a homicide, our findings highlight the importance of addressing sociocultural and religious aspects when exploring meaning reconstruction. The study's findings are interpreted through the lens of Park's Meaning-Making Model [35], according to which, when individuals encounter a stressful event, they appraise its meaning and then determine whether it diverges from their own global meaning constructs (i.e., religious beliefs, ideology). Subsequently, to reduce distress in the event of a discrepancy, one may reappraise the meaning of the event (assimilation), change one's global beliefs (accommodation), or continue without any change. In this vein, our study echoes prior studies [29b,34], and demonstrates the assimilation process that Muslim parents go through following the disruption of their global beliefs, as they attempt to reconstruct their worldview and assign meaning to a son's death due to homicide.

The study highlights that Muslim parents bereaved by homicide face an extreme discrepancy between their pre-existing global beliefs (i.e., that all events are predetermined by God's decree) and their current perception of this death as not being directed by God's hand and their feelings of anger aroused by the unjust circumstances of their child's death. Explicitly expressing this inner conflict would likely be perceived as a lack of faith [76] or lack of gratitude, which would risk alienating them from their communities and being judged by those in their social surroundings, thus adding to their stress, as documented in previous studies of Muslims [34]. Therefore, they chose to silence it. Nevertheless, this conflict and the discrepancy-related distress were eventually addressed and resolved through the process of meaning reconstruction. Yearning for "Qayama" Day means that God's will has yet to be demonstrated: according to this belief, justice will eventually be restored by God. This path allows them to assimilate their interpretation of the tragic loss within the cultural and religious Islamic frame of reference, which in turn resolves their inner conflict and gives them hope and consolation.

The study's findings echo prior findings that linked Park's model to the context of inner religious struggles [7,22,77,78]; however, these were conducted quantitatively, whereas the current study provides qualitative insights into the manifestation of meaning reconstruction in the context of a religious struggle. Furthermore, a new conceptualization explores the notion of religious "head versus heart beliefs," as a promising advance in the study of religion [79]. The current study demonstrates a possible conflict between the "religious head" beliefs (the demand to accept God's will) and the "religious heart" beliefs (the emotions aroused by the homicide and the need for resolution) and its eventual consequences. The study corresponds to prior studies of bereaved Muslim parents, showing that Park's model is relevant to understanding the complex mechanisms that religion serves in coping with adversity [22, 29a]. Yet, further studies connecting these novel notions and the meaning-making process following loss are needed.

In conclusion, the current study furthers our understanding of the experience of Muslim parents bereaved by homicide by framing it in psychological terms. Specifically, the findings demonstrate the psychological dissonance that these parents experience as a result of the inner conflict between their internalized expectation of acceptance of the loss as God's will and the emotions accompanying the

cognitive realization that this loss was caused intentionally by humans. The study also sheds light on their coping, a meaning-making process that leads not only to a cognitive reassessment but also to an emotional resolution, by shifting their focus to the day of judgment that will restore justice by rewarding good and punishing evil [75]. Thus, the resolution of the meaning-making process (i.e., the focus on “Qayama” Day) in fact resolves the psychological dissonance, enabling these parents to finally accept that their loss will be addressed by God at a later point, which relieves their cognitive and emotional distress and even leaves room for hope.

The study echoes Riches’s [80] study, which described the doubly compounded difficulty faced by parents bereaved by homicide, namely, coping not only with the loss of a child but also as collateral victims of homicidal violence. This pattern was further extended in the current study, noting a third, religious source of stress faced by Muslim parents similarly bereaved, which further complicates their grief-resolution process [81], placing them at higher risk of unresolved grief [82]. Despite the complication added by the religious aspect, it is this same aspect of religious belief that provides consolation. Thus, although religion is often viewed as promotive of mental health [83], in this case, religion can be said to have a dual function in this context, presenting bereaved parents with added challenges as well as with options by which to address these challenges, as was recently demonstrated in a prior study [6,36]. This complex picture – showing that religion may both facilitate and impede the coping process, corresponds to prior studies conducted among Muslim believers who faced adversity [22,34].

Another novel finding of the study is related to the issue of parents’ channelling their grief to the ‘Qayama’ day. This aspect has not been previously documented in the literature. Referring to Rubin’s [84] Two-track model, it may be possible that there is a connection between the need for acceptance that stems from the belief in God, and an anger reaction (which is described in Rubin’s first track). Specifically, it may be possible that this process involves a psychological mechanism that resembles a “displacement,” which refers to a psychological process in which an aspect of the self (i.e., anger) is projected (displaced) onto someone else because it is perceived as unacceptable [85]. The purpose of such projection is to reduce psychological pressure, by attributing the “forbidden” emotion to another entity. Essentially, it is a mechanism of psychological projection. In fact, Freud [86] claimed that people commonly displace their own desires onto God’s will. As such, it may be that the parents’ channelling of their grief to the Qayama day represents a process of projecting their anger and their desire for justice onto God, as an aspect of divine responsibility. In some of the interviews, it seems that they attribute to God the role of the avenger, and thus the anger from the parents is transferred to God, as the one “responsible” for exacting revenge. Yet, this hypothesis should be further explored in future research. Regardless, as elaborated beforehand, it seems that the bereaved parents are exposed to significant psychological stress due to social expectations. Thus, the context of Muslim culture and religion eventually may put them at risk of experiencing complex or unprocessed grief. Nevertheless, the possibility that the experience of complex grief is related specifically to these circumstances requires further research.

7. Implications and limitations

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the meaning-reconstruction process as experienced by Muslim parents bereaved by homicide. Employing Park’s Meaning-Making Model [35] in the context of religion has enhanced our theoretical understanding of this process, revealing the significant role of religious aspects. The implied lesson derived from these insights is the need to address the relevant religious frameworks and exercise cultural sensitivity when considering the optimal form of treatment for bereaved parents. Furthermore, identifying the silencing of grief as a factor associated with the religious background in the case of Muslim parents bereaved by homicide highlights the importance of understanding such complications in their appropriate context. To this end, a certain degree of familiarity with the relevant religious framework is needed when assessing and planning a therapeutic approach for each individual case.

As regards the limitations of the current study, its cross-sectional nature imposes certain limitations. Using a longitudinal framework to examine the same phenomenon would likely uncover different insights and emphasize different aspects of the meaning-making process. Also, the current sample size ($n = 12$) may be considered a limitation, along with the gender-biased nature (mostly females) of the study, as it provides a particular and circumscribed view of the studied phenomenon, which might not be applicable to a larger cohort. However, the recruitment of participants that match this profile is further complicated by their tendency to avoid grieving in front of others. That said, in the study of bereavement and loss, smaller samples are customarily deemed sufficient. Lastly, the researchers’ backgrounds may have posed certain limitations. Author 2 is a member of the Muslim community in Israel and thus, her interest in grief following homicide stemmed from her experience of homicide cases in her social surroundings. This may have affected the way the information was shared during the interviews and the way it was analyzed. As noted, however, the interviewer used a reflective diary and mutual brainstorming with the mentors, who belong to the Jewish community, to heighten her awareness of such potential bias when interpreting the findings [87]. Future studies may opt to examine the interesting questions of why the bereaved Muslim parents agreed to come to the interview, as well as what were their hidden or unconscious expectations, and how the opportunity for conversation formed part of their grieving processing. We hope that the current findings help pave the way to a more comprehensive understanding of the significance of the religious contexts in the bereaved parents’ process of reconstructing meaning in the process of grieving. The practical manifestation of this conclusion should be seen in the implementation of sociocultural sensitivity when exploring bereavement as well as using spiritually-informed practice [88], both in research and in therapy, when interacting with bereaved parents of all faiths.

Author contribution statement

Rivi Frei-Landau: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper. Islam Abo-Mokh: Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data. Naama Sabar Ben-Yehoshua: Conceived and designed the experiments;

Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Data availability statement

The data that has been used is confidential.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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