



Discursive-Cognitive Death Conceptualization in the Iranian Official Media Case Study: Bombing of the Eyn al-Asad Military Base

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Scientific Research Article history: Received: 2025-06-10 Received in revised form: 2025-10-14 Accepted : 2025-11-21 Available online: 2026-07-25 Keywords: Conceptualization, Metaphor, Positive/ Negative Death, Iranian Media, Eyn al-Asad.	Objective: The present study examines how Iranian media represents and conceptualizes the bombing of the Eyn al-Asad military base as part of the "Revenge Operations" following the assassination of Qassem Soleimani. From a native perspective, this cognitive-discursive analysis focuses on how these events are formulated and conceptualized within Iranian media narratives. The media differentiates between the deaths of ordinary individuals and those considered ideological adherents, referring to the latter as martyrdom, while characterizing the deaths of out-group members as acts of killing and destruction. This border-making media-based image is a step toward antagonizing the others, who, in this context, are the Americans and Israelis. Method: The analysis is done in three levels. The first level examined word choice and its metaphorical conceptualization. The second level involved categorizing the identified metaphors according to their semantic conceptualizations. The third level focused on discourse analysis, illustrating how these categories reflect antagonistic attitudes toward out-groups. Findings: Employing metaphor theory to explore the cognitive dimension and the concept of antagonism to analyze the discursive dimension, the findings reveal that Iranian formal media uses the metaphor "Death as Destruction" to depict the deaths of out-group members negatively, whereas positive, in-group deaths are conceptualized through metaphors such as "Death as Journey," "Death as Loss," "Death as Sleep," and "Death as Salvation." Conclusion: According to this media narrative, aligned with the hegemonic ideology, the world is portrayed as a battleground between forces of good and evil, positioning Iran as the leader of an anti-imperialist front, the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors. In the cognitive conceptualization promoted by Iranian media, members of the oppressed group who are killed attain heaven, while their adversaries are consigned to hell. This perspective is influenced by elements such as mystical traditions, the principles of <i>Wilāyat</i> and Imamah in Shi'a Islam, and the Islamic Revolution's interpretation of jihad. Within this theological framework, death is cognitively represented as a form of sacred suffering and the beginning of eternal life marked by divine satisfaction.

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Introduction

Many aspects of Iranian Shi'a lifestyle appear to be closely associated with the concept of death. In their daily lives, Iranians are frequently engaged with the manifestations and imagery of death, some of which hold significance equal to that of life. These beliefs may influence attitudes and behaviors, although the extent of this influence varies across contexts. This perspective may stem from their historical memory and collective consciousness. Some scholars argue that the interregnum period contributed to a cultural tendency toward fatalism and determinism. A semi-mystical view of death is reflected in certain cultural narratives and practices among Iranians. Generally, death is not perceived as a purely rational or natural event; rather, it is imbued with meaning and mysticism. From this eschatological standpoint, death is not the end of life but a transition from the material to the immaterial world, where a person's good and bad deeds are judged, and reward or punishment awaits.

Iranians, who in the interregnum years of the rule between the fall of the Sassanids and the emergence of the Pahlavi, faced a kind of anxiety in response to the nature and essence of death, encountered a mixture of Iranian-Shi'a and Sufi nature with the Sufis. During this period, Iran reemerged on the world map; the heritage and tradition of Iranshahri, along with the Iranian ideal type (Shahriar Armani), were revived, and Sufism was established as the intellectual and ontological foundation. In contrast to Sunni identity, Shi'a identity gained prominence, the Sunni governmental system became internalized, and eventually, Western intellectual and technological ideas and products entered Iran's social context. These developments laid the groundwork for rethinking the concept and nature of death. Power shaped the knowledge system, which in turn formulated the semantic framework and redefined the semantic and identity constructs of death for Iranians.

After the 1979 revolution and the rise of Islamism in Iran, the religious-traditional beliefs replaced the semi-modern, nationalist ones. Some analysts suggest that the Islamic revolution and the war with Iraq contributed to a fusion of mystical beliefs about death with ideological interpretations of religion; this represented itself in some concepts like Jihad and Martyrdom. Those who were killed during the revolution or against Saddam's aggression were given the title of martyr, and their work was called "Fighting in the path of God."

The concepts of martyr and martyrdom are among the significant sources of legitimacy for the Islamic system in Tehran. This issue has been defined and redefined in various ways, particularly in the literature of revolutionary leaders and elites.

Accordingly, the concept of martyrdom, beyond its common forms, has been represented in different categories such as missing martyrs, unknown martyrs, martyrs who defended the holy shrines, health martyrs, zeal martyrs, border guard martyrs, and others.

Martyrdom is mainly sought in the dual fight of the oppressed and the oppressors or the domination system and the anti-domination system. From the point of view of the ruling elites in the Islamic Republic, the world is a stage of struggle between the two fronts of the oppressed and the oppressors, and in this route, there is no other way than martyrdom and sacrificing one's life for the oppressed and deprived. This mission is historical, religious, and humanitarian; anyone who follows this path is a martyr and deserves the highest rewards in divine paradise. These martyrs are those who have stepped in line with the element of Shi'a Imamate and Wilayat and fulfilled their duty. As a result, it is stated by the Iranian leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, that "Martyrdom is the death of a businessman, the death of shrewd people." (<https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1979/Leader-s-Speech-to-Families-of-Martyrs-and-War-Veterans-of-Kerman>) Or as General Soleimani states, "The condition of becoming a martyr is to be a martyr."

One of the figures whose death has attracted significant attention since the Islamic Revolution is General Qassem Soleimani. Soleimani was the commander of the IRGC's Quds Force and has been described in official narratives as a key military figure in post-revolutionary Iran. The responsibility of Soleimani and the Quds Force was to expand the strategic depth of the Islamic system. In other words, his duty was to ensure the transmission and export of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution to the nations of the region and beyond. Soleimani and his accompanying team, especially *Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis*, during the early hours of Friday, January 3, 2020. He was killed by the missiles fired by the US drone at Baghdad International Airport.

This research, conducted from a native perspective, aims to achieve two objectives: "First, to understand how the death of Qassem Soleimani is portrayed in Iranian official media; and second, to explore how the death of Eyn al-Asad is conceptualized." Accordingly, the following sections will first define the three levels of analysis, micro, meso, and macro, then introduce the tools used at each level, and finally present the discourse analysis. The data analysis begins with an assessment of conceptual metaphors, followed by a critical-cognitive discourse analysis of antagonism.

The continuance of an antagonistic relationship can lead to a severe polarization. Accordingly, the formal media in Iran always tries to define and represent the Iranian identity through presenting two opposing poles, which are contesting and fighting the world. In this cognitive framework, Media discourse often portrays Iran's identity as one constructed around resistance and struggle. Within this identity-based representation, life and death are determined by the way one confronts the antagonistic polarization. The post-revolutionary Iran is a resisting one and the *Umm al-Qurā* of the Muslim world and the leader of the oppressed of the world, which will never give up fighting the oppressors and the imperialists and reconcile with them. In this path, death is eternal bliss, that is martyrdom, and this discourse idealizes martyrdom as a desirable form of death within certain ideological frameworks. This kind of media discourse is not life-based but death-based. The positive death in this situation is a kind of sacred suffering.

Literature Review

Examining conceptual metaphors within the political discourse of a specific individual or government is crucial for uncovering the underlying cognitive and ideological structures that shape political messaging and public perception. Such analysis reveals how metaphorical language strategically frames complex issues, legitimizes authority, and influences collective attitudes toward policies, identities, and international relations. Wei (2001) analyzed metaphorical expressions in Taiwanese political discourse, identifying metaphors related to marriage, weather, and economic transactions. Uvehhammer (2005) examined a presidential debate, revealing use of war metaphors by candidates. Vestermark (2007) studied metaphors used by US presidents, finding that they employed metaphors from storytelling, sports, and battlefields to shape public perception. Musolff (2013) analyzed metaphors in European Union political discourse, observing metaphors related to family, building, and human beings. Yu (2008) compared conceptual metaphors related to the body in Chinese and English. Taiwo (2010) studied metaphors in Nigerian political discourse, identifying metaphors of battle, journey, and path. Petrica (2011) explored conceptual metaphors in Malaysian political discourse, including those related to home, family, and historical context. Krimova (2015) examined the role of political metaphors in Obama's speeches, highlighting their power in shaping public opinion. Etino, Owino, and Atiang (2016) reviewed studies on metaphors in Kenyan political discourse,

emphasizing their role in helping citizens understand political issues. Burcic, Kanizaj, and Kresul (2016) analyzed metaphors used by the former president of Croatia.

Pourebrahim (2020) investigated election metaphors in Iranian political newspapers. The study used Chilton's (2004) Deictic Dimension Model to analyze how metaphors legitimize certain candidates and ideologies. Huang (2022) applied the "Discourse Dynamics Framework for Metaphor (DDFM)" to a political speech by Xi Jinping on fighting COVID-19. Ghafourisaleh & Kazemi (2021) examined conceptual metaphors and their functions within the political discourse of a specific government. The article contributed to the field by examining the specific use of conceptual metaphors within a particular political context. Brugman, Burgers & Vis (2019) presented a meta-analysis (k=91, N=34,783) comparing the persuasive impact of metaphorical framing in political discourse at both the word and concept levels. The results indicated that both metaphorical words and metaphorical concept frames positively influence beliefs and attitudes, but the effect is larger for metaphorical concept frames. Shokati Moqarab and Rahimian (2022) investigated how conceptual metaphors contribute to the construction of identity boundaries and the attainment of political legitimacy.

Theoretical Framework

The present study aims to investigate how death is cognitively conceptualized within the Iranian ideological context. To achieve this, it employs a combination of cognitive linguistics and critical discourse analysis, framed within Hart's (2010) cognitive critical discourse analysis approach. Hart (2011: 270) notes, "Within Fairclough's (1995) tripartite model of discourse and discourse analysis, it is description-stage analysis which has received the most attention." "CDA requires an approach that takes serious stock of research in contemporary Cognitive Science." (Hart, 2010: 6) Such research provides the analyst with an expressive analysis. The theoretical framework of this study consists of three levels. In the first level (micro-level), conceptual metaphor is analyzed, in the second (meso-level), the data is semantically categorized, and then the results are investigated through cognitive critical discourse analysis in the third (macro) level. The data are analyzed discursively by focusing on the element of antagonism in the last level.

Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis

Christopher Hart, in his publications (2011, 2010), combined Cognitive Linguistics (CL) with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). He utilized techniques such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Force Dynamics, Event Construal, and Blended Mental Spaces to reveal the cognitive frameworks that exist within discourse. These studies examined how specific language choices in the media, such as describing immigration as a "Force" or political protests as "Aggressive events," influence the attribution of blame, emotional responses, and ideological perspectives. By linking cognitive processes to discourse, Hart provided a method for analyzing how language subtly reinforces power dynamics and societal prejudices, particularly through strategies like framing, metaphor, and mental space theory. This approach uncovers the deeper cognitive mechanisms that shape language in ideological contexts.

In Hart's (2010) viewpoint, CDA lacks the interpretation stage to explain how linguistic choices affect discursive articulations. Hart (2011, p. 271) states, the key claim of Cognitive Linguistics for CDA, in this view, is that cognitive categories are structured around "Construal." Construal refers to the conceptualization of a fact in any number of ways, but a special language structures particular conceptualizations on the scene.

Cognitive linguistics offers various concepts that can be utilized in CDA to examine manipulation and ideology within discourse, extending beyond the study of metaphor.

Where Cognitive Linguistics has been applied in CDA, then, this has largely been at the description rather than the interpretation stage, where texts and discourses have been analyzed but the practice of discourse itself has not been addressed. This is because Conceptual Metaphor Theory is a theory of conceptual organization. Conceptualization is an 'online' cognitive process of meaning construction, which takes place during discourse and results in mental representations of the situations and events described. (Evans and Green 2018: 162).

The concepts of conceptualization and entrenchment in cognitive linguistics connect linguistic representations in text with the ideologies or cognitive models necessary for CDA to explain how discourse can shape society. The relationship between discourse, text, and discourses outlined in CDA parallels the relationship between cognitive models, language, and conceptualization described in cognitive linguistics (Hart, 2010).

A Discursive Approach to Agonism and Antagonism

Agonism, as defined by Mouffe (2002), involves a democratic confrontation between adversaries who share a common "Grammar of democratic life." This shared understanding serves as a limiting and moderating element in their confrontation, emphasizing the left/right distinction. Connolly (2002), another leading theorist of agonism, argues that agonistic respect is a civic virtue that enables political actors to express and negotiate their differences respectfully. Through self-remaking practices, political actors confront the agony of existence, recognizing it as intrinsic to the processes of identity formation. Connolly's concept of agonism does not imply a subdued form of conflict; rather, it embodies an ethic of care for life, allowing individuals to cultivate an awareness of the contingency, interdependence, and contestability of their value systems (Tambakaki, 2014: 2).

Social antagonism occurs when different identities mutually exclude one another. Although a subject may possess multiple identities, these identities do not necessarily have to relate to each other in an antagonistic manner. The implication of Hobsbawm's example is that one can be a "Worker" and a "Scot" at the same time. But if the worker identity excludes obligations to the country in war, for instance, or if the national identity summons people to kill those whom they consider to be fellow workers in other countries, then the relationship between the two identities becomes antagonistic (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002: 47-48).

Antagonism, in Laclau's words (1990: 51), is the result of a dislocation that has arisen from the structure's break by those forces which act outside it. Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 137) call this threatening outside the constitutive outside. They believe that each domain of the internal relations consists of an implied reference to an outside social antagonism. Mouffe indicates that a significant part of my argument will consist in examining the consequences of the negation of antagonism in several areas, both in theory and in politics. It is my contention that envisaging the aim of democratic politics in terms of consensus and reconciliation is not only conceptually mistaken, it is also fraught with political dangers. The aspiration to a world where the we/they discrimination would have been overcome is based on flawed premises and those who share such a vision are bound to miss the real task facing democratic politics. (Mouffe, 2005: 2).

Conceptual Metaphor

The cognitive element of this study is conceptual metaphor, which has different approaches to the issue of death and its conceptualization in a variety of contexts. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson who introduced Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which significantly transformed the study of metaphors. Metaphors are now recognized as essential mechanisms that shape human thought, rather than merely verbal constructs primarily used in rhetoric and poetry (Nabavi Zadeh Namazi, 2024). As Kövecses (2010: 4) states, "Metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain... conceptual domain A is conceptual domain B, which is what is called a conceptual metaphor." In other words, as Kövecses (2010) explains, "A conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another. A conceptual domain is any coherent organization of experience." Therefore, the two domains that participate in conceptual metaphor have special names. The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain. Thus, life, arguments, love, theory, ideas, social organizations, and others are target domains, while journeys, war, buildings, food, plants, and others are source domains. The target domain is the domain that we try to understand through the use of the source domain (Kövecses, 2010: 4).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) adopted a strategy for naming such mappings, using mnemonics that suggest the mapping. Mnemonic names typically (though not always) have the form: "Target domain is source domain or alternatively, target domain as source domain." In this case, the name of the mapping is love is a journey. "When we speak of the love is a journey metaphor, we are using a mnemonic for a set of ontological correspondences that characterize a mapping." (Lakoff, 2006: 189-190)

Method of data collection and selection

The study data are specifically focused on the news broadcast after Iran attacked the Eyn al-Asad base, called the "Revenge Operations" of the assassination of General Soleimani by the USA on 8 January 2020. The related data is collected from the official news agencies in Iran, mainly FARS¹, Tasnim², and ISNA³. All the data were

1 <https://www.farsnews.ir/>

2 <https://www.tasnimnews.com/>

3 <https://www.isna.ir/>

analyzed line by line to examine how these sites reflected the event's news. Statements containing keywords such as death, killing, martyrdom, and similar terms were extracted for metaphorical and discursive analysis. The analysis was conducted on three levels: "The first level focused on word selection and their metaphorical conceptualizations; the second involved categorizing the analyzed metaphors based on their semantic conceptualizations; and the third level was discursive in nature." The third, discursive, level demonstrates how the categories represent antagonistic approaches against the out-groups. Therefore, the metaphorical analysis of each statement is followed by its categorization, to place the analyzed data in their conceptual related categories, and the resulting categories are analyzed discursively, focusing on the "Antagonism" element of Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory.

Data Analysis

This section explores the conceptualization of death through construal systems, with a particular focus on conceptual metaphor. The corpus is analyzed to investigate how death is metaphorically represented and how these metaphors contribute to the expression of antagonism both in real-world contexts and within political discourse. To illustrate these processes, Persian statements are provided alongside literal translations, demonstrating how death is conceptualized in Iranian discourse.

Death as loss

One of the death metaphors is death is/as loss, in which "The euphemisms losing and missing take the perspective of those left alive-or, to use the metaphor of death as a journey, those left behind. People are conceptualized as valuable possessions, who thus can be "Lost"... The "Loss" image is also found in statements about the loved one being taken (either by a god or by malevolent fate) (Allan, 2018: 50).

In the studied corpus, this loss is also attributed to the death of General Soleimani, who was regarded as a loved one. The sorrow experienced from losing a loved one is expressed as profound grief. Therefore, attacking the American base in Iraq is seen as a way to alleviate this pain.

Today, to some extent, we can feel a little pain from the loss of martyr general Soleimani, who was truly beloved by all Iranians, although this pain will never be forgotten.

The loss here refers to the death of General Soleimani and its effect on the people who love him.

Death as Grim Reaper

Another death metaphor is death as grim reaper. "In this conceptualization, the lifetime of human beings is conceptualized as the lifecycle of a plant, and death as harvesting. Based on this metaphor, the image of a reaper cutting down a plant, corresponds to the person dying." (Allan, 2018: 48) Accordingly, in the news analyzed, the attack on Eyn al-Asad's base is described as plowing the land, with all those injured or killed in the base likened to plants harvested by the Grim Reaper. It is said, "Eyn al-Asad's plow shook the arrogance." The act of plowing consists of everything and every person in the base, and there is no difference between those killed.

Another statement with such conceptualization is the following:

"You saw how Iran plowed the largest US military base in the region."

In this statement, Iran is depicted as the Grim Reaper who has plowed through the base, indiscriminately killing those within it. The base is defined as a land whose people and equipment are being simultaneously harvested.

Death as Destruction

One of the frequently used metaphors in the corpus is death as destruction. In this metaphor, as Lakoff (1994: 238) states, "Destruction and devouring are actions in which an entity ceases to exist. The same is true of death. The overall shape of the event of death is similar in this respect to the overall shapes of the events of destruction and devouring." The act of imposing death and destruction on an entity by an enemy is highlighted in this metaphor (Foreman, 2011: 171). Killing as destroying is one of the main conceptualizations that is frequently used to infer the Other (enemy) being attacked. Using the word "Killed" in the Iranian context implies the harshest way of death imposed on others.

At least 80 American terrorists were killed in the IRGC revenge operations. The goal was not to kill anyone, but if we wanted to, we would have left 5 thousand killed. They have certainly killed many. They have definitely suffered a lot of casualties and damage.

This kind of other-making is applied in this context to show that "Our Other" is destroyed through "Killing." In the following statement, the news agencies literally

use the word "Eyn," translating it to "Like Something" and conceptualizing the result of attacking the base "Eyn al-Asad" to something that is destroyed and turned to "A thing like a corpse." Accordingly, this corpse is lifeless, unable to do anything, and implies the destruction of all the power the US claimed.

Turning Eyn al-Asad into Eyn al-Asad (like a corpse) was the destruction of the imaginary power of America.

This statement, like other examples, represents the attack as a move toward destroying not only those in the base but also the US power. In another statement, killing is exactly stated as destroying the others who are defined as terrorists.

The destruction of 80 American terrorist soldiers in Eyn al-Asad base.

The complete removal of an actor from the political landscape functions as another way of representing the destruction of the Other. In the following statement, Americans' influence in the Middle East is presented as contingent on Israel's continued existence, and the statement even suggests that Israel could be eliminated by limited military operations. Thus, in this discourse the "Removal" of an entity denotes not only its political eradication but also the physical annihilation of its people.

America is here because America's life is in Israel's glass, and Israel will be completely removed from political geography with a limited operation.

One of the other serious other-makings from the beginning of Islam was between Muslims and Jews. As it is mentioned in a verse of the Quran, "Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion." In the contemporary era, this struggle manifests primarily between Iran and Israel, centering on Jerusalem (al-Quds) and the broader Arab-Israeli conflict. Those who are killed along this path are regarded as martyrs and are believed to become companions of the awaited Imam. The issue of Jerusalem and Palestine thus serves as the most significant point of connection and ideological linkage between Shi'a Iran and the Sunni world. Consequently, within this discourse, Palestine and the resolution of its conflict are symbolically foregrounded through the principle of resistance. Accordingly, the Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, in the funeral procession of the General, termed Soleimani as the "Martyr of Quds."

Another point regarding the destructive concept is the use of which implies completely breaking or knocking something or someone down. Following this, a group of American riflemen is sent back to their country in a coffin. Thus, after the act of smashing, the destruction occurs, and those who are destroyed or killed are sent home in coffins.

"Today, at the same time that the enemies of God and the enemies of God's righteous servants (the enemy of Allah, and your enemy) assassinated our martyr Soleimani, the first smash of consecutive smashes was delivered to arrogance and we sent the first group of American riflemen sent back to America with a coffin and it has just begun. With the martyrdom of General Soleimani, your gradual death has accelerated, and each of us, wherever we find you, the arrogant people, will dry up your roots as a religious obligation. The martyrdom of Lieutenant General Soleimani, the starting point of the collapse of the Arrogant Front."

The word "Eyn" is an Arabic word meaning both "To be like something" and "Eye." In conceptualizing the destruction of the American base in Iraq, the official news agencies in Iran used both meanings to represent their other-making with the USA. Previously, it was shown that this word was used in the news as "Being like a corpse" and in the following, it is used in a context meaning "Eye." Furthermore, "Asad" as an Arabic word means lion, and attacking the American base is conceptualized as blinding the eye of the lion. A kind of totally literally translating of the name of the base to depict its destruction. "The lion's eye was blinded!"

An example of embodiment through metaphors can be found in a news headline describing the decline of the United States' military presence in the region. In this context, the attack on the American base in Iraq is metaphorically depicted as the backbone of a human figure lying in the area. The phrase "Breaking the backbone" symbolizes the destruction of the essential pillars supporting this military force.

"The military backbone of the US in the region broke."

In the analyzed data, the arrogance is metaphorically conceptualized as a human, and the attack of the American base is equivalent to a death blow. So, "Death Blow" is used to imply the attack and killing of the American army as a destruction imposed on the enemy.

"The death blow to the dignity of arrogance in Eyn al-Asad."

Death as Sleep

There is an evident similarity between a sleeping body and a dead one, and sleep has often been regarded as a temporary death, a period when the soul leaves the body to later return to it when it awakens (Allan, 2018: 51). "When death is described as sleep, we imagine that it, too, is temporary; no wonder that death notices often substitute sleep for death. The commonly used abbreviation of R.I.P. (rest in peace) also draws on the metaphorical image of death as being a final (and eternal) resting point, this

image is also borne out on euphemistic tombstone inscriptions such as finally at peace or peace at last." (Migut 2016: 189 cited in Allan, 2018: 51)

Lakoff and Turner (1989: 18-19) explain the death is sleep metaphor as follows (Rasse, 2022: 85):

In the death is sleep metaphor, the corpse corresponds to the body of a sleeper, and the appearance of the corpse, inactive and inattentive, to the appearance of the sleeper. Optionally, the experience of the soul after death corresponds to our mental experiences during sleep, namely dreaming. And just as death is a particular sort of departure, a one-way departure with no return, so death is a particular sort of sleep, an eternal sleep from which we never waken.

In the metaphorical explanation of the death of Gen. Soleimani through the death as sleep metaphor is also evident in this context. Using the phrase "Sleep Well" and repeating it implies that this death is like sleeping, in which the resting point is reached.

Sleep well, general, in your eternal home, but know that the shrine will not be defenseless!

Death as Journey

Based on Ralston (2016: 84), "One of the most conventional metaphors for death is that of departure, and of death being the final stage of life's journey. This metaphor negates the finality of death by applying a sense of continuous movement to the deceased, so that they are considered to be somehow alive in another place." Furthermore, Turner and Lakoff (2009: 7) explain that "The death as departure metaphor is often extended in religious traditions where the departure is seen as the beginning of a journey to a final destination. This makes use of the basic metaphor that states are locations that one can be in, enter, or leave. Being dead is a final state and, therefore, metaphorically a final location. A change of state is metaphorically a change of location. Via death is departure, this final location is the final destination toward which one departs. The specific details of this final location vary: "It can be, for example, God the Father's house, punishment in hell, an assigned spot in the underworld, final rest, or the place of one's origin, which can be one's home."

Within this discursive context, death is conceptualized as a purposeful journey culminating in the attainment of a sacred destination, one that signifies both transcendence and emancipation. Among the most revered of these destinations is reunion with the founder of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. In

the narrative under analysis, General Qasem Soleimani is metaphorically aligned with *Mālik Ashtar*, the loyal and trusted commander of Imam Ali, the first Imam in Shi'a Islam. By extension, Ayatollah Khomeini is symbolically equated with Imam Ali (AS), positioning Soleimani as his devoted general who has now rejoined him. This act of reunion is portrayed not merely as a consequence of death, but as the fulfillment of a spiritual journey, one that began in life and reached its divine conclusion in martyrdom.

"This time's *Mālik Ashtar* joined Ruhollah."

Another conceptualization of this assassination is achieved by defining death as the attainment of a high level of martyrdom. Martyrdom is thus considered the highest form of death, distinct and superior to that of ordinary individuals. This level is attained by members of the in-group, while out-group members are merely killed or destroyed.

"O! Loving warrior and devout mystic, who at the hands of the vilest enemies of the Iranian nation and the Islamic world, that is, the criminal America, reached the lofty level of martyrdom and reached your long-standing desire..."

Martyrdom in the Persian context is an act of "Reaching." As the literally translated utterance proves, Gen. Soleimani reached this destination, that is martyrdom.

In this discourse, death is not the end of the life journey, but it's the beginning of a new journey. In the following line, it is emphasized that this death is the start of a new route. In the Islamic culture, animal slaughter starts with mentioning the name of God. There is a kind of intertextual relationship between this culture and talking about a new beginning. The hard revenge is intertextually related to this kind of slaughtering.

"The bloodline is not the end of Soleimani/Be afraid that this is the beginning of the name of God."

Death as Salvation

While it is said that "Good things in general (like life) are metaphorically up, light, warm, and valuable, while bad things (like death) are down, dark, cold, and maybe also nonvaluable," (Kovecses, 2000: 44) in the studied context, death is conceptualized as emancipation and deliverance. It is formulated in the up-down image schema. In this schema, up is specific and for the in-groups, and down is reached by the out-groups. So, the up schema delivers the dead to the salvation and emancipation levels. As via (2012: 223) indicates, "Paul in 2 Cor 4:7-2 understands salvation as a metaphorical reliving of the death and resurrection of Jesus."

However, based on Dunn (2001: 156) "The difficulties that have accrued around the sacrificial atonement metaphor of salvation, exacerbated by its almost exclusive use for centuries, do not negate the importance of the cross or the power of sacred suffering. Rather, new theological interpretation is called for that will head debilitating complications off while doing justice to the centrality of Jesus death "For us." By setting the cross in its historical context, Jesus' research contributes to this needed solution. It offers a new imagination with which to appreciate the Messiah's saving work.

Throughout history, Shi'ism has generally been a minority faith. Prior to the Safavid era, when a central government was established in the name of Shi'ism, Shi'as held little power except during limited periods. From the perspective of its elites, Shi'a history has been marked by oppression and injustice. The notion of *Taqiyyah*, meaning the concealment of belief and faith in Shi'a doctrine to avoid harm and persecution by non-Shi'a rulers, was coined in this context. As is known, in contrast to Sunnis, who prioritize practice over theory, Shi'ism places greater emphasis on idea and theory over practice. This means that Sunnis, having held power, first engaged in actions, and then their thinkers, jurists, and scholars formulated justifications and related theories. In Shi'ism, however, the processes of idea-making and theorization were carried out for years in secrecy. These ideas were only put into practice after the emergence of the Safavid dynasty, when the opportunity for action became available.

One of the important points in comprehending the Shi'a discourse in general and concerning death in particular is to understand that Shi'as have always perceived themselves as being oppressed because of not having power. In the shade of this approach, the idea of resistance has circulated among Muslims. This has caused the Shi'as, like the Jews, to be occupied with notions based on salvation and emancipation. The Shi'as are killed, and the fighters are martyrs who have been sacrificed in their path to reaching salvation and emancipation.

For the Shi'as, especially after the Safavids, three events of Ghadir centered on Imam Ali (AS), *Āshūrā* centered on Imam *Husayn* (AS) and the emergence of Shia messiah (the awaited Imam) centered on Imam Mahdi (AJ) have been very important and prominent. These events are considered the biggest border-making of the Shi'as against their others. According to Shi'a doctrine, the historical lines in the struggle between good and evil are defined and drawn through these events, and the salvation and emancipation of Shi'as are realized within this framework. These three events are

regarded as the primary sources of the concepts of jihad and martyrdom in Shi'a thought.

An interesting aspect of the Shi'a-Iranian discourse on death is that dignified death is regarded as the highest form of death, namely, martyrdom in the path of righteousness and truth. In this view, Imam *Husayn* (AS) sacrificed his life in the event of '*Āshūrā*' so that the path of righteousness and truth would endure eternally throughout history. Imam *Husayn* (AS) is considered the ever-living martyr of history and is the shining light of guidance and the ark of salvation. This red line, based on the two elements of jihad and martyrdom, will last forever after this event. Armageddon and Shia messianism will also be based on these two elements of jihad and martyrdom. The ideal point is that the Shi'as wish to be one of the 313 messiahs (Imam Mahdi)'s special companions. Tolerating any kind of hardship in the way of fighting arrogance and defending the oppressed is considered a form of sacred suffering.

Based on this approach, the resistance front required Gen. Soleimani's blood to be immortalized; his death led to the unity of the Muslim nation. Therefore, an ordinary death could not produce such outcomes. In this ideology, the suffering of being killed to save the Muslim world results in emancipation.

"The immortalization of the Resistance Front demanded the blood of Haj Qasim, and you knew that your martyrdom would lead to the unity of the Islamic nation, and that your blood would create miracles..."

This kind of death is defined as serving Islam and a way toward emancipation. So, martyrdom is a level of reaching emancipation.

"Just as your life was to serve Islam and the revolution, your martyrdom should be like your life to serve Islam."

Gen. Soleimani is regarded as a legend in the Muslim world and the resistance front. This characterization indicates that his death leads to emancipation and solidifies his status as a legend.

"Lieutenant General Martyr Soleimani is a legend of the Muslim world and the resistance front."

This process of myth-making of people is seen in some events regarding Qassem Soleimani like including March 20th as "National Heroes' Day" in the official calendar of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This process of hero-making was also mentioned by some researchers and analysts like Peterson (2016), who explained the approach toward Soleimani as a living commander elevated to a hero status: "Not a Shi'a

religious figure and not a martyr, Qassem Soleimani, the living commander of Iran's elite Quds Force, has been elevated to hero status."

In another statement, emphasis is placed on his presence in heaven and his observation of the operations targeting the American base. A person in heaven is considered to have attained emancipation. He and his comrades are described as being in heaven to highlight that those following this path are on a redemptive journey.

"Surely, the pure soul of Haj Qasim the Great and his Mujahid comrades in heaven were witnessing and helping this victorious operation."

The official media uses the interpretation of "Soleimani Jewel" in this regard. Based on this interpretation, jewel is the ring's gemstone, which has a special place in the Iranian-Shi'a culture, and even the beliefs and ideas are engraved on it. In the "Soleimani Jewel," Soleimani is both the name of the figure and the name of Solomon as the ruler of all the world, in all of the Abrahamic religions. So, Soleimani is assimilated to a gemstone of a ring which is going to be universal. It is meant that Soleimani's blood is not going to be trampled, but it's going to be universal like the Kingdom of Solomon. Thus, the Solomon Kingdom would be revived through this blood. It should be noted that the color red is also a symbol in Shi'a culture, representing positive death or martyrdom. This color appears in images of Soleimani's gemstone to signify his connection to Shi'a tradition.

Although black is the symbol of death and sorrow in the Iranian-Shi'a culture, red is the continuance of the green color of *Wilāyat* and Imamah and depicts martyrdom. In the Shi'a view, martyrdom is represented as a line containing all the martyred oppressed throughout history. The culmination of this martyrdom red line is the incident of *ʿĀshūrā*. When someone is martyred, they are remembered by referencing Imam *Husayn* (AS) and are regarded as his soldier and companion. This state of being a soldier can be seen on Soleimani's gravestone with a text of "Burial place of soldier Qassem Soleimani." On the other side, the martyrdom red line finally leads to the doctrine of *Mahdaviyat* (Shi'a messianism), which the martyrs are paving the way to the emergence of Imam Mahdi (AJ).

Cognitive Death-Based Antagonism

Antagonism has two subjective and objective dimensions. In other words, interaction appears in the subjective and objective domains. We have images and concepts of the self and other borders in our minds and act in accordance with them. On the other side, reality and the objective domain also formulate and shape our mental forms of our

identity bordering with the others. Regarding the belief in different sorts of positive and negative deaths, there has always been a kind of cognitive action in the image-making of the Iranian post-revolutionary media. This media, in some cases like the assassination of Gen. Soleimani and the Eyn al-Asad event, tries to formulate the Iranian mentality and conception. In this reading, Soleimani is the symbol of fighting for the right, and in the words of the Iranian leader, "Soleimani's shoe is more valuable than the head of his murderer." This mental formulation is in contrast with Trump's illustration, who says, "US killed a monster. He was a monster. And he's no longer a monster. He's dead."

The cognitive-media conceptualization of death in the Iranian mass media tries to make an intersubjective link with the constituent elements of the Iranian identity. Accordingly, all the Iranians should comprehend those killed in the way of the idea of Islamic resistance as "Martyr"; a person who is killed in line with the divine guardianship (the trinity of God, the prophet Muhammad, and obeying those of authority) preserving and strengthening Iran's nationality and land, and finally protecting humanity and mankind. These martyrs are simultaneously represented as the martyrs of defending the holy shrines (martyrs in line with the idea of Shi'a-Islamic resistance), martyrs for Iran, border guards Martyrs, and martyrs in line with humanity and fighting terrorism (ISIS neo-fundamentalism). On the other hand, the dead of the opposite front are represented as people against this idea who are not only against Iran and Muslims' security and interests, but also are evil against humanity and mankind.

The reflected comprehension in the Islamic Republic's mass media on the positive and negative death is not an innovative and novel idea but a revivalist one. As it was mentioned, both the Iranians and the Shi'as, due to not having power and a representative state (especially from the fall of the Safavids to the rise of the Sufis), have passed the *Taqiyyah* and their hidden life and fight. Accordingly, minority ideologies are regarded as more empathetic and capable of fostering solidarity. In such contexts, protective frameworks offer broader coverage. Mental symbolization shapes the cognitive orientation of the in-group society in opposition to the dominant hegemonic mainstream, which expands its influence. The negative fight of the *Taqiyyah* era turns to ideologies of fighting in the Islamic resistance era; a trend which in Iran's post-revolutionary era since 1979, affected by the special spirit of revolutionary leaders and elites, some social activism trends, and some effects of leftist currents and ideologies, has gained more color and intensity.

Based on the analyzed metaphors, it is evident that the Iranian mass media metaphorically represents the death of the other as a negative and destructive way, while the self or the in-group's ideological self is not dead but martyred in the way of the idea of resistance and the ideals of Shi'ism. This death is metaphorically represented by concepts of a journey toward a transcendental end, reaching the religious and revolutionary figures and gaining salvation. These metaphors are applied to draw a border between the in-groups, who are the martyrs, and the out-groups, who in the studied context are the Americans who were killed in Eyn al-Asad base. So, metaphor is a way of representing antagonism and rejecting others.

Discussion and Conclusion

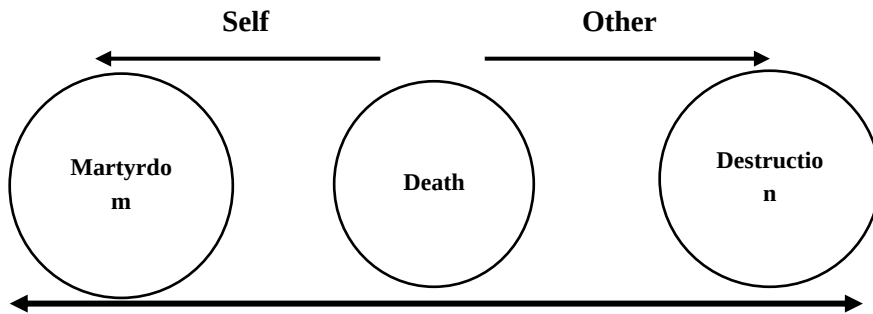
In the discourse of the Islamic Revolution in the field of death, there is a kind of valuation and classification. The quality of death is different based on the meaning included in front of it and compared to the Shia-Iranian reading of the conflict between right and evil. Normal death is for normal people; those citizens who are occupied with their daily lives and have not chosen the path of fighting. In official discourse, "Normal Death" is often framed as neutral and lacking ideological significance. Along with the concept of death, there is a fundamental duality: death on the path of truth, which is martyrdom, and death on the front of evil, which is called destruction.

This is the cognitive-discursive aspect of the issue. The official discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran consistently seeks to instill a belief in the duality of death: "Death based on truth and martyrdom, versus death associated with falsehood, evil, or destruction." This dichotomy is rooted in Shi'a social and religious symbolism, particularly as shaped by the event of *Āshūrā*. According to the official interpretation of death, the individual and collective mentality of Iranians should be cultivated to distinguish between positive and negative death, encouraging them to choose martyrdom in the path of truth and righteousness. Within this discourse, the Islamic Republic is portrayed as perpetually oppressed and violated due to its central role in leading the front of the oppressed against the arrogant and dominating global powers. The discourse encourages citizens to adopt a mindset that valorizes martyrdom as a form of positive death and is prepared to denounce its negative counterpart.

In the official discourse of the Islamic Republic, which is prevalent in its media, the world is a stage for the continuous conflict of the two forces of right and wrong and good and evil. In official narratives, the Islamic Republic is portrayed as the

embodiment of truth and resistance against perceived global evil. This dualistic framing has been interpreted by some scholars as influenced by Manichean elements within Shi'a thought, which seeks to dichotomize between good and evil in every issue. The theme of death is also seen in this context, and there is good and bad death. Death has different types and classifications, depicting the relationship between the deceased and the official discourse of the Islamic Republic in this issue.

Fig 1. The Polarized Logic of Death Conceptualization



The assassination of Qassem Soleimani and his accompanying team is regarded as a profound example of martyrdom in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Martyrdom is understood as a commitment to truth and God, often imbued with divine and heavenly significance. In official media portrayals, Soleimani is depicted as a martyr representing national, religious, and humanitarian ideals, truth, and the fight against terrorism. He is considered a transnational martyr, connected to all Muslims and humanity as a whole. From a mystical and ideological perspective, He is portrayed in ideological narratives as a symbol of resistance and martyrdom aligned with the values of truth and justice.

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