
The Paradox of *Ramadan* Happiness in Palestine: A Peircean Semiotic Analysis of Zain's Public Service Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal the meaning behind the signs used in advertisements that represent the happiness of Palestinians welcoming *Ramadan* amid the sorrow of war. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through observation and screenshots of the advertisements. The analytical framework is based on Peirce's semiotic theory, which consists of the representamen, object, and interpretant. The findings show that the happiness associated with *Ramadan* is represented through joyful expressions and shared activities, such as playing, eating together, gathering with family, and acts of solidarity. Meanwhile, sadness is represented through images of destroyed urban buildings, forms of resistance, and issues related to the suffering of residents, particularly children. These findings indicate that *Ramadan* in Palestinian media representations not only conveys nuances of happiness and tranquility but also functions as a medium for articulating issues of resistance against Zionist Israel.

Keywords: Happiness, *Ramadan*, Paradox, Peirce Semiotics, Palestine

A. INTRODUCTION

Ramadan is a sacred month for Muslims worldwide. During this month, the gates of heaven are opened, prayers are answered, sins are forgiven, and good deeds are multiplied (Shalihin & Sholihin, 2022). These distinctive virtues motivate Muslims around the world to welcome *Ramadan* with enthusiasm. The celebration of *Ramadan*'s arrival takes various forms, shaped by local traditions and cultural practices. In Palestine, *Ramadan* is welcomed with drumming in the streets, lantern-decorated alleys, and children singing traditional *Ramadan* songs. In addition, Palestinians celebrate *Ramadan* by decorating their homes and mosques, while market vendors flock to sell goods associated with the holy month (2025, جريدة الراية).

However, the atmosphere of *Ramadan* in Palestine cannot be separated from the ongoing conflict. The Palestinian–Israeli conflict began when more than half of Palestine's territory was transferred to Israel in 1947 (Fadillah & Chotimah, 2024). Since then, the conflict has become one of the most protracted in the world, exerting far-reaching social, political, and humanitarian impacts in the Middle East. In October 2023, armed conflict and the blockade in the Gaza Strip resulted in approximately 46,000 deaths. The violence also caused extensive damage to infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, places of worship, and residential areas (Prastari & Gaib, 2025). Moreover, the blockade has imposed severe movement restrictions, triggered an economic crisis, and generated psychological trauma among residents due to deteriorating living conditions (Risdayani et al., 2024). This prolonged conflict has brought deep sorrow and anxiety to the Palestinian people. When it coincides with the arrival of *Ramadan*, the sense of loss experienced by Palestinians and their families becomes even more profound. *Ramadan*, which should be a time of warmth and togetherness, is instead marked by grief and memories of deceased family members (2025, موسى).

The condition of the Palestinian population during *Ramadan* has become a widely discussed topic on social media, including on the Zain YouTube channel. Zain Group is a media organization that addresses Palestinian issues through public service announcements (Sibawaihi, 2025). The focus of this article is a *Ramadan* advertisement video clip uploaded on March 1, 2025, which coincided with the first day of *Ramadan* in the Middle East. The video is titled *سجلنا حضور*, which means “Mark Our Presence.” This study positions *Ramadan* advertising video clips as semiotic texts that construct meaning through relationships among signs. The visual elements presented in the video represent the lived conditions of the Palestinian people during *Ramadan*.

Semiotics is the study of signs. According to Peirce, signs always involve three interrelated (triadic) elements: representamen, object, and interpretant (Sobur, 2006). The representamen is the form of a sign that stands for something else, while the object is what the sign refers to. The interpretant is the understanding that arises in the mind of an individual when encountering a sign.

The interpretant emerges from the relationship between the representamen and the object (Fatimah, 2020). These three elements constitute a meaning-making process known as semiosis. This process occurs continuously and without end, as a sign generates new signs and increasingly broader interpretations (Sebeok, 2001). Peirce's semiotic framework is employed in this study to understand the relationships among signs in explaining the paradoxical meanings of *Ramadan* happiness and the sorrow of ongoing conflict.

Several previous studies have examined the Palestine–Israel conflict as well as the application of Peirce's semiotics. Research addressing Palestinian issues includes “*Sastra Menjadi Cambuk Perjuangan Rakyat Palestina dalam Cerpen-cerpen Karya Ummu Kausar: Kajian Adab Al-Muqāwamah*” (Kamala, 2024), “*Penderitaan Penduduk Palestina dalam Cerita Pendek Al-Qamish Al-Masruq Karya Ghassan Kanafani*” (Izazi & Nashiruddin, 2024), “*A Social Network Analysis of the #AllEyesOnRafah on X Social Media*” (Wahyuddin et al., 2024), “*Representasi Kritik Sosial dalam Karikatur Serangan IDF terhadap Rumah Sakit As-Shifa Palestina*” (Anshori et al., 2024), “*The Israel War as a Social Disaster and the Forced Migration of Palestinians*” (İnce, 2024), “*Weaponizing Words: War Metaphors in Al Jazeera's Israel Boycott Discourse*” (Fathurrohimi et al., 2025), and “*The Effectiveness of Hanzhala and Watermelon Icons*” (Lesmana & Azzahra, 2024). These studies explore themes of war, suffering, resistance, social criticism, and activism using discourse analysis, social media analysis, and sociology of literature approaches.

Studies employing Peirce's semiotic perspective include “*The Meaning of Tempo Magazine Cover in Semiotics by Charles Sanders Peirce*” (Sevtiany et al., 2023), “*Pembunuhan Jurnalis Palestina Shireen Abu Akleh dalam Akun Instagram @hajjaj_cartoons (Studi Semiotika Peirce)*” (Fadillah & Chotimah, 2024), “*Citra Salat yang Bergeser pada Poster Film Makmum: Ibadah Mistik, Skeptisisme Masyarakat, dan Semiotika Peircean*” (Ferdiansyah, 2025), “*Representasi Feminisme dan Kesamaan Hak bagi Disabilitas (Analisis Semiotika Charles Sanders Peirce pada Iklan 'Wardah Beauty Move You')*” (Ullyia & Meutia, 2022), “*Agama dalam Kekuasaan Media (Analisis Semiotika Charles Sanders Peirce terhadap Iklan Televisi)*” (Nurfiana & Halwati, 2022), “*Racism Issues Delivered in Lupin Film Series (2021)*” (Lubis & Puspasari, 2023), and “*Signs of Trauma: Representation of Mental Disorders in the Film '27 Steps of May'*” (Ikhwan et al., 2025). These studies apply Peirce's semiotic framework to analyze advertisements, films, posters, and cartoons, addressing issues such as humanitarian crises, socio-political criticism, shifting meanings, and human rights violations. Research that specifically examines video content on Zain's YouTube channel includes “*حماية حقوق الطفل في قناة يوتيوب 'مجموعة زين' على أساس نظرية سيميائية لأمرتو إيكو*” (Sibawaihi, 2025) and “*The Employment of Emotional Appeals in Zain Television Advertisements*” (Mahmoud & Al-Azawi, 2025). While these studies share similar objectives with the present research, they differ in terms of the issues addressed and the theoretical perspectives applied.

Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize aspects of suffering and resistance, this study highlights the paradoxical coexistence of happiness and sadness within the religious context of *Ramadan* through the lens of Peirce's semiotics. Zain's public service advertisements, which were initially designed to provide positive education and information to the public, have in recent years evolved into an important medium for expressing humanitarian solidarity and geopolitical concerns, particularly those related to Palestine. The 2025 *Ramadan* advertisement on Zain's YouTube channel serves as the main object of analysis, as it presents Palestinian issues within the specific context of *Ramadan*. This study aims to reveal the representations of happiness and sadness in the 2025 *Ramadan* advertisement video clip using a *Peircean* semiotic approach. Examining the representation of these contrasting emotions allows for a deeper understanding of the meaning of sadness experienced by Palestinians behind the joy associated with *Ramadan*. This research is grounded in the argument that expressions of happiness displayed by individuals or groups in public spaces may conceal an underlying reality of profound sadness.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs qualitative research with a descriptive method. It focuses on describing sign phenomena to reveal the paradox of happiness represented in Zain's *Ramadan* advertisement video clip. The research data consists of screenshots containing signs that represent both happiness and sadness. The primary data source is the *Ramadan* 2025 advertisement video clip titled *سجلنا حضور* on Zain's YouTube channel. Secondary data sources include books, journal articles, theses, news reports, and other relevant materials related to the research object and Peirce's semiotic theory.

Data collection was conducted in several stages, including video observation and screenshot capture. The first stage involved watching the video from beginning to end while carefully identifying visual elements that represent happiness and sadness. In the second stage, screenshots were taken of the selected scenes identified in the initial observation. In the third stage, the researchers categorized the collected signs into those representing happiness and those representing sadness.

Data analysis was carried out using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, which emphasizes the classification of signs into icons, indexes, and symbols. The data were divided into two main categories: happiness and sadness. Signs of happiness were analyzed within the context of *Ramadan*, while signs of sadness were examined in relation to the Palestine–Israel conflict. The researchers then interpreted the signs in each category based on their semiotic relationships. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the results of the analysis.




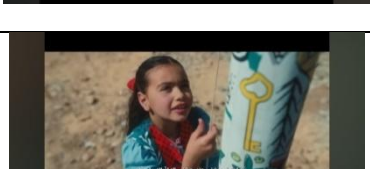


To ensure data validity, the researchers conducted repeated observations of the video at different times and applied careful selection procedures to the data. In addition, peer review was conducted through discussions with colleagues and supervisors to evaluate and refine the overall research findings.

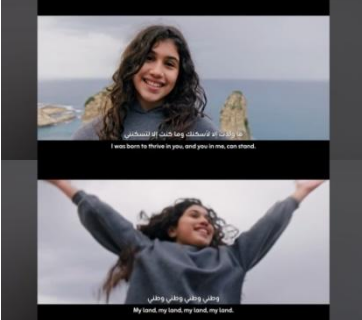




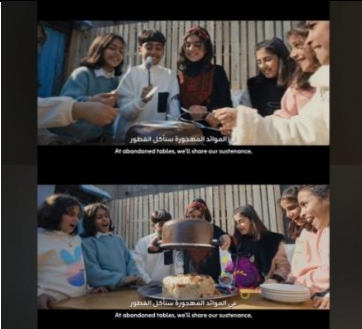



C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The 2025 *Ramadan* advertisement video clip presents two dominant emotions: happiness and sadness. When analyzed through Peirce’s semiotic perspective, the representation of these emotions can be explained as follows:

1. Representment and Object

Table 1. Sign of Happiness

No	Representament	Type of Object Sign	Object
1		Icon	Representing the Palestinian population across age and gender, the figures depict residents—ranging from children to the elderly, men and women—walking side by side.
2		Icon	The tambourine, a traditional Middle Eastern percussion instrument, is commonly played by Palestinians during festive and celebratory occasions.
3		Icon	Maqluba is a traditional Palestinian dish typically served at large family gatherings, celebrations, and religious holidays. As such, the dish is closely associated with expressions of joy and togetherness.
4		Index	A girl is shown waving a flag. Her happiness is reflected in her smiling expression as she looks up at the flag.
5		Index	Palestinians gather around a waving flag. Their collective presence represents happiness, togetherness, and solidarity.
6		Index	A group of people are depicted playing tambourines. They wear coordinated clothing and hold tambourines in their hands. The scarves around their necks feature red, white, green, and olive patterns, symbolizing Palestinian identity.

7		Index	Happiness is expressed through a wide smile, a radiant facial expression, and sparkling eyes. The individual is shown jumping, further emphasizing the intensity of his joy.
8		Index	Happiness is represented by two girls embracing and jumping together. Their interaction illustrates the joy of close friendship and shared play.
9		Index	The joy of Palestinian children is visible as they run around playing together while carrying soap bubbles.
10		Index	Palestinian children express happiness by raising their arms, cheering, and playing with balloons.
11		Index	Palestinian children are shown sharing cookies with their friends. Food serves as a source of joy, as reflected in the smiling face of a girl receiving the cake.
12		Index	Palestinian children clink spoons on a serving dish. Expressions of excitement and happiness are clearly visible, particularly at the moment when the dish is uncovered.
13		Index	A small family consisting of a father, mother, and child is depicted embracing one another. The act of hugging represents affection, closeness, and emotional bonding.
14		Index	A family is shown crying while hugging each other. Their tears are not expressions of sadness, but rather of happiness and emotional relief at being reunited.
15		Index	A man and a young girl are shown ascending a black staircase. The girl reaches out her hand to the man, and both are smiling as they walk upward together.












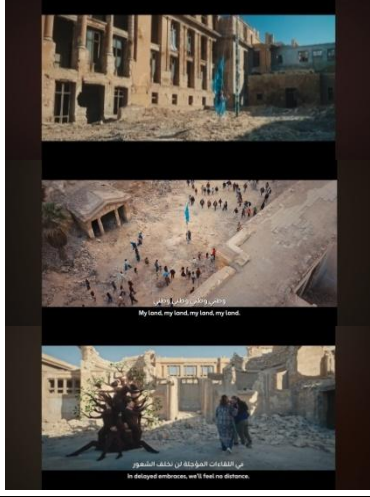


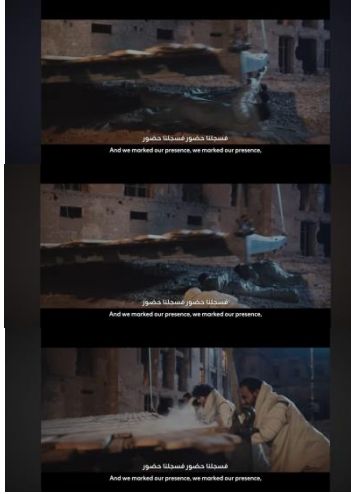




16		Index	An elderly couple is depicted chatting in a living-room setting, with a sofa and a worn wall in the background. Their faces radiate happiness during the interaction.
17		Index	Happiness is represented by a girl and a boy dancing inside a house with its furnishings intact, symbolizing joy within a secure and complete domestic space.

Table 2. Sign of Sadness

No	Representament	Type of Object Sign	Object
1		Icon	The olive leaf represents the majority of Palestinians who rely on olive farming as their livelihood. It has also emerged as a symbol of resistance, as olive trees are traditionally cultivated by indigenous Palestinians, while Israeli Zionist settlements have not planted olive trees.
2		Icon	The image of a key painted on the flagpole signifies the sadness of the Palestinian people, particularly in relation to the Nakba of 1948. During this event, Zionist forces expelled Palestinians from their homes. As a form of resistance and remembrance, the original owners continue to keep the keys to their houses to this day.
3		Icon	Al-Aqsa Mosque, located in Jerusalem—a city contested in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict—represents sorrow and grief, bearing witness to the prolonged tension and suffering experienced in the area.
4		Icon	The Nablus Clock Tower holds deep historical significance for Palestinians. It symbolizes collective grief and perseverance in defending their homeland.
5		Icon	The oud is a traditional Middle Eastern stringed instrument often played to entertain Palestinians in refugee camps. It has become part of Palestinian collective identity, conveying both grief and resistance.

6		Icon	Expressions of sadness are depicted through Palestinian schoolchildren participating in formal education. This act represents resistance against Israeli occupation, as armed attacks have deprived many Palestinian children of their fundamental right to education.
7		Icon	People dressed in black and posing as trees symbolize the condition of Gaza following unilateral aggression by Zionist Israeli forces. This imagery reflects loss, devastation, and mourning.
8		Icon	People dressed in black and forming the shape of a ladder represent sadness for previous generations who have passed away, symbolizing sacrifice and continuity across generations.
9		Index	Broken glass scattered across the streets signifies violent conflict that has destroyed urban buildings. This image reflects the grief of Palestinians who have lost their homes due to armed attacks.
10		Index	The ruins in the background represent Palestinian sorrow, as they depict buildings that once served as centers of daily life but are now destroyed, abandoned, and uninhabited.
11		Index	A little girl arguing about her homeland. This suggests the grief of Palestinian children whose childhoods have been robbed.
12		Index	Children wearing school uniforms march through the rubble of a destroyed school building. This act conveys grief and serves as a critique of Israel for the destruction of educational facilities during armed attacks.

13		Index	A group of men hanging from wooden planks, avoiding and pushing them away, symbolizes grief over the sacrifices Palestinians endure in their struggle for survival.
14		Symbol	Children are shown wearing checkered <i>keffiyehs</i> . Originally a cotton headdress used for protection from the sun, the keffiyeh has evolved into a symbol of grief and resistance against Zionist Israeli occupation.
15		Symbol	light blue flag flutters amid the ruins. The color blue may be interpreted as a symbol of peace. The inscription <i>لنغني سلاما روحيا، يحتضن</i> <i>لنغني سلاما روحيا، يحتضن</i> (“Let us sing a spiritual peace that embraces national peace”) reflects sorrow and resistance within the Palestinian struggle.
16		Symbol	The red, green, and white colors on the flagpole represent the colors of the Palestinian flag. While the flag symbolizes identity, struggle, and resistance against colonialism, it also expresses sadness, reflecting Palestine’s condition amid ongoing conflict.
17		Simbol	Palestinian embroidery (<i>tatreez</i>) embodies a collective cultural identity that has been passed down through generations of Palestinian women. <i>Tatreez</i> functions as an expression of grief and as a form of resistance against Israeli occupation.

2. Interpretant

Criticism of the Palestinian situation, which remains marked by conflict during *Ramadan*, is depicted in scenes at minutes 0:10–0:22 and 0:51–0:57. A smiling girl’s face conveys a sense of happiness, while sadness is simultaneously represented through visual elements such as the keffiyeh, olive leaves, and the writing on the flag. The *keffiyeh* has become a symbol of

resistance, as it is closely associated with Palestinian identity (Fadillah & Chotimah, 2024). Olive plants are depicted as symbols of the fertility of Palestinian land prior to the conflict (Kamala, 2024). Over time, olives have also emerged as icons of resistance, as many Palestinians are no longer able to cultivate olive trees after being forcibly displaced from their homes and land (Izazi & Nashiruddin, 2024).

Furthermore, the waving flag signifies that the peace associated with *Ramadan* becomes meaningless if conflict in the homeland persists. Palestinians express that freedom and peace have been taken away by war and occupation. This message is conveyed through the inscription *لنغني سلاما روحيا، يحتضن سلاما وطنيا* (“Let us sing a spiritual peace that embraces national peace”) and the light blue color of the flag, which may be interpreted as symbolizing peace. The Palestinian people are then shown surrounding the flag, representing unity in defending their rights and collective identity in the land of Palestine. Solidarity and unity are portrayed as a shared spirit that fosters mutual support and cooperation in the pursuit of common goals (Mustofa et al., 2025).

The resistance of the Palestinian people against Zionist Israeli forces in defending their homeland is depicted in scenes at minutes 0:07–0:22 and 0:33–0:35. This resistance is represented through iconic signs in the form of painted images of keys, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Nablus Clock Tower, and an oud musical instrument displayed on the flagpole. The key refers to the Nakba of 1948, during which Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homes by Zionist forces. The key functions as a symbol of resistance, representing Palestinians’ assertion of their right to return. It is widely documented that many Palestinians who were displaced during the Nakba continue to preserve their house keys and pass them down across generations as a symbol of hope for returning home (Lesmana & Azzahra, 2024).

Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Nablus Clock Tower are historic structures situated within Palestinian settlements and serve as silent witnesses to destruction, suffering, and sacrifice. Meanwhile, the oud represents a form of collective Palestinian culture and is commonly played to entertain Palestinians living in refugee camps (Saber & Al Khateeb, 2024). In addition to these painted symbols, sections of the flagpole are colored to reflect the colors of the Palestinian flag. This sign signifies that the land of Palestine and its collective cultural heritage are inherent and inseparable from Palestinian identity.

At minutes 1:02–1:12, a group of people is shown playing tambourines. Tambourine performance represents a form of collective cultural tradition in Palestine. As a traditional Middle Eastern percussion instrument, the tambourine has been passed down across generations since ancient Egyptian times and continues to be preserved by Middle Eastern communities. During *Ramadan*, tambourines are commonly played as a sign of joy and as a means of

welcoming the holy month. However, behind this celebratory practice, the attributes worn by the performers continue to signify resistance against Zionist Israel.

At minutes 0:23–0:30 and 0:58–1:09, Palestinian children are depicted playing together. They run around while blowing soap bubbles, playing with balloons, and preparing cakes, creating an atmosphere similar to a festive celebration. Subsequently, at minutes 1:27–1:31, the children are shown enjoying maqluba. Consuming traditional food represents an expression of gratitude and happiness in welcoming the month of *Ramadan* (Wirayudha, 2024). Moreover, when shared with friends, food strengthens the warmth of togetherness that characterizes *Ramadan*. Nevertheless, behind this joyful scene, one child is seen wearing red tatreez embroidery. This traditional embroidery functions as a symbol of Palestinian resistance against Zionist Israel (Haddad et al., 2023).

At minutes 1:13–1:18, the video presents a clear expression of rejection and resistance by Gazans toward forced relocation. This message is conveyed by a young girl from Gaza, Maria Hanoun, who has gained public attention for her role as a vocal representative of the people of Gaza. In the circulated footage, Maria Hanoun delivers criticism toward former U.S. President Donald Trump regarding proposals to relocate Gaza's residents (2024, سكاي نيوز عربية). Furthermore, scenes at minutes 1:20–1:23 highlight the issue of education for Palestinian children. The destruction of civilian infrastructure has severely damaged essential facilities, including schools (Ismaeel, 2025). As a consequence, many Palestinian children are deprived of access to proper formal education. Zionist Israeli actions are thus portrayed as violating Palestinian children's right to learn and threatening their future prospects (Sibawaihi, 2025).

At minutes 1:32–1:36, a family is shown embracing amid the rubble. The small family expresses happiness at being reunited after a prolonged period of conflict, shedding tears not out of sorrow but out of joy at meeting their loved ones again. Adjacent to the embracing family appears a black tree icon resembling a dead tree. This image commonly represents the condition of Gaza, which has been affected by genocide. Genocide refers to acts committed with the intent to destroy a group, causing physical and psychological suffering and creating unbearable living conditions (Septiani & Chotimah, 2024). From the dead tree, leaves are shown blooming as the family embraces, symbolizing that reunification with loved ones can strengthen psychological resilience and the capacity to survive adversity.

The happiness of the Palestinian people upon returning home is depicted at minutes 1:51–1:56. In this scene, they are shown chatting joyfully with family members, dancing, and enjoying a peaceful day without the overcrowded conditions of refugee camps. Subsequently, at minutes 2:02–2:10, a dance performance further expresses collective happiness in welcoming the holy month of *Ramadan*.

Mutual assistance among the Palestinian people is illustrated at minutes 1:44–1:49, where individuals pose as black stairs, symbolizing the sacrifices of previous generations. A man and a young girl are then shown climbing the stairs, representing the younger generation being supported by earlier generations in striving toward a better future. This spirit of mutual assistance is reinforced when the girl, after climbing the stairs, turns back and extends her hand to the man.

The sequence at minutes 1:59–2:01 depicts Palestinian nationalism, perseverance, and loyalty in defending their homeland. Several men appear in this scene, symbolizing the ups and downs experienced by the Palestinian people in their struggle to protect their land. This imagery highlights their resilience in confronting obstacles and demonstrates their refusal to remain silent in the face of rights violations. Instead, it reflects a principle of resistance grounded in the belief that it is better to struggle than to submit to foreign domination (Lestari & Yurisa, 2023; سكاي نيوز عربية, 2024).

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the representation of *Ramadan* in Palestinian media simultaneously conveys happiness and sadness. Happiness is expressed through joyful facial expressions, children's play and shared meals, family reunions, and acts of solidarity, while sadness is represented through images of destruction, symbols of collective identity and resistance, challenges faced by Palestinian children—particularly in education—and depictions of perseverance in defending the homeland. These findings indicate that *Ramadan* representations do not merely emphasize tranquility and celebration, but also function as a medium for articulating resistance and critique of Zionist Israeli occupation. This study is limited to a single *Ramadan* advertisement video clip. Future research is encouraged to examine a broader range of *Ramadan* advertisements across different media platforms or national contexts to enrich the understanding of semiotic representations of emotion in conflict settings.

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