



Imagery and Divine Discourse: A Critical Reading of Qur'anic Imagery through Bakhtin's Theories

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Abstract: This paper seeks to outline an interdisciplinary reading of imagery in Qur'an by applying Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and heteroglossia. Utilizing the modalities of literary theory, religious studies and cultural critique, it reveals how the Qur'an's polyphonic language calls the reader into an active debate with facts of divinity. It also reconsiders the religious narrative and universal themes of spirituality in seventh century Arabia. Using Bakhtinian theory to read the Holy Book, the research sheds light on the ways in which the Qur'an can be read simultaneously through time and space and proposes some new paths for interdisciplinary dialogue between the fields of literature, theology and cultural studies.

Keywords: Imagery, the Qur'an, dialogism, heteroglossia,

1. Introduction

The Qur'an, the Islamic holy text, is renowned for its superb imagery. Its images, metaphors and symbols are not simply figurative devices; they are spiritual records of perception, moral investigation and spiritual understanding. Qur'anic imagery is full of multiple meanings that draw the reader into the universe of divine visions, higher truths and moral values. Images of Paradise and Hell, light, darkness, water and fire turn abstract concepts into tangible pictures, prominent in their prints like the brightest of dreams, and working on our senses, emotions and intellect. The Qur'an's verses utilize imagery much tied to its seventh century Arabian origins but also transcends that time and culture to address the cosmopolitan concerns of human beings. Linking the theories of dialogism and heteroglossia of Mikhail Bakhtin with religious studies and cultural analysis, this paper uses an interdisciplinary approach to reveal the multiple horizons of the text. The study shows how the imagery of the Qur'an offers a living room for an active search for both morals and the meaning of existence by framing it in a dialogic space in which the voice of the divine, the voice of the prophet and the human voice are all active agents. At the same time, it elaborates on how the Qur'an can function in multiple cultural and historical contexts while remaining theological. Its interdisciplinary approach seeks not only to augment traditional interpretation but also to connect literary theory, theological hermeneutics and cultural studies in ways that shed new light on the Qur'an's relevance across space and time.

2. The Power of Imagery: Creating Vivid Worlds in Literature

Imagery is a powerful literary device that relies on sensational language to create images in readers' minds. They are appealing to human senses; therefore, employing imagery inspires emotion, tantalizes imagination, and transmits abstract concepts. Writers often use vivid imagery to delve into their characters' minds or highlight key themes such as nature, religion, or war. The Concise Oxford

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Dictionary of Literary Terms (Baldick, 2001, p.121-122) defines imagery as the blanket term for a literary language that creates "sense-impressions" through literal and figurative allusions to physical objects, scenes, or actions, as opposed to abstractions. Baldick notes that the term is commonly associated with figurative devices, specifically metaphors and similes, while images with more symbolic resonance are referred to as symbols. He links imagery with motifs, repeated thematic strands, and then counsels against divorcing imagery from the broader context of a work of literature.

Arp and Johnson (2018) point out that in literary theory, imagery is usually categorized according to the sense to which it appeals. They list seven categories of imagery, five of which directly map onto human senses: "visual imagery" (sight) "auditory imagery" (sound) "tactile imagery" (touch) "olfactory imagery" (smell) and "gustatory imagery" (taste). They also contain "kinesthetic" (movement) and "organic" (inner sensation within) imagery (p. 759). All these enable authors to enhance the reader's exploration so that the described scenes, actions, or emotions are arresting and truer to life (Arp and Johnson, 2018).

Literary critics have approached the significance of imagery from many perspectives, elucidating how it can elicit passion, influence themes, and forge meanings. Coleridge, a leading romantic critic, argued that imagery engenders imagination. In *Biographia Literaria*, published in 1817, he lays out his own theory of human faculty. He differentiates between "imagination" as a "shaping and modifying power" and "fancy" as an "aggregative and associative power," that fuses sensory experiences with profound imagery (Coleridge, 1817/2014, p. 197). Fancy and imagination, he claims, can cooperate but yield different results: aggregation versus alteration of ideas. Imagery, Coleridge says, is essential for a work to rise above its literal meaning and unite the reader with eternal truths (Coleridge, 1817/2014). Imagination's liberating and redemptive power was one of the central concepts of Romanticism (Baldick, 2001, p. 122).

One of the well-known new criticism theorists, I. A. Richards (1929) stated in his much-referenced book *Practical Criticism* that imagery can have a multidimensional influence. He believes that imagery, including sensory words, metaphors, and similes, activates a mindset that can stir feelings as well as intellect. According to Richards, Imagery helps readers to understand abstractions and obtain a deeper estimation of the text. However, he warns that imagery itself remains ambiguous and that it can elicit different or even contradictory interpretations for a poem because they are primarily grounded in the readers' own experiences and understanding of the world. "The vivid and precise images," he argues, "that rise before the reader owe much of their characters and details to resources beyond the poets' control. That is a very risky process" (Richards, 1929, p.236). However, ambiguity invites more meaning to poetry, but at the same time, deprives one of the senses of the message that the poet intends to convey.

Cleanth Brooks, the prominent American literary critic and a leading member of the New Criticism school of thought proposes in his *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947) that imagery lies at the heart of poetic unity, that it artistically joins together seemingly discordant tensions whether emotional, thematic, or structural into a single cohesive substance. He contends that a poem achieves "reconciliation of opposites," by means of suggestions, metaphors and symbols (Brooks, 1947, p. 198). A well-known example is John Donne's clever metaphor, likening lovers to the legs of a compass, in which the tangible image of a geometric tool is deftly bound to the abstract notion of spiritual love. While they are independent, the legs of the compass act as a single entity, "And since one of them moves, the other immovable will hold its place" (Brookes, 1947, p222). By marrying disparate concepts into one powerful and symmetric metaphor, it overcomes the paradox of simultaneous physical separation and mental and emotional unification. Such graceful imagery in poetry allows a writer to channel the most extreme subjects one can think of, such as love, death, and existential crisis, in a compact form that can be compellingly lucid and provocative to its audience (Brookes, 1947).

In his major work, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye (1957), one of the most influential literary critics of the 20th century, describes archetypal imagery as essential for illuminating literary significance. He states that universal recurring images, such as seasonal cycles or heroic adventures, point to common psychological and cultural currents. The symbolic energy of the elements of nature,

water (cleaning) or fire (metamorphosis), is obtained by coding common cultural significations. Frye (1957, p. 113) defined archetypal symbols as "natural object[s] given human meaning," thus, art became a "product of civilization", a way that reflects human dreams and desires. This property rendered archetypes transferrable from one text to another, he suggests, occurs because of their universally cultural meanings; thus, Frye touched on what he calls the "collective unconscious" (Frye 1957 p.111), a Jungian notion that the symbols and themes we know are derived from a kind of symbolism transmittable through the totality of human experience.

Symbols such as darkness for chaos and light for illumination correlate with ancestral lineages that are interwoven through generations of cultural myths, and Fry (1957) articulates their latent quality within popular understanding. Frye sees what is mediated through the interaction of the natural (as in the water of life, the water of destruction) and the patterns inherited in the symbols create the most mythic, most evocative territory of literature. Elemental things that matter to human experience, like fires and seasons, are eventually elevated to contain eternal truths.

In *S/Z* (1970/1974), Roland Barthes, an outstanding French philosopher, critic, and linguist, altered literary studies by shattering the illusion of the transparency of texts. For Barthes, stories are not organic entities, but rather a network of codes classified by culture. Central to his argument is that images, whether visual, symbolic, or descriptive, form a dynamic system of signification in which five interrelated codes: hermeneutic, proairetic, semic, symbolic, and cultural codes. According to Barthes, these codes are a "kind of network, a topos through which the whole text passes (or rather, in passing becomes a text)" (Barthes, 1970/1974, p. 20).

Set free from any fixed or hierarchical readings, Barthes places imagery as a "galaxy of signifiers," a large field of disconnected play in which cultural, ideological, and psychological forces meet (Barthes, 1970/1974, p. 5). Drawing from semiotic and structuralist origins, Barthes' theorization of the imagery of Balzac's *Sarrasine* produces something of a "stereographic space" (p. 19), in which myth, history, and ideology converge. he hermeneutic code creates problems of sense (as in *prides of time*), whereas the semic code disperses connotative meaning as "motes of dust" (Barthes, 1970/1974, p. 18), rejecting determined significations. In this frame, imagery naturalizes cultural norms such as the *Pygmalion* myth of maleness and creativity (Barthes, 1970/1974). With the emphasis on the active role of the reader, Barthes (1970/1974) imagined texts as making a "writerly" space within which images such as the mutilated body of *Zambinella* and the broken statue of *Sarrasine*, prevent the possibility of a single truth and compel the reader to navigate the gaps and conjunctions of meaning.

3. Divine Significance and Spiritual Reflection: The luminous Imagery of the Qur'an

The Quran, the sacred text of Islam, is for all Muslims the word of God spoken directly to Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel. It is sacred with words and meanings, recitation and scripting. The Qur'an affects Muslims' lives, from dictating prayers, salutations, or utterances of thanks to Allah. The text given to Islamic faith from the origins of metaphysics and theology to the fields of law, ethics, and sacred history. While Christ is the center of Christianity, it is the Qur'an which is at the center of Islam. According to Nasr (2002), Muslims hold the Quran in high esteem, spiritually and materially in Arabic.

The Qur'an's imagery is no mere ornament; it is a moving connector between human senses and higher metaphysical realities. Its vocabulary suggests divine light (Qur'an 24:35), cosmic tumult (Qur'an 81:1-6) and the banquet of paradise invite us into a space for moral and existential reflection, delivering mysterious spiritual and intellectual abstractions concrete and available for consideration. These metaphorical narratives as elaborated by Qutb (1993) do not represent a passive literary constructions, they are active mechanisms designed to generate an experience of bodily intimacy that translates theological concepts to worldly practices echoing across cultures and epochs.

3.1. Reaching Readers at a Corporeal Level

The Qur'an uses vivid imagery to produce an overwhelming emotional impact, making abstract concepts tangible. Descriptions of Paradise and Hell make the notions transparent. Paradise's depiction of rivers of water, milk, and wine (Qur'an 47:15) fuses a sensuous experience that entices to relish the reward of virtue. On the other hand, Hell is visualized by fire, pain, and despair (Qur'an 35:36), urging

the adoption of moral responsibility. According to Abdel Haleem (2004), the horror of eschatological depiction in the Quran is a deliberate way to evoke heated emotional reactions that would induce introspection and penance.

3.2. Expressions of Deep Spiritual Truths

The Qur'an also takes imagery in consolidated ways to represent complex theological ideas by linking physical, and concrete entities to abstract ideas. The Light of God likened to a lamp that illuminates the earth and the skies (Qur'an 24:35) is a symbol of the guiding force and wisdom sent by God to encourage people to dismiss ignorance and follow His guidance. Imagery not only endows the Qur'an with vivid style, but the message becomes resounding on a deeper ground. Nasr (2002) additionally points out that light (Qur'an 24:35) suggests God's limitless force of creation, portraying the universe as reflecting the divine power.

3.3. Revealing Moral Lessons

Qur'an images testify to moral lessons such as the accounting of virtue and vice. In Chapter 18, the cave has a significant moral value representing divine protection and strong faith (Muslih-Dien and Salim Hameed, 2019). The Qur'an presents the cave as a shelter for the virtuous in which the young believers isolate themselves from an evil, disbelieving society: "Now that you have left such people, and what they worshiped instead of God, take refuge in the cave. God will shower his mercy on you and make you an easy way out of your ordeal" (Qur'an 18:16). The cave is not only a natural retreat but also emphasizes a moral message of how those with true faith would eventually be saved and rewarded by God.

3.4. Eternity and Contemplation of Spiritual Realities

The Qur'an booms with vivid, sensational imagery to describe the afterlife and the cosmos, restating that earthly existence is brief compared with the afterlife. The cataclysmal imagery forces the readers to consider the horrifying scenes of the Day of Judgement: "When the sun is shrouded in darkness, when the stars are dimmed, the mountains are set in motion, when the pregnant camels abandoned, when wild beasts are herded together, when the seas boil over" (Qur'an 81:1-6). Such terrifying views of death and destruction inspire a deep-seated dread, a reminder of resurrection and coming accountability that urges for self-examination and moral integrity. It is this use of vigorous imagery that causes the Qur'an to engage its readers at a deep level making spiritual processes, moral lessons, and metaphysical realities increasingly relatable and compelling

4. Mikhail Bakhtin: Dialogism and Heteroglossia

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), was a Russian philosopher and literary critic famous for his conceptions of dialogism and heteroglossia. These form an important component of his work on language, literature, and culture and have a broad impact on the assessment of communication, narrative, and social interaction. His ideas highlight language as a social, interactive phenomenon, wherein meaning is created collectively through intercoursures between multiple voices. His most significant work concerning these ideas is *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981).

4.1. Dialogism

Because both writing and speech are inherently dialogues of voices, Bakhtin declares that texts are never monologic, but inherently dialogic, influenced by the interplay of several voices, cultures, and historical contexts. According to Bakhtin (1981), in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, the notion of dialogue is not confined to conversational actions, but dialogical activity occurs in every form of human expression, including in literature where various characters or narrative viewpoints engage in dialogue. Every utterance is seen as a response to a prior utterance and anticipates upcoming responses; thus, it turns into a dynamic and ongoing process (Bakhtin, 1981).

In this sense, dialogism, for Bakhtin, is a characteristic of language in general, including literary forms; authors do not build a one-voiced, single voice, but rather allow for multiple voices from different social, ideological, or philosophical stances to rest with each other and interrelate. Dialogues

create meaning through tension, contradiction, and negotiation between different perspectives in contrast to a monologic approach that might convey a single voice of authority. He criticizes the stylisticians who confine the utterance, and by extension the text, to "the monologic, dungeon of a single context," not allowing them to exchange messages with other utterances (Bakhtin, 1981, p.274).

One of Bakhtin's contributions of prime importance is the notion of polyphonic, which he famously connects with Dostoevsky's works as examples of dialogism. "The development of the novel," he maintains, "is a function of the deepening of dialogic essence" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.300). In a polyphonic novel, each character's voice gets equal weight, the novel does not impose on the characters, or the reader has a single unified meaning. Rather, that the point of view is embodied in the characters, and each character expresses its own interpretation of the world, making a conversation between speakers with no controlling voice (Bakhtin, 1981).

4.2. Heteroglossia

Heteroglossia generally refers to a variety of voices and social languages evident in a single text, which creates richness and complexity in meaning. Bakhtin (1981) describes heteroglossia as the existence of multiple meanings (social registers, dialects, language uses, and voices) within a single work of literature and spoken language. He states that "verbal discourse is a social phenomenon... throughout its entire range... from the sound image to the...reaches of abstract meanings" (p.259). These different levels of meaning can capture the different classes, professions, ideologies, and ethnic groups within society, and thus mirror society in all aspects. Bakhtin (1981) asserts that heteroglossia is a defining characteristic of the novel since it allows the genre to capture the heterogeneous nature of society. Other genres like Epic poetry, can be more monologic and hardly contain the diversity of voices. The novel is heteroglossic and dialogic by nature gathering diverse characters with varied ways of speaking.

Heteroglossia is not merely the intersection of different agents and points of view speaking differently; it is the complete social fabric of social languages that acknowledges one another. According to Bakhtin (1981), novels are heteroglossic of society; they offer a space for the heterogeneous ideology, worldviews, and linguistic forms to start a process of mutual engagement.

5. Dialogism and Heteroglossia in Qur'anic Images

The theories of dialogism and heteroglossia by Mikhail Bakhtin provide an appealing basis for reading complicated imagery in the Qur'an as an energetic interplay between voices. Through this approach, the Qur'anic text can be seen as a dialogic venue where the divine word encounters human existence, moral imperatives, and cultural issues. Instead of a stagnant monologue, the Qur'an comes across as a conversation between God and believers, between timeless truths, and historical contingencies, further enlivened by its collaboration with multiple styles of expression.

Heteroglossia illuminates how the imagery of the Qur'an thrives in plurality. The utterances weave divine commands, prophetic narratives, and ethical discourses into intertextual stylistic registers and perspectives. This array of voices does not break the text but rather opens into a generative space where conflicting readings, legal, mystical, theological, coexist, and engage. Such heteroglossic affluence enables Qur'anic imagery to go beyond uniform meanings, allowing readers to freely negotiate the myriads of meanings that are evoked both spiritually and intellectually.

To sum up, Bakhtin's framework renders the Qur'an's imagery as the means of divine truth and a living dialogue, tying revelation with interpretation, harmony with tension, and cultivating an enduring discourse between sacred and human beings. In analyzing the intersections of the many voices and discourses that mark the Qur'anic text, scholars have dissected passages, revealing the deeper meanings at work in the vivid and symbolic language of Qur'anic verses that continue to enthrall readers and believers alike.

5.1. Qur'anic Imagery and Dialogism

Bakhtin (1981) declared that meaning is not given; it is constructed through the tension of varied voices (dialogism). Every utterance is not an isolated act but rather the result of a dialogue with utterances from the past, present, and future. This view is essential for reading texts, such as the Qur'an, which invites engagement and interpretation across historical and cultural settings.

The Qur'an provides imagery in a dialogic frame structured around divine and human voices that gesture performatively in an exchange surpassing descriptive functionality, a compass to the moral, theological, and eschatological states of readers. Framing Qur'anic imagery using a multi-voiced, dialogic approach, Bakhtin's theories help clarify how new communities receive and interpret divine messages through their cultural and historical context. Images of sunlight, fire, water, and gardens promote this multivocal quality and remain exposed to analysis. In weaving theology into dialogue with imagery, the Qur'an strikes an intricate balance between general universality and cultural specificity. In desert communities of the seventh century, symbols like water, shade, and abundance conveyed vivid images of divine grace and relaxation. Simultaneously, their deep meanings cross centuries, thus paving the way for new generations to reinterpret their significance while constantly aligning to the Qur'anic unifying theme: human morality as measured against divine balance.

5.1.1. Divine-Human Dialogue

Qur'anic imagery triggers a constant dialogue between God and human beings. This is demonstrated in the distinction between *nur* (light) and *zulumat* (darkness): "God is the Light of heavens and earth... Light upon light. God guides whomever He will to His light" (Qur'an 24:35). In this context, light suggests divine guidance and "light upon light" indicates a deeper comprehension of truth. Chapter 2, the Cow, reads: "God is the ally of those who believe. He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into light" (Qur'an 2:257). This interplay of light and darkness serves as a dialogical device, in which one can reflect on one's spiritual state. Light connotes divine insight, while the darkness of ignorance and sin is used to draw readers to the message of the text.

The reiterated dualisms of *al-Akhira* (the afterlife) and *al-Dunya* (the worldly life) throughout the Qur'an minimize fixed and static notions of meaning and illustrate how dynamic and relational meaning is. These terms are not simply opposed but work within a moral framework through which the choices of humankind dictate whether one is on the path of the transitory *Dunya* or the eternal *Akhira*. "Al-Dunya," the Fazlur Rahman (1980) argues, "is not 'this world,' but the lower values, the basal pursuits which appear so immediately tempting that most men run after them most of the time, at the expense of the higher and long-range ends"(p.75).

In contrast, *al-Akhira*, he goes on, is the final disclosure of reality, with the deceptive veils of *al-Dunya*, or what the Qur'an terms *ghurur*, the multi-layered self-deception is peeled away. All that we think we want in this life is temporary, and the Qur'an itself critiques the pursuit of worldly pleasure, as we find in Chapter 3 (the Family of Imran): "Even if they were to offer an earth full of gold as ransom, it would never be accepted from them" (Qur'an 3:91). Rahman (1980) explains that the Quraan does deny the material world, rather it advises against degenerate human existence in relation to it, since "The transient, like the foam on the water, is gone, while what does remain benefits mankind" (Qur'an 13:17).

These metaphors resonate differently across historical contexts. In the harsh and precarious landscape of early Islamic Arabia, the Qur'anic framing of *Akhira* provided a moral and psychological anchor focusing on the spirit and individual care for divine accountability as opposed to worldly struggles (Rahman, 1980). Unlike in modern materialistic societies, where the tension between *Dunya* and *Akhira* raises ethical questions over the spheres of consumption, responsibility and pursuit of meaning beyond material success.

The Qur'an is, as Abdel Haleem (2004, p. ix) comments, a text that "differentiates between right and wrong," that is why contemporary Muslims when confronted with universal problems like "globalization, the environment, fighting terrorism and drugs, questions of medical ethics, and feminism," they seek moral solutions in it. Its moral edifice is intricately married to its conception of *Dunya* (the worldly life) and *Akhira* (the eternal afterlife). The Qur'an asserts that, although worldly pursuits are not, in themselves, a negative thing, they should be balanced with a realization of the Afterlife. Chapter 87 (the Highest) reads: "Yet you prefer the life of this world life, even though the Hereafter is better and more lasting" (Qur'an 87:16-17). This verse summarizes the Qur'anic invitation to value eternal affairs over temporal ones.

5.1.2. The Dialogic Path: Negotiating Meaning in Qur'anic Exegesis

Bakhtinian discourse theory can situate Qur'anic imagery as a multi-voiced, ideologically dynamic virtual space in which the divine message is heard at various historical moments and situated in various communities. The motif *sirat al-mustaqim* (the straight path) in the first chapter of the Qur'an (1:6) has been a subject to different interpretations by jurists, mystics, and theologians which demonstrates Bakhtinian dialogism.

Some Islamic legal scholars (*fuqaha*) interpret *sirat al-mustaqim* as divine law, *Shariah* that lists out Muslims' duties, rights and behavioral codes. The early jurists Al-Shafi'i (d. 820) and Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) would refer to these as the commands and prohibitions of God prescribed in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* (Prophet Muhammad's tradition). In that vein, the straight path is a legally oriented structure that should promote a just and righteous manner of life (Kamali, 2003). Sufi mystics, on the other hand, are more cryptic. To scholars such as Ibn Arabi (d. 1240), the *sirat al-mustaqim* was the spiritual discipline to reach divine proximity or divine union (Abdul Muthalib, 2022). This perspective makes clear that the straight path is less about external adherence to rules, rather it is more about weeding the heart and achieving spiritual realization. The Sufi hermeneutic reading of Qur'an aligns with their controversial understanding of the revelation that it is seen with spiritual insight not just with the mind.

Sunni interpreters, such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210), interpreted *sirat al-mustaqim* in relation to the *Sunnah* and consensus (*ijma*), while Shi' commentators, such as Shaykh al-Tusi (d. 1067), saw it tied to the infallible guidance of Imams (spiritual figures). The discrimination revealed the wider theology of Islam as to which of the two sects provides authority in terms of Qur'anic hermeneutics. The Mu'tazilites, famous for their rationalist theology, engaged with that dialogism more on a reconciling level between reason (*'aql*) and revelation. *Sirat al-mustaqim* (straight path) is regarded as a vow to both divine justice (*'adl*) and unity (*tawhid*) (Hourani 1985). For them, the way was that of active moral reasoning, as opposed to the jurists' attention to textual literalism and the mystics' emphasis on transcendent experience.

5.1.3. Qur'anic Intertextuality: A Dialogic Approach

Applying Bakhtin's dialogism, a theory that analyzes the text in the light of its interaction with preceding discourses, there is a concrete ground for intertextuality between Qur'an and the Biblical literature and Arab folklore. Instead of replicating or discarding earlier traditions, the Qur'an recontextualizes them in a manner that directly engages socio-religious concerns relevant to seventh century Arabia. It positions itself at once as a fulfillment and rectification of prior divine revelations.

A remarkable disparity between the historical context of the Old Testament and the Qur'anic narrative has been highlighted by Neuwirth (2014). While in the Old Testament the stories anchor concrete events in Israel's historical context, the stories of the Qur'an stand moral lessons always showing the believers an example of some virtue which they ought to practice. She also adds that "the Qur'anic characters are moral exemplars who are the allegorical personification of good and evil." (p. 278). Stated otherwise, they are static archetypes embodying absolute morality with limited room for growth. Their fractured stories, spread throughout the Qur'anic chapters, signal the Qur'an's indifference, to historical development or change, either for past prophets or for Muhammad himself. Highlighting the primacy of moral identity over historical context, this emphasis on timelessness allows the Qur'anic work to depict the character of the Muslim community in ethical rather than chronological terms (Neuwirth, 2014).

The Qur'anic story of Noah is completely unique in both its orientation and form that provides a retelling that is far more interested in considering ethical performance than in the provision of elaborate accounts of events (Qur'an, 11:25-49). There is a stark contrast between Noah as presented in both the Qur'an and the Bible (Genesis 37–50) While the Genesis centers on covenantal theology and the ark's building, the Qur'an emphasizes Noah's battles with tribal arrogance (*istikbar*) and corruption (*faasd*), remarkably analogues to Muhammad's fight against Meccan immoral polytheism (Izutsu, 2002). This re-framing shows a material relationship of the Qur'an to the previous traditions; it permits some of their fundamental significance but changes the narrative focus to speak to the seventh century Arabian concerns (Griffith, 2013).

According to Chowdhury (2016), Noah appears in the bible as a simply righteous, yet passive man concerned with survival rather than prophetic vocation, corresponding to the Bible's stress on the societal sin and divine mercy. The Qur'anic Noah is more of a warner (*nadhir*) whose monotheistic proclamations are rejected by the aristocrats out of inherited customs and vanity (Quran 11:27-32). His prolonged endeavor to counsel his pagan people (Qur'an 11:25-48, 71:1-28) accentuates moral duty as opposed to historic recording (Chowdhury, 2016). Their negligence of God's message parallels Muhammad's Meccan experience with the tribal notables who dismissed his faith as a threat to the status quo. Unlike the Bible, the Qur'an does not highlight the rainbow; it emphasizes justice and the consequences of disobedience. The Qur'anic narrative shows the development process of Noah from a preacher to a survivor embodying firm belief and surrendering to the god's authority (Chowdhury, 2016).

The Qur'anic imagery operates dialogically, taking on familiar cultural and religious symbols, rewriting their meaning and, in turn, inviting reluctant audiences to reread those shared symbols against the backdrop of its liberative vision. As such, the Qur'anic retelling of biblical narratives is a coherent and corrective dialogue with its predecessors — references to the flood resonate with yet unpunished Meccan powers. As Neuwirth (2014) explains, Qur'anic retelling of Biblical narrative is intended to represent the final word in a long chain of divine discourses, rightly affirming and responding to earlier scriptures while simultaneously and speaking a voice of its own.

5.2. Heteroglossia in Qur'anic Eschatology:

Bakhtin's (1981) heteroglossia serves as a gripping framework for analyzing religious texts as multivocal and dynamic discourses. Whereas monologic text subdues meaning through the violent imposition of a single interpretation, heteroglossia is concerned with the multivalent and competing symbolic layers, linguistic registers and possibilities of reading. These qualities allow religious texts to extend beyond stiff readings and to echo generatively, across community, era and tradition. Metaphors, narratives, and images create locations for readers to negotiate ambiguous and pluralist meanings within religious, moral, or spiritual frames. This is where heteroglossia highlights how sacred language functions as extremely relevant: the negotiation, the re-investigation reflects humanity's ongoing work when faced with meaning and transcendence.

Bakhtin's assumptions of heteroglossia that texts contain multitudes of understandings manifesting distinct and separate social, cultural, and ideological voices, create a more robust lens to contextualize the rich eschatological imagery in the Qur'an. The powerful, moving representations of Paradise and Hell can be read as juxtaposing several voices arguing over the intentions of the divine through mercy (*rahma*) and anger (*ghadab*). As Ayoub (1984) points out, the central theological dialectic touches the core of Islam, portraying these not as entirely opposed but as attributes of God that complement each other.

The paradoxical images of the Cosmos of Paradise and Hell serves not as separate markers, but as intermediaries between the transcendent divine and a received human understanding whereby this symbolism reaches towards theological, cultural, and historical grounds. Paradise pleasures are beyond human comprehension, as the Qur'an states: "No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for them as a reward for what they have done" (Qur'an 32:17). But it does paint vivid, concrete images of some of these blessings, depicting Paradise as green gardens, flowing rivers, real companions and everlasting delight (Qur'an 56:12-40). For the Arabs of the seventh century residing in a desert environment, this imagery of water, shade and abundance was an urgent metaphor for God's grace and rest, a status reflecting their lifelong aspirations.

Medieval Muslim intellectuals such as al-Ṭabari (d. 923), al-Qaḍi, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya have read the Paradise in the Qur'an in diverse ways (Günther, 2017). They defined those terms as *janna* and *dar al-jinan*, as referring to the first garden where Adam and his spouse lived before being expelled due to the Devil's interfering (Qur'an 2:35-36). Al-Ṭabari pointed out that the command, *ihbiṭu* (descend), was ambiguous as it could mean the metaphysical path from paradise to earth or literally descend from a high place to a low one. To a similar outlook, the narrative of the fall of Adam and Eve

was interpreted by the modern historian Mircea Eliade (1907–86) as symbolic of humanity's fall, with divine access sacrificed (Günther, 2017). These interpretations are built upon by contemporary researchers. Sells (1999), observes the recursive organization of Chapter 55 (the Lord of Mercy), that is loosely linked with the refrain, “Which, then, of your lord's blessings do you both deny?” (Qur'an, 55:13), which functions as a kind of “dream logic” for both material and spiritual rewards (p. 148). A parallel debate about “celestial virgins” (hur 'in) also suggests problems of cultural subjectivity: according to some Western critics, Paradise females are sexualized beings, while Muslim scholars interpret them as representations of platonic union and closeness to God (Sells, 1999, p. 149).

The harrowing image of Hell in the Qur'an serves as a portrayal of divine justice and punishment for vice and infidelity. Its metaphor is infectious with pangs of violent physical pain, paired with vehement mental suffering of its residents. By intertwining the corporeal agony with the existential dread, the Qur'an places a persistent demand on the audience to reflect upon the divine cost of moral and spiritual choices. The vision of Hellfire, chains, and ghisl, or pus and filth (Qur'an 69:36) functions as a simplistic counter image to that of Paradise. Whereas Chapter 88, the Overwhelming Event (Qur'an 88:1–7) speaks of metaphors of a “blazing Fire” from which cursed people “drink from a boiling spring,” Chapter 69, the Inevitable Hour (Qur'an 69:30–37) focuses exclusively on bondage and despondency. The stories are dialogical—they involve exchanges between the dwellers of Hell and their tormentors, in which questions, such as “Did no one come to warn you?” bring upon them more pain (Qur'an 67:9). This type of exchanges calls to mind Bakhtin's notion of polyphony in which relegated voices lament yet entreat the readers to welcome moral obligation to avoid divine punishment.

When speaking of Hell, the Qur'an frequently shifts between descriptive and imperative moods, as well as direct address and orders, which not only serves to create a sense of immediacy but also suggests a moral imperative. In chapter 44, Smoke, the command, “Taste this [the punishment], you powerful respected man” (Qur'an 44:49) satirizes human arrogance. Chapter 67, Control, (Qur'an 67:6–11) shifts from providing creative representations of Hell's ecological horrors to direct appeals to the readers. The exchange of descriptive and prescriptive discourse converts eschatology into ethical exhortation, as suggested by Fazlur Rahman's (1980) that the Qur'an's the real power resides in its capacity to spark an urgent moral sense:

The standard Qur'anic terms for the ultimate sequel, are not salvation and damnation so much as success (*falah*) and loss (*khusran*) both for this life and the hereafter. This is why the Qur'an continues to exhort people to send something for the morrow[sic] (p. 75).

It is through Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia that we can recognize how the Qur'an's eschatological imagery is held within a vast web of meanings that elicits the reader's imaginations on various cultural, theological, and moral levels. This polyphonic richness grants the text a universal aspect that connects the seventh-century Arabian context to contemporary debates around justice, ecology, and spirituality.

Conclusion

Reading Qur'anic imagery through Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and heteroglossia uncovers its polyphonic abundance. To persuade the readers, the Qur'an contains multi-layered and complex imagery that redirects earlier traditions while simultaneously establishing its own theological innovation. The heteroglossic nature of the text calls for various applications across eras and worlds and proves its relevance. It draws together such universal preoccupations as divine mercy and retribution with the specific context of seventh century Arabia, thereby establishing a connection between the human and celestial worlds. Based on Bakhtinian theory, the Qur'an can be deemed as dialogically oriented, creating the opening for actual dialogue, lending a literary and spiritual significance at the same time. This interdisciplinary model is a key to stretching the limits of inquiry by connecting literary analysis, religious studies and cultural analysis in the search for a richer encounter with the legacy of the Qur'an as an ongoing phenomenon.

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