

Pharaoh and the Divine Wont of Respite: A Critical Analysis of Quranic Themes

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Abstract

Respite or giving extra time (*imhal*) is a divine wont that means postponing the punishment of wrongdoers. Although not mentioned with a specific title, this wont is explicitly noticeable in the Quran in various places, such as in the encounter of prophets with the disbelievers and oppressors, particularly in the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh. An analysis of this divine wont using the critical discourse analysis method shows the use of an element of Jewish discourse and its new articulation as a central signifier in the formation of religious-Islamic identity. This belief plays a vital role in the early centuries of Islamic history in the redefinition of religious concepts, formation of political identity, antagonism, and the formation of independent social identity for Muslims and for specific groups among them.

Keywords: Divine tradition of respite, Exodus, Critical discourse analysis, Discourse practice analysis, Social practice analysis.

Introduction

In the academic sphere of contemporary religious studies, various methods are used to study different aspects of religion. Certain case studies have also been conducted regarding the application of new methods to religious themes (Power 2013; Rizwan Bahauddin 2011). However, it needs to be taken into account that the new analytic methods inspired by Marxist (Hjelm 2013), Neo-Marxist (Siebert 2010), and Foucauldian ideas (Stuckrad 2003) prevented the formation a common language between religious scholars and modern scholars within the domain of modern religious studies. The most important reason for this disagreement can be traced back to disregarding the naturalized and indisputable presumptions of every religion, without which no authentic understanding would be achieved according to religious scholars. An understanding that takes all visible and hidden factors of a religion into account, considers its formation in a special context, and provides a specialized and relatively deep understanding of it is indeed closer to the social reality of religion. But can we find a way to make use of new analytical methods and at the same time acquire an authentic understanding of religion? Can we analyze and understand the mechanism of religion in its formation?

The critical discourse analysis method appears to have the capacity to clear a room for religious presumptions within its framework. This article seeks to shed light on the mechanism of religion in providing identity for individuals and turning a believer into an actor. To this end, we have used the critical discourse analysis method of Norman Fairclough, which has been further developed by Hjelm in his works on religious themes (Hjelm 2014). We use this method to analyze the adventures related to respiting Pharaoh in the three steps of text analysis, discourse practice analysis, and social practice analysis.

1. First Step: Text Analysis

In this stage, the microanalysis of the text in the form of analyzing the propositions' structure (study of words, adverbs, conditionals, and so forth) and the macroanalysis of the text in the form of analyzing the propositions' composition (study of rhetoric, eloquence, and story narration) are conducted. Due to the interconnection and close relation between these two levels of analysis, each Quranic verse is simultaneously analyzed on micro and macro scales.

The most perfect set of verses that deal with the life conditions of the Israelites before the Exodus, calling Pharaoh to monotheism by Moses, Pharaoh's reaction, and finally respiting and punishing Pharaoh by God can be found in Quran 7:127-41, which is the selected text for analysis in this article.

1.1 Political Fronts in Society

The goal of text analysis is achieving a description of the world that is depicted by the author. In the study of the divine wont of respiting in the case of Pharaoh, finding the characters and explaining social places and domination relations in the story is important.

1.1.1 Description of Pharaoh and Egyptian Aristocrats

The story begins with a quotation from "*al-mala'*." The Arabic word means "a group" (Jawhari, n.d., 1:73), "the elite and elders of the nation" (Ibn Durayd, n.d., 2:1084), "elders whose words are the basis of action" (Farahidi, n.d., 8:347; 'Askari, n.d., 274; Raghīb al-Isfahani, n.d., 776; Ibn al-Athir 1988, 4:351). "Fir'awn" was an Arabicized word taken from a foreign language, referring to the Egyptian king who was a contemporary of Moses (Jawhari, n.d., 6:2177; Zubaydi, n.d., 18:432; Turayhi 1996, 4:375). Using the title

instead of a person's name is an indication of his or her social status. Pharaoh was a ruler who revolted against God and oppressed people.

A positive interrogation with a negative implication in the words of the elders of the court is as follows: "Will you leave Moses and his people to cause corruption in the land, and to abandon you and your gods?" (Quran 7:126). This is a structure that can be used to rebuke or motivate someone for action; of course, motivating is more likely in this context. This phrase contains a balance between "Moses and his people" and "Pharaoh and his goddesses." This division bespeaks a confrontation that is more a matter of racial disputes than a controversy between ideologies.

The confrontation with the Israelites is described as follows: "He said, 'We will kill their sons and spare their women, and indeed we are dominant over them'" (Quran 7:127). This order is totally intelligible in view of Pharaoh's harsh policies in reducing the Israelites' population. The emphasis in "indeed we are dominant over them" refers to Pharaoh's deep belief in his domination and the abasement of the dominated people (Ibn Manzur, n.d., 5:5; Ibn 'Abbad, n.d., 3:341; Azhari, n.d., 5:120). It is as if Pharaoh struggles to affirm his own superior status in the society that has been weakened following the sorcerers' defeat by Moses and his people.

1.1.2 Depiction of the Status of Moses and the Israelites

The story continues with a different scene: "Moses said to his people, 'Turn to Allah for help and be patient. The earth indeed belongs to Allah, and He gives its inheritance to whomever He wishes of His servants, and the outcome will be in favour of the God wary'" (Quran 7:128). Moses recommends them to ask God to help them, and by this recommendation he reminds them that God is the only source of power and that they should disregard all other powers. The word

“servants” motivates the people to retain their belief, as it can lead them to the promised land of liberation. At the end of this verse, Moses notes that “the outcome will be in favour of the God-wary,” that prosperity is with the people who have God-wariness (Shaybani, n.d., 2:245). Moses does not seek to deny the difficulties that lie ahead of the wayfarers of the path of righteousness; rather, he insists that one's practical insistence on the belief in God can finally pave the path for prosperity: if Pharaoh attempts to uproot your generation, the Lord will expand your generation and make you superior, and you will see the reward of your patience and God-wariness.

The dialogue between Moses and the Israelites continues: “They said, ‘We were tormented before you came to us and [also] after you came to us’” (Quran 7:129). They show their distrust in the words of God’s Messenger Moses. It seems that the Israelites reveal their utmost hopelessness in the betterment of their conditions whether with Moses or without him.

1.2 God in Confrontation with Pharaoh and Egyptians

In the narration of the story related to respite Pharaoh, where the description of the interaction between God and the people starts, the text goes into further details.

1.2.1 Goal of the Divine Wont of Respite

In this part of the verses, God is personally narrating the story with utmost confidence and emphasizes that He fulfilled the promises that were given to the Israelites by destroying their enemies and punishing Pharaoh and his people in order to set the scene for them to think about self-correction and repentance. God applies the wont of respite in the case Pharaoh and his people, and the goal of this

respiting is explicitly expressed: "... so that they may take admonition" (Quran 7:129).

1.2.1.1 First Sign: Denial and Refusal

The first punishment is famine (Farāhīdī, n.d.,7:197). Divine punishment takes place gradually. Since famine could be attributed to natural causes, Pharaoh and his people refused to consider it a punishment from God; they even blamed Moses as a cursed man whose presence had caused such misfortunes: "But when good (times) came, they said, 'This is due to us.' When gripped by calamity, they ascribed it to evil omens connected with Moses and those with him! Behold! in truth the omens of evil are theirs in Allah's sight, but most of them do not understand!" (Quran 7:131).

The phrase "most of them" indicates that there were few people among Pharaoh and his followers who really believed in God. Nevertheless, the majority were under the influence of the dominant culture that prevented them from understanding Moses' revealed message. The Quran reports their stance regarding the divine signs: "They said (to Moses): 'Whatever be the signs thou bringest, to work therewith thy sorcery on us, we shall never believe in thee'" (Quran 7:132). Such an explicit assertion of refusal by the Egyptians show how influential was Pharaoh's cultural domination over Egyptians. The persistent rejection of Moses' call caused the wont of respiting to enter a more serious stage.

1.2.1.2 New Miracles: An Opportunity for Returning

"So We sent against them a flood and locusts, lice, frogs and blood, as distinct signs. But they acted arrogantly, and they were a guilty lot" (Quran 7:133). Regarding the previous signs, God stated that Pharaoh's people were uninformed about Moses and his stature as a prophet and regarded him just as a skillful sorcerer. Thus, in order to

purify Moses from the accusation of being a sorcerer, God decided to send miracles that could not be performed even by the greatest magicians in the world.

1.2.1.3 The Most Important Factor of Respite: Timetable

In Quran 7:133, the adjective “distinct” refers to the intervals between the signs. These intervals are indeed a necessary part in the divine wont of respite, through which God extends His mercy. This extension of mercy is repeated at least five times in the form of respite via the process of sending signs, affliction, people’s recourse to the prophet for ending the punishment, suppression of the torment, and giving an opportunity for repentance.

1.2.1.4 Identity Instability: Affliction, Enlightenment, and Negligence

Despite the signs, the result was the following: “But they acted arrogantly, and they were a guilty lot” (Quran 7:133). The most significant point in this verse is that the phrase “most of them do not understand” is changed to “they were a guilty lot.” This is to say that the initial refusal of Moses’s call was due to Pharaoh’s influence and could be excused, while the second act of denial following the revelation of countless signs left no room for any excuse. Anyone who rejects the divine message after a series of convincing signs and miracles is punishable and has no excuses. “But when We had removed the plague from them until a term that they should have completed, behold, they broke their promise” (Quran 7:135).

1.2.1.5 Denial of Signs and Destruction

“So We took vengeance [*intaqamna*] on them and drowned them in the sea, for they denied Our signs and were oblivious to them” (Quran 7:136). The word “*intiqaam*” means punishing someone (Mashkur

1979, 2:928) because of his or her actions (Farahidi, n.d., 5:181; Ibn Durayd, n.d., 2:977). God punished Pharaoh and his followers due to their inattention to divine signs.

1.2.2 Fulfillment of Divine Promise: Social Deconstruction

In the last scene of the story, when God destroys the followers of Pharaoh due to their infidelity, God bestows the east and the west of the blessed land upon the people who were abased (Quran 7:137). This can be considered the fulfillment of the promise that was given to the Israelites in the beginning of the story. What connects the audience of the Quran to the story of Pharaoh is the sudden emergence and mention of the chief addressee of these verses, Prophet Muhammad (s): “And your Lord's best word [of promise] was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of their patience, and We destroyed what Pharaoh and his people had built and what they used to erect” (Quran 7:137). If God has fulfilled his promises to Moses and his people, the Prophet has to know that the same will be fulfilled about him and his people. Of course, patience was the key to the complete fulfillment of God's promises to the Israelites.

2. Second Step: Discourse Practice Analysis

In this part, we will follow the implications of the acquired clues in the stage of description through theological, traditional, and exegetical reflection on the sources. To this end, we need to take the second analytical step in the following two areas: (1) situational context (contextual interpretation of the background of the text) and intertextual context (historical perspective and connections and disconnections with other discourses and in discourse formation) and (2) the subject-matter, presumptions, and speech-acts of the text.

2.1 Contexts Analysis

The analysis of the situational and intertextual context creates a wider horizon for the related story, and this wider horizon paves the path for discourse act analysis.

2.1.1 Explanation of the Situational Context of the Wont of Respiring

The divine wont of respiting, as a central signifier in such micro-discourses as confidence in God, trust in God, belief in the power of God over natural and social changes, belief in the role played by faith in afflictions, insignificance of tribal and racial divisions in the eyes of God led to the qualitative expansion of the Muslims' beliefs and strengthened their belief network. It could even create new beliefs like the belief in God's care for the Israelites that led them to prosperity, and the sense of identity and sympathy with the Jews.

If we suppose that the Jews in the time of the revelation of the Quran were also among the audience of the Quran, the differences between the Quran and Torah led to different reactions: either their previous beliefs were strengthened or they were changed in light of the new revelation. Of course, the new knowledge can be suggestive of similarities or differences between the new prophet's and Moses' missions.

2.1.2 Explanation of the Intertextual Context of the Wont of Respiring

The story of the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh and respiting the latter is also related in the book of Exodus. The main line of the biblical story has many similarities with the story as narrated in the Quran. However, there are some differences as well. We do not intend to find the reason behind the differences; rather, our goal is to answer questions such as the following: Why has this story been narrated in both scriptures? What was the goal of their narration? What were the

effects of the narration of this story? To answer these questions, we need two simple presuppositions: (1) a similar story exists in both scriptures, and (2) the Jews or the People of the Book in general are among the audience of the Quran.

The sameness of characters, the main line of the story, and the process of events led the Muslims to use Jewish sources to learn about further details of the story which did not appear in the Quranic narration. This sameness and commonality have indirectly provided common background knowledge of the story.

When the same story is narrated in two sacred scriptures, if we study them outside the belief framework, there is always a probability of the existence of differences between them, and each narration can be either false or true. However, when a Muslim considers the story as part of the divine revelation in the Quran, the whole story is believed to be corresponding to the reality, and every similar source, even those prior to the Quran, is considered to be of lesser value; therefore, if a Muslim finds differences between the Quranic and Biblical narration, she will take it to be an indication of distortion in the Bible and not due to a mistake in the Quran, because the micro-discourse of belief in the inerrancy of the Quran leaves no room for any doubts in its veracity.

In this part, we implement critical discourse analysis as regards the wont of respiting in the story of Pharaoh in Islamic sources. According to Islamic beliefs, the similarities between the Biblical and Quranic versions of this story are due to their having the same source. The differences between the two texts are not contradictions; rather, they originate from the untold details in the Quran. Moreover, the belief in the veracity of the Quran as compared to the other sacred texts relatively reduces the incompatibility between the two scriptures.

This interaction in the case of differences will uncover its fruits in the form of discourse reproduction, to which we will turn in the third step.

2.2 Speech Acts Analysis

The most important stage of the explanation is describing the existing speech acts and their origin. For better organization of the discussion, the speech acts will be discussed in two distinct parts: social speech acts and individual speech acts.

2.2.1 Social Speech Acts Analysis

One of the speech acts in the social sphere is the description that is offered by social groups and classes. The Quran begins with a description of the status quo of the Egyptian society—that is, the class system in which on the one side stand the king and aristocrats, while on the other side stand Moses and his people, who are an oppressed minority due to their immigration from Canaan and racial and tribal differences. A serious confrontation between the two groups begins with Moses' mission and his call to monotheism. From this stage onward, the confrontation takes a religious form. The concern of the ruling body is the possible fall of the governing religious and political hegemony in the society, while the concern of the Hebrew minority is promoting the belief in God and religious freedom and liberation. The precise depiction of the bipolar society of the time of Moses and the description of the status of the Israelites among the Egyptians and the ongoing oppression indeed served as a model for the Muslims and inspired hope in them that their resistance would lead to a desirable end.

Obviously, the course of events and afflictions of Pharaoh and his people led to their loss of their higher stature, such that they asked

Moses to use his power as a prophet to save them from their affliction. Social humiliation was also another psychological crisis of the believers in the beginning of Islam. The new converts, who were mostly from the lower social classes were continuously under torture. The similarity between the new Muslims and the followers of Moses, who received the reward of their patience, would raise the Muslims' motivation for resistance against social pressures.

In Exodus, the central theme of the story is the liberation of the Israelites, while in the Quranic narration, the title "Children of Israel" is just used twice. This is indeed an indication of the insignificance of race for God. The fact that God in the Quran speaks of the normal factors of social supremacy, such as wealth, social status, and race, is indeed not intended to value these factors; rather, the measure of nobility in the Quran is merely piety and faith in God. These descriptions delineate the negative factors of the social identity of a religious person.

Division of social groups into "Pharaoh and his followers" and "Moses and Children of Israel" shows that in Islamic logic those who hear the call of Truth are two groups and no more. In fact, this is a strategy that necessarily leads the individual towards religion. Religious identity can be negative or positive because no third impartial class of people is recognized.

2.2.2 Individual Speech Acts

The factors of the religious identity of individuals can be found in two groups of people who have been mentioned in the verses of the Quran. On the one side stand Pharaoh and his people who are called to religion for the first time, while on the other side we find the Israelites who have already embraced Monotheism.

In the initial invitation of people to religion, the first reaction is usually denial, because people's prior beliefs make them deny the new faith. However, repetition of knowledge-bearing signs makes them doubt the governing hegemony and sets the scene for knowledge. This knowledge either leads to the rejection of the new religion and reaffirmation of the previous discourse structure or strengthens the doubt and provides the ground for the debacle of the hegemony of the previous cognitive paradigm. At any rate, the doubt that is casted on the totality of the individual's knowledge should not be neglected, and its baseless denial is not accepted either. This can be seen in the consecutive features attributed to Pharaoh and his people.

On the other hand, mere conversion to monotheism does not secure one's religious identity; rather, it is believing in a religion and its prophet as a guide, as well as playing the roles expected of a believer, that constitutes an individual's religious identity.

3. Third Step of Discourse Analysis: Social Practice Analysis

The most important stage in discourse analysis can be found in social practice analysis, whose goal is describing the discourse as part of a social process. If our major goal in this essay is understanding the mechanism of religion in the formation of the religious identity of a believer as an individual and social actor in the reproduction of religious discourse, we need to discuss this stage of analysis in two steps: contextual analysis of Surah al-A'raf and analysis of the divine wont of respite in the case of Pharaoh throughout the Quran.

3.1. Contextual Study of Surah al-A'raf and the Context of Verses¹

Surah al-A'raf (Quran 7) is the thirty-ninth chapter that was revealed to the Prophet in Mecca (Darwaza 1964, 1:15; Jarami 2001, 87; Ma'rifat 2002, 90; Ramyar 1990, 686). According to historical reports, this surah was revealed before Surah al-Jinn (Quran 72), which was revealed after the Prophet's trip to Ta'if (Ibn Ashur, n.d., 29:201). As a result, Surah al-A'raf was revealed simultaneously with or before the Prophet's travel to Ta'if. The travel to Ta'if was a missionary trip, and if we accept the historical reports about the presence of Jews in Ta'if (Ibn Khaldun 1988, 2:343), it was probably the first call of Jews to Islam. The familiarity of the audience—that is, the leaders of the Thaqif and Hawazin tribes—with Jewish stories is needed to be considered a possible presupposition in this context. This presupposition is supported by the historical information about the city of Ta'if and its founders (Bakri 1983, 1:63-66), the urbanization style that is focused on castle-like building (Balādhurī 1997, 1:366; Waqidi 1989, 3:922), emergence of a man like Umayyah ibn Abi Salt, who was in touch with Christians and Jews and sought to present himself as the last prophet (Isbahani, n.d., 4:129), and also the willingness of the people of Ta'if to pay alms (Baladhuri 1988, 64). If we accept that this surah was revealed before the Prophet's travel to Ta'if and also if we accept that there lived people who were familiar with Jewish culture, the structure of Surah al-A'raf can be considered a guide to the revelation of divine message for the People of the Book and particularly the Jews.

Surah al-A'raf is the first chapter in the sequence of revelation that contains the stories of prophets in detail (Darwaza 1964, 2:36). It is

1. The basic presupposition in this stage is that the verse were revealed according to the traditional order.

interesting to note that it contains just those stories that are found in the Hebrew Bible, with which the Jews were completely familiar. For example, it is worth asking why there is no mention of Jesus, who was the closest prophet to Prophet Muhammad, while the story of Moses and Pharaoh is narrated in detail. The stories of past prophets are narrated in a sequential manner, and at the end of each story it is noted: “These are the towns some of whose accounts We recount to you. Their apostles certainly brought them manifest proofs, but they were not the ones to believe in ... ” (Quran 7:101), while in the middle of the story of Moses, Prophet Mohammad is addressed with the following words: “Your Lord's best word [of promise] was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of their patience” (Quran 7:137). At the end of the story, where the events related to the destruction of seventy-one of the Israelite elders are told, Moses asks God: “And appoint goodness for us in this world and the Hereafter, for indeed we have come back to You” (Quran 7:156), and in response God says: “I visit My punishment on whomever I wish, but My mercy embraces all things. Soon I shall appoint it for those who are God-wary and give the zakat and those who believe in Our signs” (Quran 7:156). Here, God intends to apply the measures of true faith as delineated in the time of Moses to the time of Prophet Muhammad and thus announces that true believers are those who “follow the Apostle, the uninstructed prophet, whose mention they find written with them in the Torah and the Evangel” (Quran 7:157). This connection between the stories of Moses and Prophet Muhammad and his people (some of whom were Jews) is a sign of a serious confrontation between Prophet Muhammad and the Jews. In these verses, there is a positive interaction between the prophet and the Jews and no negative stance has been adopted against the latter, for they are expected to

convert to Islam due to the common background, and this is why the story of Moses is related: "... and relieves them of their burdens and the shackles that were upon them" (Quran 7:157).

But if we put aside all the presuppositions and historical probabilities related to the atmosphere of the revelation of the verses and disregard the aspect of teaching the right way of proselytization, these verses still have a significant role in the promotion of the discourse of Islam. This is a role that owes its significance not to the Jews or non-Muslims but to the few believers at the dawn of Islam. This is what God intends by "an admonition [reminder] for the faithful" in the second verse. Surah al-A'raf is the first chapter in which the stories of prophets are related in detail, and it could not be a "reminder" if the audience were hearing the stories for the first time.

Dhikr in Arabic does also refer to "preservation of something" (Farāhīdī, n.d., 5:346), and the Hebrew equivalent for this word means memorization (Mashkur 1979, 1:266). But what does this chapter seek to preserve for the believers? To properly explain this, we need to return to the introduction and review the points mentioned before the story of Moses and Pharaoh: God is omnipotent and is in charge of the bounties and torments (verse 96); He is the Punisher (verses 96, 100); He devises plans against the imposters (verse 99); He dominates the whole universe, and even the resistance of the infidels against the call of faith is due to the seal put on their hearts by God (verse 101). The hardships that people, and particularly the believers, go through are all planned by God (verses 94, 95), and all these factors exist in the story of Pharaoh and Moses. Then, the story is immediately narrated.

Up to this point, there is no difference between the identity of a Jew and that of a Muslim, as they are both believers who share the same monotheistic beliefs, such as the belief in God's support, final

victory, hope for a better future, and liberation from the oppression. But the culmination of the rehabilitation of the Muslims' religious identity is where God introduces a Jew's correct religious identity to be that of the one who embraces Islam. Accepting the supremacy of the new religious title for those who had a long religious history was not an easy task, and this was a source of honor for Muslims among the followers of the other monotheistic religions. This honor played a key role in the promotion of the religious identity of early Muslims in the face of numerous social humiliations.

3.2. Respiting Pharaoh in the Quran

As to the story of respiting Pharaoh and postponing his final punishment, many references can be found in the Quran. Every reference can be regarded as a factor among the numerous factors of religious identity. This shows that God has not abandoned the discourse structure of a religious identity and even has repeated and strengthened the established factors. The reason is clear: discourse is an open and dynamic set that becomes unstable by various factors, like foreign enemies, social crises, doubts, and threats. Then, it is totally natural that, despite the formation and establishment of a central signifier in the religious identity of an individual, extra evidence be presented for further corroboration.

In Surah al-Zukhruf (Quran 43) and Surah al-Dukhan (Quran 44), some allusions have been made to respiting Pharaoh though not in the detailed fashion of Surah al-A'raf. In al-Zukhruf, like al-A'raf, the discussion starts with the issue of prophecy, continues with the discussion of monotheism and resurrection, and ends with the issue of monotheism. The demonstration of prophecy and explanation of the status of prophets in chapters that were revealed in Mecca generally

show that the belief in prophets is the first step in accepting the religion. The first course of action for finding a religious identity and changing the past knowledge is the belief and trust in the person who has brought the message of God. Thus, in the beginning of the Prophet's mission, this first measure was explaining the doctrine of prophethood.

In Surah Al-Zukhruf, the intention of respiting is explicitly expressed: "We seized them with punishment so that they might come back" (Quran 43:48). In this chapter, the story of respiting Pharaoh serves as a ground for demonstrating prophethood, monotheism, and resurrection. First, prophethood is taken into account. God addresses the Prophet with the following words: "Indeed you are on a straight path" (Quran 43:43). Such a statement is a clear endorsement of the Prophet on behalf of the Lord. Then, God continues: "Indeed it is a reminder for you and for your people" (Quran 43:44). The revelation that addresses Prophet Muhammad is referred to as "*dhikr*." This term finds a new meaning within the articulation of the religious discourse, and it is interesting to note that it frequently appears in the story of Moses and Pharaoh. The sentence "Ask those of Our apostles We have sent before you" (Quran 43:45) is stated to demonstrate the prophethood. In this verse, there is certainly a positive question with a negative implication: "Did We set up any gods besides the All-Beneficent to be worshipped?" (Quran 43:45). It also addresses the previous phrase too and suggests that prophets only call to monotheism. But why such a clear point is enfolded in complicated similes? Perhaps discourse analysis could reveal the reason behind the use of these literary devices. In this verse, God addresses the Prophet in person, as the central signifier in this verse is him. He is ordered to ask the prophets before him. Aligning the last prophet with the other prophets is the most dependable expression that provides the ground

for the trust of the followers of the previous monotheistic religions in Islam and its prophet. The next phrase that is in the form of a positive interrogation with a negative implication addresses the issue of monotheism, which forms the major message of prophets. Then, the story of respiting Pharaoh is related, which includes characters and social conditions that are very similar to those of the time of the Prophet but which is different in that the veracity of the story of Moses and Pharaoh was accepted and could be used as a means to facilitate the acceptance of the principles of prophethood, monotheism, and resurrection.

The other verses in which the story of respiting Pharaoh is mentioned are found in Surah al-Dukhan. Al-Dukhan was revealed in Mecca, and like other Meccan chapters speaks about the pillars of Islam. In this chapter, a clear relation is found between the story of respiting Pharaoh and resurrection. In the opening verses, God is described as the one who gives life and takes it back and as the Lord of the first humans (Quran 44:8). There are people who are grappling with doubts (Quran 44:9), and the signs of torment are sent to them in order to warn them. Despite the “reminder” and the “prophet” who is sent to them by God, they still insist on their disbelief and call their prophet a “trained lunatic.” God promises them a harsh retribution. Then, God connects the state of these people to that of those in Moses’ time. The process used by God regarding the deniers is the same process used in the case of the despisers of Moses: sending a prophet, presentation of signs, denial by the addressee, sending the signs of retribution to warn as part of the divine wont of respiting, denial, and finally the destruction and worldly and otherworldly torment. Here, there is a road map presented to the individuals who deny the divine message, and the destiny of the previous deniers can serve as a vital lesson for them.

The detailed narration of the story of respiting Pharaoh at the dawn of Islam is significant from two perspectives: first, in the process of presenting a new religion a cognitive crisis occurs that daunts the audience and creates resistance. The gradual presentation of the religion using a common cognitive ground (such as the story of Moses and Pharaoh) and emphasis on knowledge-bearing signs reduce the cognitive crisis to some extent and assists the fast formation of the new religious identity that establishes the grounds for the new discourse. On the other hand, in the detailed stories of the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, the emphasis is laid on the compassion of God, who intends to guide people, even the greatest transgressors among them. This compassion turns God into a source of support and mental security. Meanwhile, God warns the people that respiting is temporal and tries to convince people to make positive decisions regarding the acquisition of faith in the newly emerged religion and find a positive solution for the cognitive crisis.

Conclusion

The application of the critical discourse analysis method to religious themes and particularly in the explanation of religious identity and its formation uncovers the hidden mechanisms through which religious discourse has been reproduced through centuries. Studying the mode of the narration of the story, the words used, and the syntactical rules in the text provide a precise description of the social fronts of Moses' time. The assessment of the rhetorical rules of the text reveals the quantitative and qualitative expansion of belief in the audience and the interaction between the Quranic text and the Hebrew Bible. The study of speech acts sheds light on the identity situations depicted as the individual and social identity of religious people and explains the way the individuals relocate themselves in these situations through cognitive simulation and identification. The discourse analysis of the

various social acts, focusing on the theme of respiting Pharaoh, shows that it plays a key role in the establishment of macro religious principles, like divine unicity, prophethood, and resurrection, as well as their reproduction through the description of individual and social identity places.

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