

SACRED COEXISTENCE AND NARRATIVE ORDER IN *PARADISE*: AN AFRICAN-ABRAHAMICA READING

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Abstract

Syncretism, hybridity and identity negotiation are some of the common frameworks that have been used to conduct critical scholarship on religion in African literature which explains encounter between African Indigenous religion and Abrahamic religion. This framework though productive, it presents religious polarity as unstable or incomplete. This paper advances the idea of African-Abrahamica as a critical vocabulary of reading religious coexistence as a genre of African fiction with Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* as its primary text. The study takes the form of a qualitative textual analysis and close reading as its methodological basis and explores the relationship between Islam and African indigenous cosmologies in the social and moral world of the novel. The results indicate that the images of shrines, amulets, spirits, Quranic practices and the call on common Adamic ancestors are not presented as contradictory but as interconnected modes of meaning that structure everyday's life rather than depicting religious difference as a problem to be resolved. *Paradise* presents coexistence through its narrative form and social imagination. This article argues that African-Abrahamica provides a new interpretive tool for reading literary representations of lived religious pluralism beyond binaries such as tradition and modernity, orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Consequently, it contributes to debates in African literary studies, religion and postcolonial cultural studies.

Keywords: African-Abrahamica; Religion; African Literature, Coexistence; Gurnah.

Introduction

The models used to interpret religion in the African literary narratives mostly focus on cultural mixture, transition and negotiation. Although these approaches have been fruitful, particularly the approaches that relate to postcolonial theories of

hybridity, they tend to give a circumscription to analyses by viewing religious plurality as a state of unrest instead of as a principle of organisation of narrative meaning. As a result, the texts of African multiple systems of sacred reading are subject to the primary reading of the revelation of historical experience or cultural mediation, as opposed to the mediation of belief systems which can and do influence narrative logic and character experience. Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* is the interesting location to reevaluate this tendency. The novel lies within the web of trade, migration and imperial expansion in the Swahili coast and in the world it creates; there is no division of Islamic life with native spiritual rites and practices. Current criticism has been inclined to give more importance to economic circulation themes, mobility and ethical ambiguity to the background of the situations (Sabby, 2024). However, these readings do not give appropriate emphasis to the level of how the sacred practices shape the perception, power and narrative causality in the text.

This paper posits that *Paradise* enacts an ordered sacred space where there are various systems of religious beliefs that are held together through a common imaginative space. These systems do not usually come across as being discontinuous or in-between, but instead they can be intelligible to characters that span across cultural and spiritual divides. This coexistence does not come easy. The disequilibrium of religious power, the opposition between religious orthodoxy and local rites of passage and the powerlessness of people like Yusuf in systems of trade and servitude reveal that religious plurality may result in friction and disparities as well. These examples make reading anything that would view coexistence as harmonious or integrative across the board, difficult.

African-Abrahamica is the proposed conceptual framework in this article to explain African narrative worlds religious representation, taking into consideration both the coherence and conflict. African-Abrahamica refers to a form of narrative structuring where Abrahamic and African native cosmologies collectively educate moral judgment, social interaction and development of events, without necessarily depending on their difference. This paradigm breaks with paradigms that put primacy on mixture or transition by prefiguring coexistence as a structuring condition, but is sensitive to the boundaries and inconsistencies within it.

By closely reading Gurnah's *Paradise*, the article illustrates how religious rituals contribute to character action and narrative construction in a manner that makes religion a part of the inner-logic of the text. By so doing, it contextualizes African-Abrahamica as a vocabulary to rethink not only the work of Gurnah but also the work of African and trans-regional literary and cultural studies more generally, as a configuration of spiritual plurality appears in both the work of Chinua Achebe and Ben Okri, although to varying extents of conflict, accommodation and ontological tension.

Review of Scholarship on Religious Coexistence in Gurnah's *Paradise*

The *Paradise*, is set against a backdrop of historical stratification of the Swahili coast, characterized by trans-regional trade, Islamic expansion, inland, caravan economies and native spiritual continuities, which existed before and survived the colonial encroachment. Though the concept of mobility and commerce is often used as a prism to read the novel, the writing structure is clearly influenced by the presence of religion as a perception-organising, moral-reasoning, and existential-orientation-structuring force. Religion here is not merely thematic material; but a structuring situation of narrative reality (Hodapp, 2023).

This tendency is made difficult by historical scholarship. Isichei (1995) shows that African interactions with Islam and Christianity have not been determined by discontinuity, but continuity and accommodation, and that indigenous cosmologies are not replaced by new religious meanings, but continues to be constructive frameworks that receive new religious meanings. In their application to literary texts, however, such historical lessons are often refracted into the form of critical models which put more emphasis on flux and negotiation at the expense of coherence and durability. Criticism of the fiction of Gurnah has greatly increased, especially after his Nobel Prize in Literature in 2021.

Much of this criticism places *Paradise* in the context of Indian Ocean mobility, trade, servitude and vulnerability to ethical issues. Quayson (1995) interprets the work by Gurnah by way of moral economies of dependency and movement with a foreground of how social relations are structured by the movement of spatial circulation. In this context, religion is likely to emerge as a constituent of the cultural fabric of Swahili society as opposed to being the main issue of analysis. Equally, Krishnan (2023) places Gurnah in the context of global and postcolonial narratives, and dwells on the concepts of belonging, hospitality, and narrative ethics. Although he recognizes Islamic codes of morality in the *Paradise*, Krishnan considers religion to be one component in a number of concepts that define character consciousness and not as a set of consistent sacred codes. The native religious activities: cult sites, spirits, ritual taboos are generally interpreted as ethnographic elaboration or a symbolic residue and not as active narrative powers.

Previous interpretations of Gurnah's *Paradise* also have viewed the novel in terms of a paradigm of historical change and cultural discontinuity. Islam has been construed in regard to business, power and discipline, specifically in the figure of Aziz and the caravan economy and the native cosmologies are brought into the fringes of Islam as hangover or pre-Islamic remnants. These readings implicitly support critical suppositions that the plurality of religion must be syncretic or transitional, and there is little room to allow other interpretations that acknowledge coexistence as a stable story.

The parallels with other African texts also provide the additional support of the necessity of a more sophisticated system. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is characterized by the conflict and rupture in the experience of the Igbo religion and

Christianity (Okeke et al., 2017) and is a predetermined foreground of the disruptive aspects of religious plurality. In contrast, in Okri's *The Famished Road*, there are overlapping spiritual realities which exist in a more fluid and yet tension-filled cosmology with boundaries between material and metaphysical worlds that are permeable (Quayson, 1995). It is in these texts that African literature can be seen to comfort a variety of modes of religious interaction, starting with conflict and ending with coexistence and ontological ambiguity.

The fact that there is still a critical difference in readings of the Gurnah's *Paradise* in which religion is still under-theorized as a structuring principle is an indicator that there is a need to employ a different conceptual vocabulary. This paper suggests the African-Abrahamica as a model of explaining the state of religious coexistence as being stable but in a dynamic state of narrative structure. Instead of prioritizing mixture or transition, African-Abrahamica prefigures how Abrahamic and indigenous cosmologies act on each other to influence ethical arguments, social dynamics and plot development, being mindful of the conflicts and imbalances such co-existence implies.

By redefining the role of religion in the work of narrative, such as this way of making religion central to the narrative structure shifts the analysis of what religion is to how it works, how it organises the fiction world, and how it shapes the moral horizons as well as offering the terms by which characters perceive themselves as part of a larger metaphysical environment.

Theorising Sacred Realism and African-Abrahamica in Gurnah's *Paradise*

This paper follows Sacred Realism as a theoretical position orientation and not a theory that is institutionalised or fixed. In place of suggesting a strict structure, Sacred Realism is more like a form of critical focus which allows a more subtle conception of the functioning of religious presence in the realist narrative. It gives a point of view through which to consider the operation of the sacred not in the peripheries of the text, but as a force of internal structuring, as a formative force in the motivation of character and the maintenance of coherence in the narrative. Fundamentally, Sacred Realism goes against a long-held belief in literary studies, namely, that realism is secular in nature, and that the meaning of religion must always be marginal. In these suppositions, the sacred tends to be diminished to metaphorical, superstitious or symbolic remnant. In opposition to this trend, Sacred Realism is the belief that the religious meaning can be completely integrated into the imaginative and moral construction of realist fiction (Moore-Jumonville, 2018). Reading through Sacred Realism then is to alter the analytical focus towards presence to function. Instead of posing the question whether religion is present in a text, the emphasis is placed on how it works, how it imposes a pattern of perception, how it sets the pattern of judgement of morals, and how it shapes the decision-making in the day-to-day life. Religious practices are not considered idolatrous surplus and decoration, but as normalized tools of meaning-making. This disposition is in line with wider theoretical explanations of realism which lay stress on the ethical saturation of life in common. According to Auerbach (1953),

realism can be characterized by its ability to depict serious and problematic elements of the daily life. This would reposition the ordinary as a place of richness and importance and it is now possible to appreciate that the sacred meaning can be constituted in commonplace activities not as something special. Sacred Realism is also reminiscent of philosophical explanations of belief as being socially anchored. Social imaginaries are a concept that was developed by Charles Taylor to refer to how people conceptualize their social being, their collective structures that make practices significant (Klassen 2018). This view brings out the religious meaning that lives on because of the practiced moral structures and social rites. In the context of narrative worlds, it means that religion is a normal sense making process and it is not an extraordinary or disruptive process.

Simultaneously, the Sacred Realism has to be placed in context of the prevailing postcolonial theories especially that of Homi K. Bhabha. The idea of hybridity introduced by Bhabha explains the “third space” in which new places could be constructed in the process of negotiation and ambivalence (Patterson, 2004). This model has played a key role in the interpretation of the interaction of cultures and the fruitful conflicts of colonial encounter. Nonetheless, it may be less prepared to explain the forms of coexistence as having a habitual and internally coherent nature due to its focus on liminality and negotiation. Sacred Realism is not opposed to hybridity but replaces the analysis emphasis. Whereas hybridity sheds light on the instances of friction and re-articulation, Sacred Realism takes care of the fact that plural systems of meaning can already be implicit in the everyday life. Such structures are thus complementary: the tension is prefigured by hybridity, and the tension can be resolved in the patterned coexistence that is described by Sacred Realism.

In this perspective, Sacred Realism can be effectively used to analyse the Gurnah’s *Paradise*. In the novel, the world is depicted whereby religious practices are interwoven in everyday life. The prayer of the Quran, the codes of Islamic ethics, the native shrines, the amulets of protection, and presence of the spirits are all overlapping reactions to the repetitive human situations of fear, duty and survival. Meanwhile, such co-existence is not totally smooth. There are instances of the imbalance of spiritual power, the lack of morality about characters like Aziz, and vulnerability of Yusuf in the structures of commerce and slavery that show there are asymmetries. The Sacred Realism has been able to accommodate these tensions by noting that coherence does not exclude conflict, but it is rather a part of a greater narrative framework (Al-Hamdi, 2024).

The different spiritual practices are interchanged among the characters, and not necessarily is there an indication of contradiction, implying some sort of religious literacy that goes beyond single adherence. The practices do exist in a common metaphysical space with each dealing with various aspects of experience. Sacred Realism interprets this as structural. Based on this introduction, African-Abrahamica is the main idea of intervention in the article. The methodological prism is given by Sacred Realism, the particular pattern of religious coexistence,

as it is manifested in African literary life, is called African-Abrahamica. It outlines a situation where Abrahamic and indigenous cosmologies are co-present systems influencing the ethical life and narrative formation.

Notably, when it comes to African-Abrahamica, fusion is not the meaning. Instead, it highlights coexistence without erasure and multiplicity without the instability needed, and is sensitive to tensions and asymmetries that are the product of historical processes like trade and migration. The possibility of reading *Paradise* as a story of organised coexistence granted by Sacred Realism and African-Abrahamica makes it possible to explain the tensions inherent even in the religious plurality as neither transitional nor incomplete without explaining the tensions inherent in the latter.

In this regard, Sacred Realism does not refute but enhances the main contribution of the article. It gives the conceptual support required to see religion as an inner and structuring aspect of narrative, whereas African-Abrahamica details the functioning of that organisation in a historically-located African setting. The two of them allow a long-term reading of *Paradise* as a story of divine coexistence that disrupts the interpretations which tend to view religious plurality in the main in the context of transition, rupture or incompleteness. Such a synthesis allows one to transcend the shortcomings of current paradigms, to anticipate an alternative critical possibility: the African literary texts are not a simple expression of a religious experience, but are actually remaking that experience into fixed and significant patterns of life.

Sacred Coexistence as Narrative order in *Paradise*

Paradise is a narrative that constructs East Africa as a place where several sacred systems exist, without competing with one another, but exists as systems of interaction. The Islamic faith, the native ritual practices, shrines, spirits and talismans work in unison to influence the ethical judgment, relationship in the community, and causality in the narratives. These systems are not indicators of the clash of religions or the shift of historical periods, but a logical divine order, which is a part of daily activities of life. Religion in the novel is not a doctrine but is lived cosmology, an imaginative framework by which the characters perceive danger, necessity and survival. This story structure indicates what Irele (2001) recognizes as the centrality of the sacred imagination in African literature where religion serves as an integrated worldview that influences perception and sense of morality but not as a system of belief.

As Irele points out, the novel shows that such a worldview is not fixed but is dynamically maintained by practice, memory and through shared involvement. The meaning which is sacred does not just come to us out of the blue; it is something which is constantly performed, re-performed and modified as the rhythms of everyday life play out (Irele, 2001). This divine pluralism is lodged in the interiors of the novel, and can be theorised as the African-Abrahamica, a story logic where the Abrahamic and indigenous religious constructs play in a common moral

universe. With this setup, there is no opposition to epistemology based on religious practices, and there is no hierarchy of authenticity or legitimacy of religious practices. Rather, they co-exist as pragmatic reactions to vulnerability, uncertainty and risk in ethics. *Paradise* is in line with the fact that according to Mbiti (1990), the African religious life is essentially integrative and does not require a break and exclusivity. Most notoriously, Mbiti makes it clear that religion in African situations is not a section of life but the entirety of life, a formula which finds an immediate echo in the narrative space of the novel. The role of religion in the novel is not the identity of a community which separates and sets strict boundaries. Instead, it offers a common grammar that approaches ethical duty, spiritual threat, and social responsibility to negotiate and comprehend.

The interactions that Yusuf has with the sacred depict this integrative logic both in material and narrative aspects. The symbols of shrines, amulets, ritual directions and prayers are not the remnants of a dying belief system. They are functional devices in the narrative world and are a determinant of action as well as moral judgment, both immediate and consequential. As the porters are told “The prayer is for you and your journey. The spirit of this shrine is Pembe” (155), the story is one of an Islamic invocation and a native ritual symbolism. Colour, texture and substance are used as vehicles of holy efficacy where each object has a meaning that is known in the collective cultural knowledge. The shrine spirit is not put out of the prayer and the invocation of the spirit does not take away the power of the prayer. However, they are both mobilised as complementary protection sources. Divine power in this case is not rivalrous.

The same reason is used in making ritual decisions. The shrine is presented as an acceptable moral action to danger when a character says, “The shrine. We can make a sacrifice there [sic]” (115). Neither superstition nor irrationality but a culturally intelligible type of moral action. There is no need of any explanation since the shrine is already a part of a collective moral universe. These instances are the best examples of what Graham Furniss (2000) refers to as “normalization of Islam in African cultural production”, in which the Qur’anic practice is internalized in the local cosmologies, instead of being foisted on them as a unique system. Islamic practice in *Paradise* exists in the framework of indigenous metaphysical patterns, and not opposition to them, forming a stratified semantics where diverse types of sacred knowledge are switched in response to the situation. Qur’an prayer does not nullify shrine worship but rather, they are known to be effective in negotiating uncertainty. This co-existence brings about narrative coherence as opposed to confusion. The fact that there is no overt conflict in the doctrines in itself is a lot, showing that plurality is made normalized but not problematised.

The moral and narrative role of the practices is consistent with the idea of Sacred Realism by Noël Valis (2010) that views the practice of religion in literature as a structuring narrative power as opposed to the metaphorical decoration. The role of ritual in the novel controls behaviour, manages ethical behaviour and influences community reaction to threat. The fact that sacred practice constitutes results of

narrative not because it is imposed upon it, is that it constitutes the way of structuring how characters make judgments about causality and responsibility. Religion thus serves to provide infrastructure as opposed to atmosphere. This convergence of materials can also be depicted by the fact that Yusuf would come across the *hirizo* which was said to be “an amulet which was to contain words of prayers” (152). The object unites the Qur’anic textuality and native talismanic practice to create a type of sacred power that is based on material presence. The extension of meaning is achieved by the involvement of the body but not abstract faith. The efficacy of the amulet is presumed, and this strengthens the Sacred Realism where belief has no symbolic meaning, but is operational. African narrative forms are often able to maintain multiple belief systems without disrupting the narrative coherence as Quayson notes. This merging in *Paradise* brings about stability and not tension.

It is also African-Abrahamica that is manifested in the common origin and moral reasonability. In these statements, when a character says, “We are their brothers, from the blood of the same Adam who fathered all of us” (100), Abrahamic genealogy is set into motion as ethical argument and not doctrine. Adam serves as an icon of universal kinship, and facilitates moral duty between differences. Relational responsibility is created through the appeal as opposed to religious hierarchy. At the narrative theory level, Bhabha hybridity is only applicable to a certain extent (Bhabha, 1994). Although hybridity justifies cultural negotiation, coexistence is not just liminal but it is organised and maintained through practice as shown in *Paradise*. Sacred plurality in the novel is thus not a transitional one but a lasting one and is found within narrative order.

These strategies make Gurnah portray religion as something that cannot be separated by the narrative causality, ethical logic and imaginative sight. Sacred coexistence does not work as a background but as an underpinning principle to organise the world of the text. Both African-Abrahamica and Sacred Realism shed light on how religious pluralism does not operate as a transitional and incomplete process; rather as coherent and generative in the African literary imagination.

Material Sacred and Ritual African-Abrahamica

The sacred in *Paradise* is not just a matter of faith but it is also a matter of objects and ritualized embodiment of the sacred. Shrines, amulets, ritual cloth, oil, herbal use, Qur’anic inscriptions and talismanic objects are narrative tools that order ethical thought, character activity, and facilitate spiritual power. Nevertheless, these objects are not functioning within a coherent system in a similar manner; their meaning varies according to the context, social status and interpretive power. Instead of the passive cultural artefacts, there are dynamic actors in what can be termed as the material economy of the sacred in African-Abrahamica. But this coherence is not even: the Islamic and the indigenous cosmologies find points of convergence in places of practice and points of divergence where they converge in the place of practice and diverge in the place of interpretation, hierarchy and moral

judgment. The sacred is not thus smooth assimilation but constructive co-existence with internal conflict.

This embodied African-Abrahamic material theology is based on practices of embodiment: practice of touch, movement, bodily discipline, and interaction with the environment and not a belief system. But embodiment does not negate contradiction, on the contrary it is the place where various sacred logics are negotiated, and are at times harmonized and at times put in silent conflict. This conflict is acutely depicted when there is crisis. As a violent storm descends on the caravan, Gurnah writes “the porters groaned God’s name and wailed for mercy,” and Mohammed Abdalla replies: “Why should God be kind to ignorant animals like thee and me? Why not sing a song, to send off the bad magic”? (89). It is not a straightforward opposition of Islam to indigenous belief that is a scene in the passage. Instead, it displays an interpretive power struggle and spiritual effectiveness when put to the test.

There are Islamic invocation and counter-magic, but not everyone in the play is accorded equal moral status. The scene thus makes any presupposition of the easy intelligibility problematic: sacred plurality in this case is a site of judgment, hierarchy and struggle as well. The story maintains co-existence, and not unity. The storm is also an anticipation of unsteadiness of human agency in the face of the environment. Ritual speech is a means of survival and not control. Addressing God or counter-magic can never solve crisis but offers alternative paradigms of coping with it. Efficacy of sacred language is thus performative, and it is doubtful and controversial in the social context.

The same thing can be identified in the material ritual practice in the daily life, convergence and differentiation. Hamid tells Yusuf: “Do not forget to drop in oil in your ear once in a week to keep off insects and worms laying their eggs in your ear” (90). Although this seems to be simply a matter of hygiene, it also shows how the care of the body in the novel is incorporated in more general moral and environmental reasoning. But instead of the complete fusion of the sacred and pragmatic registers, the story demonstrates an overlap of the two but not their identity. The body turns into a location of stratified meaning, in which, survival practices can take on the haze of spirituality, yet, at the same time, they are still required to keep the body alive. African-Abrahamic hence does not work as fusion but is a co-presence of functional overlap.

Another way in which Islamic and indigenous cosmologies are depicted in *Paradise* is based on embodied experience as opposed to abstract doctrine. Mbiti is right in saying that religion cannot exist outside lived existence; a mode of knowing the universe and the role of humanity in it, but it has to be made complicated. In *Paradise*, this totality does not reside in a homogenous form, but it is unequally distributed among the social actors and situations. Yusuf, in his statement that; “I’ve discovered that I can summon a good jinn by rubbing it, and he will do whatever I command” (168), is also another indication of this instability.

The jinni, in the Islamic cosmology is reconstituted in the touch, but this refiguring brings about issues of authority and knowledge: what is considered to be legitimate sacred knowledge is not predetermined but negotiated through experience, learning and misrecognition. The fact that Islam tends to blend with the local traditions as observed by Furniss is still applicable, however, in this story, the process is not always stable and mutual. It is both intelligible and ambiguous and of particular importance when characters differ in their perspective on the boundaries of spiritual control and moral legitimacy.

In these instances, the role of sacred objects and rituals is that of a node of narrative meaning, though not necessarily of constancy as to result. They are the driving force behind action and the framework of interpretation, but are frequently subject to controversy or asymmetrical appreciation. In *Paradise* religion then plays a role as a unified infrastructure less than as a field of sacred practices that is in tension. Items like oil, cloth, talismans and spoken incantations are flowed in this domain, yet they do not have a fixed meaning; they are constantly redefined in terms of circumstance and power. The idea of Sacred Realism as proposed by Valis (2010) is beneficial in as much as it prefigures religion as a narrative, but not as an ornament. *Paradise* however, makes this model more complex by demonstrating that sacred structure is not necessarily fixed; it is usually bargained out in the uncertainty, discord, and partial understanding.

By this, African-Abrahamica becomes not a smooth synthesis but a well-organised yet unstable ecology of sacred coexistence, in which the material practice, the belief and the narrative causality converge, but do not fully project out to a unified state.

Liminal Sacred African-Abrahamica Ethical Horizons

Paradise not only universalises the concept of African-Abrahamica as transcending localized ritual practice to include universal kinship, ethical negotiation and moral accountability. Religion in the text is functioning as a moral cosmos that is shared where the Islamic, Christian and indigenous imaginaries intertwined without necessarily settling into a doctrinal harmony. Nevertheless, this intersection is not homogenous and conflict free, it is an ambiguous, imbalanced phenomenon that is interpreted situationally. Sacred plurality in the novel is not thus the mere organising of ritual action. It also brings about ethical ambiguity, interpretive conflict and conflicting moralities. The belief systems are resources of reasoning, but may not be absolute but contingent authority.

This moral turmoil is revealed in religious commentary moments. When Kalasinga talks about the translation of the Quran, Hamid says “It was home made spirits talking there. I hope God realizes he’s a heathen and a madman” (76). This is an ironic and sceptical statement which does not completely reject the sacred. Rather, it shows the miring of spiritual interpretation in the humour, doubt and moral judgement. The term home-made spirits is a collapse that gets rid of the differences between revelation and native spiritual agency but in such a manner that does not

create synthesis, but ambiguity. Moral witness of God implies not dogmatic truth but moral ambiguity: divine power is envisaged as something that is to interpret human lack of knowledge and not merely to reign over it.

Sacred coherence is also enhanced by mythical geographies. The eschatological imagery of Islam and the indigenous structures of myths are put into the same imaginative space in the description of “the Fountain of Life... guarded by ghouls and snakes as huge as islands” (68). But this convergence is not a disinterested convergence. It is an indication of a world where sacred knowledge is superimposed, uneven, and to some extent in competition with each other as opposed to having been completely integrated. Sacred space in the novel is thus not unitary, but is plural and stratified and it is up to the characters to work with uncertainty, to be wary and part-believe, which is to be in a tentative state of being.

This complexity is also put on stage in domestic space. The fact that “a bronze statue of Ganesh, a small painting of Jesus Christ the Redeemer and a miniature copy of the Koran” (65), are in the same place, places several religious traditions in the same physical space. Although this arrangement is a hint towards coexistence, it is not to be understood as an uninterrupted syncretism. Rather, it is a practical closeness as a result of experience, as opposed to theological reconciliation. These objects are not a part of a singular system of belief; instead, they are present in a space in which meaning is negotiated in everyday use, habit and attentive selectivity. There are sacred symbols that have their own identities though they may be physically near to each other.

This ethical ambiguity is further extended with spiritual perception; Yusuf’s perception of “shadows flit among the rocks” and “unseen watchers” (170). The consciousness of shadows that move in and out among the rocks and unseen spectators develops a liminal sacred space whereby moral behaviour is determined by forms of visibility which are not certain. These watchers are not demarcated, categorized or stabilized in a single cosmological system. Their uncertainty brings about moral awareness as opposed to dogma. In this case, the sacred plays a role of belief system but rather as a domain of interpretive pressure, which influences restraint, caution and responsibility without dispelling the uncertainty.

Throughout these episodes, African-Abrahamica is not a cohesive system but rather a well-organised arena of contacting and even volatile sacred reasonings. Religious plurality in the *Paradise* defines the morality of the judgment and story flow but in a negotiation, ambiguity and unequal power. Read through the notion of Sacred Realism, religion in the novel is not merely decoration in symbols but a part of a narrative order. But this order is not pre-determined; it is always created during the interpretation, practice and situational making of sense.

Conclusion

Paradise shows that African-Abrahamica is not merely a descriptive term of a religious mixture but a literary state of affairs where there are activated but disproportionate forces of several sacred systems existing simultaneously in the

narrative life. The novel reveals the influence of religious plurality on the reasoning of ethical arguments and storyline development through the experiences of Yusuf with ritual objects, domestic sacred spaces, ancestral imaginaries, and spiritual presences. But this plurality is not a stable and homogenised one. It is characterised by uncertainty, interpretive conflict and the changing of power. Sacred practices are considered to be moral and imaginative resources that are open to continual negotiation and not fixed. In the light of Sacred Realism, religion in the novel is revealed in the form of constitutive of the narrative structure, but not a harmonized system. Rather, it is a living science where the ethical judgment, spiritual sight and social relationships are continuously restructured. African-Abrahamic can thus provide a conceptual frame of African literature which prefigures a sacred coexistence as ordered, but unstable, generative yet contested, and ethically productive, without being completely resolved.

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