

## TURKISH SUNNI-ALEVI DIALOGUE METHODOLOGY: A PROPOSAL FOR PRO-JECTS USING QUR'AN CITATIONS IN CLASSICAL ALEVI SOURCES\*

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### Müslüman İdeolojiler, Kur'ân'ın İçeriği ve Türk Sünni-Alevi Diyalogu Öz

Müslümanlar arası Sünni-alevi diyalogu beklentisi askıya alınmış uzun vadeli bir proje olabilir ve Türkiye'de yeni bir kavram değildir. Bu açıdan resmi ve akademik çalışmalar vardır. Aldatıcı görünen ise, Müslümanlar arası diyaloga ve uzlaşmaya ve bunun uzun vadeli stratejileri ve tekniklerine dair ideolojilerin mevcüdiyetidir. Müslümanlar arası diyaloga dair ideolojiler, mevcut aktivist ve akademik kaynaklarda görülebilir. Bunlara banşı ve dinler-arası diyalogu tesis eden materyaller ve dinler arası diyalog metodolojisiyle alakalı ödünç alınabilecek diğer materyaller de dâhildir. Alevi-sünni diyalogu olgusunda, klasik Alevî kaynaklarında bulunan Kur'ânî içeriğe stratejik bir şekilde odaklanma, hem Sünnilerin hem de alevilerin ilgisini çekebilecek bir diyalog malzemesi için gelecek vadeden bir seçenek olabilir. Akademi, bu diyalogu benimsemek ve ona ev sahipliği ile elde edilecek faydalardan yararlanmak konusunda ciddi bir potansiyele sahiptir. Bu açıdan mevcut muhtelif örgütsel metodolojiler kullanılabilir ve akademik ürünlerden ve alevî ve sünniler arasındaki anlayıştan faydalanan ekstra mevcut metodolojilerle, yuvarlak masa toplantılarıyla ve odak gruplarıyla bu metotlar artırılabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sünni İslam, Alevilik, Türk Müslümanlar, Müslüman İdeoloji, Barış İnşası.

### Muslim Ideologies, Qur'anic Content and Turkish Sunni-Alevi Dialogue Abstract

The prospect of Sunni-Alevi inter-Muslim dialogue can be a sustained long-term project and is not a novel concept in Turkey: there has been official and academic activity in this regard. What may appear to be deficient is the existence of ideologies for inter-Muslim dialogue and reconciliation and also long-term strategies and technique for this. Ideologies for inter-Muslim dialogue can be gleaned from existing activist and academic sources, including existing material for peace-building and interfaith dialogue also borrowing from other material describing interfaith dialogue methodology. In the case of Sunni-Alevi dialogue, a strategic focus on Qur'anic content found in classical Alevi sources presents a promising option for dialogue material that could be of interest both to Sunnis and Alevis. Academia presents a major potential to foster this dialogue and to benefit from hosting it. Various existing organizational methodologies can be used in this regard and they can be augmented with additional existing methodologies, roundtables and focus groups, benefiting academic production as well as understanding between Sunnis and Alevis.

**Keywords:** Sunni Islam, Alevism, Turkish Muslims, Muslim Ideology, peace building,

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is common knowledge in Turkey that relations between Sunnis and Alevis have been quite troubled at times in Turkey's history. The purpose of this paper is to suggest various alternative ways, in addition to existing dialogue efforts, that inter-Muslim (intra-faith) dialogue can be planned and used to attempt to improve relations between Turkish Sunnis and Turkish Alevis, for the benefit of all members of both communities. The suggestions in this paper rely on a number of sources to construct methodology for inter-Muslim dialogue and ultimately to propose focusing on material from the Holy Qur'an for use in Sunni-Alevi dialogue. These various ways include not only short-term dialogue projects but also constructing strategic plans and perhaps even ideologies for sustained inter-Muslim dialogue. A major part of this dialogue effort would be within Turkish academic institutions, in the classroom and at the various academic symposia which have been or will be planned to deal with related topics.

### ***Existing Dialogue Efforts and Scope of Alternatives***

It can be noted that there have already been dialogue efforts between Sunnis and Alevis in Turkey. This can be seen as having had official sanction, with a government project, "Alevi Çalıştayları" (Alevi Workshops) with a resulting series of publications from the T.C. Devlet Bakanlığı (Ministry of State) ([www.devlet.gov.tr](http://www.devlet.gov.tr)) in 2009 and 2010 concerning the project for Sunni-Alevi dialog. (See bibliography.) There have also been numerous recent academic symposia in Turkey to study Alevism and Bektashism, for example, "Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi Güncel Sorunlarıyla II. Uluslararası Alevîlik Ve Bektaşîlik Sempozyumu, 16-18 Nisan 2014 (See <http://alevilik-bektasilik2.comu.edu.tr/ksayfalar/sayfa/14/21/tebligler>). Therefore it is safe to say that there have been official and academic efforts to promote dialogue between Sunnis and Alevis in Turkey. Sunni-Alevi dialogue is not a novel concept for Turkish Muslims.

In addition to any existing dialogue efforts, it is possible to consider ways for expanding or providing additional and alternative project ideas for dialogue. In so doing, dialogue between Sunnis and Alevis could strive to achieve peace-building.

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According to Abu-Nimer,

*"An Islamic peace-building framework, applied to a context of community socio-economic development, can promote objectives such as an increase of solidarity among members of the community; bridging the gap of social and economic injustice; relieving the suffering of people and spare human lives; empowering people through participation and inclusivity; promoting equality among all members of the community; and encouraging the values of diversity and tolerance"*(Abu-Nimer; 2003, 82-83).

Of course there is peace generally nowadays in Turkey between communities, but thinking about these suggested "peace-building" efforts can provide these above-mentioned interesting objectives and outcomes for a dialogue amongst communities.

In another publication, Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer describe that, anecdotal evidence suggests that Muslim leaders find intra-faith dialogue harder than interfaith dialogue"(Shafiq and Abu-Nimer, 2007; 20). It is a point that should be made at the outset, that inter-Muslim dialogue, especially Sunni-Alevi dialogue may not be easy and may be frustrating. Nonetheless there are ways of facilitating the endeavor of inter-Muslim dialogue. Shafiq and Abu-Nimer offer some general guidelines, "guiding principles," which can also be described essentially as good manners and which can be appropriated for approaching inter-Muslim dialogue (Shafiq and Abu-Nimer; 20-40). These guidelines are important as so much of "dialogue" can be following either a non-Muslim agenda, serving non-Muslim interests, or it can represent competing interests seeking to impose conflicting doctrines. These guiding principles outlined by Shafiq and Abu-Nimer reference the Qur'an for their authority and provide a procedure by which the dialogue can take place without becoming entangled in unproductive arguments. Examples, with Qur'anic references, include "be polite and gentle and avoid harshness (68:5; 3:159); "do not speak ill of others or their religion (6:108); "equal and human treatment"; "pay full attention to the person speaking (24:30) (Shafiq and Abu-Nimer 21-23).

For more general strategic planning of inter-faith and inter-Muslim dialogue in its initial phases, it is possible to appropriate genres of dialogue which are used for Christian-Muslim dialogue and then plan inter-Muslim dialogue (Argon 2009, 363-364). There are multiple genres of Christian-Muslim dialogue described by Jane I. Smith (2007) and these can be used to programme inter-Muslim/ Sunni-Alevi dialogue. Jane I. Smith describes the following types of dialogue (Jane I. Smith; 2007, 63-82): "Dialogue of Persuasion." This involves proving the validity of one's own tradition and unfortunately also disproving the validity of the other's religion (Smith 2007: 64-65). My own opinion on this genre is that there is already enough of this activity in Muslim communities. There is the "Get to know You" mo-

del which can be said to be for establishing an introduction and is comparatively superficial (Smith 2007: 67-68). There is the "Dialogue in the Classroom" model, which touches upon interfaith dialogue in academia and this involves also university and college chaplains (Smith 2007: 68-70). This genre of dialogue in the classroom touches upon a major strategic point, that being that there are venues for dialogue that could be fostered not only by religious organizations and institutions but also alternatively by academic institutions. This is important as we can see in Turkey that academic institutions recently have been willing to host conferences and publishing about Alevi-Bektashism. (See for example, I. Uluslararası Hacı Bektaş Veli Sempozyumu, 07-09 Mayıs 2010 Çorum, Hitit Üniversitesi Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi, Ankara 2011, ISBN 978-605-872-93-08.) The academic sphere as a place for fostering constructive Sunni-Alevi dialogue is probably the easiest area of potential in the near future as Turkish academia has Sunni and Alevi scholars who are intellectually equipped for this process suggested above.

The "Theological Exchange" model touches more upon comparative doctrines of the different religions and this is potentially very difficult and should really only be done with proper qualifications and preparation (Smith 2007: 70-74). The "Ethical Exchange" model of dialogue can touch more on practical matters and this will most likely bring in aspects of Islamic legal jurisprudence (Smith 2007: 74-76). The "dialogue about ritual" model concerns ritual practices, an advantage here being that these rituals might not be open to outsiders to the tradition and the dialogue allows a discussion about what is otherwise not accessible to outsiders (Smith 2007: 76-79). An example would be the Alevi Cemevi as a discussion topic. The "Dialogue about Spirituality" model will almost certainly appeal to many Westerners and can provide a venue to talk about a commonality of the spiritual aspects of traditions but this may also be a real concern for those wishing to maintain clear distinctions and differences between their traditions (Smith 2007: 79-80). Lastly, the "Cooperative Model for Addressing Pragmatic Concerns" points towards more pragmatic action and involvement than is to be seen with other dialogue genres (Smith 2007: 81-82).

To ensure that this dialogue planning and execution is Islamic and serving Islamic purposes, the ethical guidelines for dialogue should be Qur'anic, for example as outlined by Shafiq and Abu Nimer (2007; 20-46). To be of interest to Alevis, the content should include and be based on Qur'anic references from Alevi classical sources, for example, the Makalat of Hajji Bektash Wali. This could be used as content within these general different types of dialogue described above by Smith. Of course dialogues could go beyond this selection available from classical Alevi sources.

### **CONSTRUCTING IDEOLOGIES FOR INTER-MUSLIM/SUNNI-ALEVI DIALOGUE.**

While different dialogue genres exist that can be used to focus an inter-Muslim dialogue, especially on Qur'an selections from classic Alevi sources, unfortunately it is not enough to simply have this information. For success there needs to be a long-term strategy or strategies, even an ideology for engaging in sustained inter-Muslim/Sunni-Alevi dialogue. This paper is constructed primarily from a Sunni (the majority) perspective, to outline the prospect for constructing an ideology for inter-Muslim dialogue between Sunnis and Alevis and to suggest methodologies. While Alevis have had ideologies and Sunni movements have had ideologies, what appears to be missing is an ideology for long-term sustained inter-Muslim/Sunni-Alevi dialogue projects. To receive adequate resources for a sustained effort, this initiative would probably need to come primarily from within the community of the Sunni majority but it would also need support from various Alevi community members. Therefore, in addition to Qur'anic material from the classical Alevi sources, as described above, there is another overall strategy for selecting and using Qur'anic material and engaging both communities in a beneficial dialogue. This strategy is to have an ideology for sustained inter-Muslim dialogue and peace-building.

Constructing Muslim ideologies for inter-Muslim dialogue could provide important direction for a long-term strategic approach to inter-Muslim dialogue. It is important to consider ideologies and make provisions for inter-Muslim dialogue projects which could augment existing Muslim ideologies or be integrated into a newly constructed ideology or ideologies for different involved Muslim institutions, groups or movements. Constructing these new ideologies is important because dialogue efforts need to be sustained over time to achieve long-term results, i.e. improved relations. Dialogue efforts would need to be part of a long-term strategy of these Muslim institutions, groups and movements and the strategy would have to serve an Islamic purpose and outcome.

For comparison and consideration to use in constructing operative ideologies for inter-Muslim/Sunni-Alevi dialogue, an appropriation of some Qur'anic selections from various existing Islamist ideologies (for example, Abul Ala Mawdudi or Iranian Shii Islamist thinkers such as Ayatollah Khomeini or others) could be used instead to structure and "operationalize" a long-term dialogue effort and an improvement in Sunni-Alevi relations. Important to note is that this appropriation would not be for any political revolution but rather for an improvement in relations which could be a "revolution in hearts," or peace-building as described by Abu-Nimer. Another way to look at these new "revolutionary ideologies" is to understand from the example of different Islamists that, first, it is possible to freshly construct ideologies based on the Qur'an and, secondly, they can be constructed attempting to be relevant to the needs of Muslims for reconciliation today (See

Nasr, 1994, 1996). These would be new, innovative, and can be quite successful. The example of different Islamist ideologies, as described by Nasr (1994, 1996) and Jahanbakhsh (2001) shows that these constructed ideologies can succeed in having a tremendous impact. Although these ideologies of Mawdudi and the Iranian Islamists have been criticized, their thinking about use of Qur'anic material to construct long-term projects can be reviewed and sometimes appropriated for Muslim representation elsewhere, in this case that representation being inter-Muslim/Sunni-Alevi dialogue.

An example of appropriation of Quran'ic material from Islamist sources could be taken from Mawdudi in his work, "Four Basic Qur'anic Terms" where he quotes the Qur'an, "Verily this brotherhood of yours (that is, of all the prophets) is a single brotherhood, and I am your Rabb, wherefore give your 'ibadah to Me. Men have apportioned rububiyah and the duty of 'ibadah on their own (without any sanction from Us), and all of them will, ultimately, return to Us. (Quran 21:92-93)" (S. Abu'l A'la Maududi, 1941: 76). This Qur'anic verse would be used to establish the intention and purpose of finding a brotherhood amongst various Muslims as a result of inter-Muslim dialogue efforts.

Another example of Islamist thinking that could be appropriated for Sunni-Alevi dialogue and peace-building could be taken from Ayatollah Khoumeini, who states, "instruct the people about the problems Islam has had to contend with since its inception and about the enemies and afflictions that now threaten it...do not allow the true nature of Islam to remain hidden..."(Algar 1980: 29; cited in Lafraie 2009: 60). This selection of a high-level scholarly opinion by a Shii Ayatollah is only one example of a scholarly interpretation which could be appropriated to support approaches to Sunni-Alevi dialogue and peace-building.

Many Muslims may find Qur'anic aspects of Islamist ideologies interesting and allow themselves to be informed to a certain extent by them but will not want to be members or part of these movements or organizations. In a more generic way, Najibullah Lafraie discusses "revolutionary ideologies," their components and their construction based on the Qur'an, suggesting an "ideal type" of revolutionary ideology that can be Qur'anic (Lafraie; 20-57). Rather importantly, he concludes that these do not always lead to revolution (Lafraie 57). The advantage of Lafraie's generic model is that it allows constructions of new ideologies, founded on Qur'anic citations, without being necessarily tied to the politics of any preexisting Islamist movements. Of course, Islamic movements have constructed ideologies and strategies to achieve certain ends, however these must be reviewed to assess not only their Islamic correctness but also their timeliness and appropriateness for changing circumstances. This freedom from political entanglements should be important especially for persons who want no question about their ability and commitment to work within the existing secular system but rather merely

want to create better relations amongst various communities.

Certain aspects of Lafraie's generic description of a "revolutionary ideology" can be outlined along with the relevant Qur'anic references, to provide an example of the outline of an ideology for inter-Muslim/Sunni-Alevi dialogue. Lafraie's model entails bringing about political consciousness (51:46; 21:16; 31:28; 2:213; 10:19; 3:103; 49:9; 9:71; 61:4) (Lafraie 2009, 22-25). Another aspect of these ideologies is a "criticism of existing social arrangements" and Lafraie references Qur'an 23:46; 2:49; 28:4; 10:83; 89:10-12; 10:78; 26:22 (Lafraie 25-27). The other aspect would be a "a new set of values," which is described by Lafraie as relating to a "Qur'anic set of values" (Lafraie 27-32). Lafraie also talks about "an outline of the Good Society," referencing Qur'an 5:47-50 and noting that there is a controversial debate about sharia, also 33:36; 4:59; 57:25; 42:38; 49:13; 2:247; 3:110; 4:60; 60:12; 3:103; 5:1,3; 24:32; 9:18; 2:177; 9:60; 2:284; 4:126; 57:10; 4:5; 2:188; 59:7; 9:34; 2:219; 4:165; 83:1-3; 2:275; 2:279; 14:32-33; 96:1-7 (Lafraie 17, 33-41). Rather importantly, as aspects of an ideology as interpreted for a peace building, this is also a "program of action" (13:11; 42:30; 4:97-98; 42:39; 42:40; 20:42-67; 26:10-69; 16:125; 7:127-28; 10:87-88; 29:56; 16:41; 8:72; 2:190; 2:191; (and more) (Lafraie 41-47). Lafraie also describes the sixth characteristic, a "commitment to action" with Qur'anic references 3:111; 48:22-23; 29:41; 16:45; 85:15-16; 48:7; 64:13; 33:3; 3:160; 3:139; 47:35; 46:13; 41:30; 2:249; 8:26; and 48:18-20 (Lafraie 41-47). With appropriation of selections from these aspects for an ideology that supports dialogue, (leaving aside the shariah debate and working within the secular system) the raising of political consciousness here leads to an understanding of the need for improved relations as an outcome of dialogue projects. Amongst other matters, the criticism of existing social arrangements could include an articulation of the different needs for improved relations between Sunnis and Alevis. One good example of a Qur'anic quote mentioned in Lafraie (2009 24) would be Qur'an 3:103. The citation reads as, "And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allâh (i.e. this Qur'ân), and be not divided among yourselves, and remember Allâh's Favour on you, for you were enemies one to another but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren." (Hilali and Khan, 1985, 87-88).

Qur'anic values are well known and the understanding of Qur'anic values should be one of the outcomes of a good dialogue project. The outline of a desired society is one that is a better situation for all involved parties to the dialogue effort. The program of action and commitment to action must be part of the ideology, ensuring long-term commitment for eventual success.

Understanding that a general model for Muslim ideologies can successfully be constructed from the Qur'an (Lafraie 20-57), constructing an ideology for sus-

tained inter-Muslim dialogue can also rely upon the work of Abu-Nimer who provides a framework and directs attention to certain Qur'anic references that can be foundational to the purpose of peace-building. (Abu Nimer 48-84). Abu-Nimer cites Howeidy in providing seven main principles (usul), derived from the Qur'an that support coexistence and tolerance: (Abu Nimer 81; Howeidy 1993, 203). These seven principles put forward by Howeidy and later Abu-Nimer are about human dignity (see 17:70); a common origin of all humans (4:1, 5:32, 6:98); differences among people being designated by God and are part of his plan for humanity (10:99; 11:188-199; 30:22); acknowledgment of other religions and their unified origin (2:136; 42:13); freedom of choice and decision after call delivered (2:256; 17:107; 18:29; 109:4-6); Judgement is God's alone, on Judgment Day (16:124; 31:23; 42:48; 88:25-26); and good deeds, justice and equity with all (4:135; 5:8; 60:8) (Abu Nimer 81; Howeidy 1993, 203). These Qur'anic references appear to be a good beginning for the foundations of an "Islamic peace-building framework" (Abu-Nimer 82) or what could also be used to establish different ideologies for inter-Muslim/Sunni-Alevi dialogue.

Shafiq and Abu-Nimer (2007) continue in the later publication providing useful Qur'anic material for planning the framework of dialogue with Qur'anic terms and references. Most importantly, we can consider *Ta'aruf* (49:13); *Islah* (4:114); *Mujadalah* (29:46); *Ihsan* (41:34); *al-Hikmah wa al-Maw'izat al-Hasanah* (16:125); *Ta'awun* (5:2); and *Istabiqu al-Khayrat* (5:48) (Shafiq and Abu-Nimer 40-46). These major points could also be considered in constructing these ideologies for inter-Muslim dialogue.

#### **EXAMPLES OF THE METHODOLOGY USED FOR PLANNING.**

With good manners and procedure (Shafiq and Abu-Nimer 2007; 20-40) planned and assumed, the main area of content being suggested in this article for Turkish Sunni-Alevi dialogues would be relating to material selected from the Qur'an. Numerous scholars knowledgeable about Alevism have affirmed to me privately that Alevis generally do not as a rule reject the Qur'an. This is confirmed similarly by the statement according to Professor Dr. Siddik Korkmaz from the abstract to his article,

*"the creedal elements of Hajji Bektash Velī's teaching are Islamic and depend primarily on the Qur'ān...this teaching has been influenced by Maturidism and the Yasawī tradition...the tenets of Islamic creed such as the unity of God, the prophethood of Muhammad, and resurrection after death are the components of the Bektashi teaching... this teaching has a Sufi character which represents the conception that differences can and should coexist"* (Korkmaz; 119-134)

In theory, then there are therefore points where Sunnis can find matters to discuss with Alevi-Bektashis in the context of "theological exchange" (Jane I.



Smith, 2004; 164-197) focusing on material selected from the Qur'an. This historical Alevi reliance on the Qur'an can be seen in the example of the Makalat of Hacı Bektash Veli. (Coşan 1990) and the later English translation (Uluç; 2006, 2007). Extensive Qur'anic references are given throughout the text of the Makalat: this is clear in the Esat Coşan redaction of the Makalat text. (Another option of a source text to compare is the more recent "Makalat Hünkar Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli", Hazırlayanlar Prof. Dr. Ali Yılmaz, Prof. Dr. Mehmet Akkuş, Dr. Ali Öztürk, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı 367, Anadolu Halk Klasikleri Serisi 2, Alevi-Bektaş Dizisi 2, Ankara 2013).

The Qur'anic references from the "Ten Stations of the Law" from the Maqalat of Hajji Bektash are provided within the redaction by Esat Coşan (1990) and in the English translation by Dr. Tahir Uluç (2006, 2007). The references for each station of the ten stations of the Law according to Hajji Bektash Wali are: "First: (5:9); Second: (3:79); Third: (2:43) (3:97) (5:6); Fourth: (2:275); Fifth: (4:3); Sixth: (2:222); Seventh: (Esat Coşan's redaction of the Maqalat references this simply as a "hadis" whereas Tahir Uluç in his English translated version locates this as evidenced by a sahih hadith, "Sahih Muslim; Kitab al-Masajid wa Mawadi' al-Salaat, 42."); Eighth: (13:25); Ninth: (2:172) (20:81); Tenth: (3:104). (9:71)(Coşan (1990: 13-14); Uluç (2006: 44-46)."

It is evident from the references to the Qur'an in the Maqalat that sufficient Qur'anic material is available for selection and discussion with and by Sunnis together with Alevis in different genres of inter-Muslim dialogue. In addition to the Makalat, the extended corpus of translated Alevi classic works provides even more Qur'anic material for discussion. This Qur'anic material could be used within various genres of inter-Muslim dialogue but in any case the purpose would be to increase knowledge, overcome problems and improve relations.

To begin to plan using this material, we can consider local or general needs for which a Sunni-Alevi dialogue might be helpful (either in communities or within academia) and then make a selection of what general type of dialogue we would like to program. Selecting and appropriating from the genres of Christian-Muslim dialogue described by Smith (2004) we can look, as an example, at prospects for using the models of "ethical exchange," the "cooperative model for addressing pragmatic concerns," and the later described genre of "dialogue in the classroom" (Smith 2007).

The category of "ethics" in Christianity has its counterpart in the Islamic law. If there is to be a Sunni-Alevi dialogue about Muslim "ethics," this would have to be within this context, discussing aspects of Islamic legal jurisprudence.

Of course this is only a small selection from the Makalat of Hajji Bektash but it offers ample insights about which a dialogue about "ethics" could be hosted. It is also only one of the books in the series of Alevi classics which has been re-

cently published by the *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı*. Furthermore, the content for a Sunni-Alevi dialogue need not be limited to ethics but could extend to other areas such as the "spirituality and moral healing" model of dialogue suggested by Smith. Not only the other sections of the *Maqalat* of Hajji Bektash Wali but selections of Qur'an and also commentary from the other recently published Alevi classics could be utilized for a discussion of "spirituality and moral healing." These other Alevi classic works are the "*Vilayetname, Sarayname, Muhammad bin Hanefiyya Cengi, Dil-Güsa, Besmele Tefsiri, Erkanname 1, Ilm-i Cavidan, Dastan-ı İbrahim Edham, Hızırname, Fütüvvetname-ı tarikat, Kitab-ı Dar, Kitab-ı Cabbar Kulu.*" (See bibliography.)

A Sunni-Alevi discussion about these "Ten Stations of the Law" from the *Maqalat* (Cosan 1990 and Uluç 2006) and their Qur'anic references could be part of a discussion not only on ethics but also part of the "cooperative model for addressing pragmatic concerns" (Smith; 2007: 81-82) focusing on more pragmatic matters. This would also be in line with Lafraie's general outline of a "revolutionary ideology" (a set of values) adapted for programming inter-Muslim dialogue, this being relevant to a discussion about achieving the desired society for all to live in. The product of these Sunni-Alevi dialogues could be a timely relevant discussion on Muslim ethics and values pertaining to pragmatic concerns affecting Sunnis and Alevis.

### ***Expanding the Academic Experience of Inter-Muslim Dialogue and Peace-Building***

As noted earlier, the academic sphere is one which has potential for fostering more Sunni-Alevi dialogue. There can be four areas of methodology where Turkish academics can expand their cooperation concerning Sunni-Alevi dialogue and peace-building. These are in the areas of networking, organizing academic conferences and symposia, and also in the area of academic roundtables and focus groups. It should be obvious to the casual observer that networking is an area of methodology that Turkish academics quite often already know and utilize very well. The reason for mentioning networking as a category of methodology is that these networking skills are relevant to cooperation within the other areas of conferences, roundtables, and focus groups. It can also be said that it is common knowledge throughout the academy that academic conferences are already organized in abundance and these are often very well organized in Turkey. Numerous examples of these conferences about Alevism and Bektashism can be found demonstrating the fact that Turkish academics are willing recently to use this methodology as a venue for a kind of formal academic Sunni-Alevi dialogue. These academic conferences can be a major resource and venue for dialogue and peace-building as described above by Abu-Nimer (2003) and Shafiq and Abu-Nimer (2007).

The other two methodologies, academic roundtables and focus groups, should be seen as strategic alternatives that are available to augment the options of conferences and symposia for facilitating Sunni-Alevi dialogue. These could be utilized much more widely in Turkish academia generally but also for this specific purpose. Although roundtables already exist widely in different forms and varieties throughout academia and industry, they have a special advantage in the ease and economy by which they can be organized in academia, also for Sunni-Alevi dialogue.<sup>1</sup> An academic roundtable can be relatively quickly arranged, consisting of one invited presenter and several respondents or discussants. This invited presenter could be a senior-level academic (Sunni or Alevi) who has researched an aspect of Alevism (Qur'anic content and commentary) which would be interesting for inter-Muslim dialogue. The invited presenters or discussants could alternatively be knowledgeable persons from outside of academia. Important for the success of the academic roundtable as regards Sunni-Alevi dialogue is that there is a protocol and an Islamic (Qur'anic) etiquette established by the hosts and facilitators of the roundtable consistent with the suggested guidelines of Abu-Nimer and Shafiq described above. This protocol and etiquette can be an integral part of the strategic planning and preparation for the academic roundtable beforehand. These roundtable events can be strategically planned using one of the general categories suggested by Jane I. Smith (2007). The content of these could draw on Alevi classic sources and Qur'anic material from these sources, engaging Sunnis and Alevis in a dialogue and peace-building effort founded on these Qur'anic selections.

The methodology of "focus groups" could be potentially very useful throughout Turkish academia but should be especially interesting and relevant for persons engaged in the area of Alevi-Bektashi research and/or interested in Sunni-Alevi dialogue and peace-building (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, Robson 2001,2002). Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson suggest adapting focus groups for academic purposes (Bloor et.al. 3). As Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson note, the use of focus groups in the "public sector" can "yield data on the meanings that lie behind group assessments"...can "yield data on the uncertainties, ambiguities, and group processes that lead to and underlie group assessments"...and "focus groups can also throw light on the normative understandings that groups draw upon to reach their collective judgments" (Bloor et. al. 4). For research on Alevism,

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<sup>1</sup> See my article of September 29, 2014 in the Huffington Post entitled "Academic Roundtables to Benefit Colleges and Universities(and Religious Institutions) available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kemal-argon/academic-roundtables-to-b\\_b\\_5880436.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kemal-argon/academic-roundtables-to-b_b_5880436.html). Precedent for the use of academic roundtables exists and can be seen in the book: Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', editor (1994) "Islamic Resurgence: Challenges, Directions & Future Perspectives: A Roundtable with Prof. Khurshid Ahmad," Tampa Florida, World and Islam Studies Enterprise, 1994, reprinted by Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan, 1995; 1996.

Bektashism, Sunni Islam and aspects of relations, focus groups offer a potential methodology for rigorous analysis.

Langford and McDonagh (2003) provide additional and often very similar or identical information on focus groups, the advantages and disadvantages and information on how to organize these. In the second chapter of Langford and McDonagh's book, "Organising and Conducting a Focus Group: The Logistics" by Anne Bruseberg and Deana McDonagh, the structure of this commercial methodology is described. As Bruseberg and McDonagh describe, "Focus groups are group interviews, and involve gathering together people with knowledge about a specific topic or issue... a chairperson or moderator promotes the discussion amongst the group...the synergy between the participants (the interaction amongst the individuals based on a mutual interest) assists in uncovering or highlighting less tangible issues. ...focus groups provide qualitative data." (Langford, McDonagh, Bruseberg 2003, 20). Both of the books, (Bloor et.al. 2001, 2002) and Langford and McDonagh (2003), provide a description of the structure and functioning of focus groups, how to plan and conduct these and the importance of analyzing the data (Bloor et.al. 19-72; Langford and McDonagh 19-42).

The importance and relevance of focus groups for Sunni-Alevi research (dialogue) and peace-building in Turkey lies in the fact that these are usually logistically more economical and feasible to arrange than larger conferences and they can more readily assemble more knowledgeable persons within Sunni and Alevi communities to focus on Qur'anic and other content. Focus groups also have the major advantage of following a protocol (Bloor et.al. 37-56), which can be ethical and well-mannered by Islamic standards, and have (deep) analysis of the resultant data, i.e. Qur'anic content (Bloor et.al. 59-72). In thinking about focus groups as originally being a commercial methodology for product development, which is directly mentioned in the title of Langford and McDonagh's (2003) book, one need only consider what the "products" are that academics produce, i.e. teaching and publications, to see their applicability. Academic focus groups would produce qualitative material for use in classroom teaching and for new publications.

What should not be forgotten with focus groups is that, these are actually a form of interview as Langford and McDonagh and Bruseberg describe above. So any research done in focus groups should follow and adhere to any and all applicable university ethical guidelines and policies for research done with human subjects: the privacy and confidentiality of these persons must be respected and protected as focus group participants.

Summarily, academics have multiple options at their disposal depending on their resources and needs. They can network with individuals in their own or other religious communities. They can choose larger events and thereby take a longer period of time and much more money (and university bureaucratic efforts and

maneuvering) to arrange conferences and symposia. Either alternatively or additionally, they can often more easily, more frequently and more economically arrange academic roundtables as smaller events. They can arrange focus groups for research with invited Alevi and/or Sunni participants, a carefully programmed protocol, (some university bureaucracy for funding and ethical oversight should be expected) and recorded/transcribed and deeply analyzed results (Bloor et. al. 37-72). All of these modalities of methodology can inform the academic products of teaching and publications.

### **CONCLUSION**

The prospect of Sunni-Alevi inter-Muslim dialogue as a sustained long-term project appears to be more realistic if a number of factors can be accounted for. First, this is not a novel concept in Turkey: there has been official and academic activity in this regard. What may appear to be deficient is the existence of ideologies and long-term strategies for inter-Muslim dialogue and reconciliation. Ideologies for inter-Muslim dialogue can be constructed using material gleaned from existing activist and academic sources, including the material for peace-building and interfaith dialogue suggested by Shafiq and Abu-Nimer, also borrowing from other material describing interfaith dialogue methodology. In the case of Sunni-Alevi dialogue, a strategic focus on Qur'anic content found in classical Alevi sources presents a promising option for dialogue material that could be of interest both to Sunnis and Alevis. This dialogue over Qur'anic content could be stimulating and enriching in terms of knowledge for both Sunnis and Alevis, even if there is disagreement, as may be expected. The place of Sunni-Alevi inter-Muslim dialogue may be outside of and also within academia but academia presents a major potential to foster this dialogue and to benefit from hosting it. Various existing organizational methodologies (conferences and panel discussions) can be used in this regard and they can be augmented with additional existing methodologies, roundtables and focus groups, benefiting academic production as well as understanding between Sunnis and Alevis. There could even be an improvement in relations, a "peace-building" as described by Abu-Nimer (2003; 82-83).

Lastly I will suggest considering the words of Jonathon Magonet who says, "Personally, I prefer the security of religious insecurity, of a dialogue with others that continually challenges, that opens up new dimensions of my own self." (Magonet 2003, 61). When we look forward to an inter-Muslim (Sunni-Alevi) dialogue where there is almost certainly to be some disagreements but which has ethical guidelines and good etiquette, we may almost certainly expect intellectual stimulation and challenge.

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