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THE QUR'ĀN AS A HIDDEN ACADEMY FOR LEARNING DIALOGIC EXCHANGE

Mohamed Wehby*

Abstract: The Qur'ān hosts numerous dialogues independent of its readers' moral and ideological positions – a key source for renewed learning and understanding. Conventional readings of the Qur'ān rarely notice the subtle underlying linguistic features. Similarly, rote readings can narrow one's capacity for renewed learning. As a result, the accustomed reader misses the profound moral lessons. To address this problem, I have analysed how the Qur'ān can be imagined as an open academy for learning dialogic exchange. This article's thematic approach is inspired by heuristic modes of learning to ascertain the Qur'ān's dialogic medium as a model of 'invitational rhetoric.'

The theories in this article create an inter-disciplinary framework. I used the Arabic word *qawl* (statement/assertion) as a primary linguistical index of dialogic exchange. I quantitatively surveyed two morphological derivatives of this word across the Qur'ānic text: *qul* (say, denoting God's voice) and *qālū* (they said, plural in the past tense, denoting voices of the Other vis-à-vis God). These derivatives signify voices speaking from different yet interactive contexts.

This article argues the Qur'ān's down-to-earth guidance translates the notion of dialogue from an elitist noun concept into an interactive dialogic context. The Qur'ān's dialogic medium illustrates its artistic elevation of dialogic exchanges at two levels: justice and *ihsān* (excellence). To this end, I use content analysis to analyse emergent themes according to the three principles of invitational rhetoric. The outcomes of this analysis ascertained how the Qur'ān *records* multiple voices of dialogic exchange, which it *accords* with its aesthetic features.

Keywords: *Qur'ān, dialogue, debate, invitational rhetoric, dialogic exchange, language*

INTRODUCTION

Why is the Qur'ān in the title described as a hidden academy? Hidden here presupposes a presence, yet, because of the conventional rote learning, accustomed readers fail to appreciate the Qur'ān as an open academy for learning dialogic exchange. Rote learning gives an illusion of comprehension resulting from habitual patterns of learning, which confuses a sense of

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familiarity with a text that has deep meanings. Rote learning can cause a wear and tear that narrows one's capacity for renewed learning.¹

Etymologically, the word 'dialogue' stems from the Greek word 'dialogos.' *Logos* means "the word" and *dia* means "through." Dialogue, as David Bohm defines it, is a "stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which may emerge some new understanding." Similarly, in Arabic, the word *ḥiwār* (dialogue) stems from the tri-root *ḥaa waw raa* and originates from same tri-root as the word *ḥawr*, which suggests the return from and to a viewpoint. According to Ibn Fāris and al-Zabīdī, *ḥiwār* presupposes a back and forth movement underpinning a dynamic verbal exchange – a cognitive empathy where one takes the perspective of the other to understand their position while returning to their subjective perspective.²

For this reason, it is imperative to bring the hidden academy out of the shadows of debate³ and into the light of dialogic exchange. The word 'dialogic' was coined by Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin to "name a discussion which does not resolve itself by finding common ground. Though no shared agreements may be reached, through the process of exchange, people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another."⁴

In Islamic literature, spiritual masters crafted creative methods of critical thinking to question the taken-for-granted notions shackling mainstream society. The satirist stories of Mulla Nassruddin testify to such creativity in distinct ways. Nassruddinian stories and anecdotes are aimed at increasing critical awareness beyond rote learning. The purpose is to increase one's intuitive capacity to extract the needed moral nutrition from the tales. Hence, freeing societies out of self-sustained illusions requires landing blows in the public discourse. Perceived as nutrition, the Nassruddin blow is a coconut. This term is derived from a witty statement: "A monkey threw a coconut from a treetop at a hungry Sufi, and it hit him on the leg. He picked it up; drank the milk; ate the flesh; made a bowl from the shell."⁵ This article is the coconut.

The Qur'ān is a divine text that illustrates enlivening insights. These insights, in and of themselves, serve as reminders of multi-dimensional learning possibilities for readers when they engage in critical self-reflection. Critical self-reflection is not a one-dimensional exercise limited to rationally questioning one's assumptions. Critical self-reflection extends to spiritual

¹ See Steven A. Sloman and Philip Fernbach, *The Knowledge Illusion: Why We Never Think Alone* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017), 217-218.

² David Bohm and Lee Nichol, *On Dialogue* (London: Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2003), 6; Aftab Ahmad, "Provisions of Interfaith Dialogue in Islamic Shari'ah," *Ma'arif-i-Islami* 14, no. 2 (2015): 2, https://www.aiou.edu.pk/sab/mi/Maarif_e_Islami/VOL-14,%20ISSUE-II%202015/1E.pdf. See Qur'ān 84:14.

³ This term derives from the Old French word *débatre* – to fight (*dé* meaning down and *batre* meaning to beat). Debating literally means "to beat down." Robert Westwood and Stewart Clegg, eds., *Debating Organization: Point-counterpoint in Organization Studies* (Madden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 371.

⁴ Richard Sennett, *Together the Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2012). 19.

⁵ Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (London: Octagon Press Ltd, 1999), 96-97.

encounters with the divine text that enable the reader's soul to be touched by its artful effects on the human heart. It is not an accident that 'art' is the last three letters of the word 'heart.'⁶ Ancient orators and rhetoricians cherished the civic function of speech as an *art* that promotes the common ground in a shared life.⁷ Speech is a faculty refined by critical reflection, literary techniques such as parables, aesthetic qualities such as prose style and moral virtues such as respect. This art may provide researchers with a clue about the subtlety in the title of Karen Armstrong's book *The Lost Art of Scripture: Rescuing the Sacred Texts*, which coincidentally parallels Prophet Muhammad's usage of the word *dālah* (lost property) and conveys the meaning 'lost' in his description of the *mu'min* (the faithful individual leading a life of inner serenity and peace). The faithful individual is the archetype of an earnest researcher preoccupied with a relentless quest for wisdom everywhere: "Wisdom is the believer's lost property *dālah*; wherever he finds it he takes it," as the Prophet said.⁸ The latter tradition compels knowledge seekers to learn cross-disciplinary dialogue. Knowledge seekers are the ones that treat pursuit of knowledge as an ongoing responsibility, without an end point. The manner through which this pursuit is carried out can be compared to one who loses a valuable item and fervently tries to find it. Once this valuable item is retrieved, the knowledge seeker must still afford it care as if the item can be lost at any time. Hence, humanities researchers endeavour to revisit 'ignorance' as a distinct subject matter across various fields of enquiry. Their focus is on "knowledge that could have been but wasn't, or should be but isn't..."; this new field is known as *agnotology*: the study of ignorance making, lost and forgotten.⁹ With the predominance of debate in the public sphere, dialogue as an art of communication has been lost and forgotten. Herein lies the value of this article. Metaphorically, it asks the Qur'ān for guidance so people re-search for the lost art of dialogue in their own communities. In addition, it asks the Qur'ān for a renewed reminder, so people do not forget the worth of this art once they find it. In effect, should society rediscover the lost art of dialogue, it should not forget that dialogue is a divine trust, which only the human being can violate or protect.¹⁰

⁶ Deborah A. Quibell, Jennifer L. Selig and Dennis P. Slattery, *Deep Creativity: Seven Ways to Spark your Creative Spirit* (Colorado: Shambhala Publications, 2019), 24.

⁷ James Martin. *Psychopolitics of Speech: Uncivil Discourse and the Excess of Desire* (Bielefeld: Verlag, 2019), 142-43.

⁸ Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunnan* (Cairo: Sharikat Mustafa al-Babi, 1975), vol. 5, 51 (*ḥadīth* no. 2687), cited in Andreas Christmann, trans. and ed., *The Qur'an, Morality and Critical Reason: The Essential Muhammad Shahrur* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 105, https://books.google.com.au/books/about/The_Qur_an_Morality_and_Critical_Reason.html?id=6WYid72jvsC&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false. The word *dālah* in Arabic is used to describe a lost camel. See Francis Johnson, *A Dictionary, Persian, Arabic, and English* (London: Wm H. Allen and Company, 1852), 799.

⁹ For more details, see Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), vii.

¹⁰ This conception of dialogue as a trust is inspired by the Qur'ānic notion of trust, *al amāna* (see Qur'ān 33:72). Dr. Taha Abdel-Rahman coined the concept *al i timāniyya* "the trusteeship paradigm". For more insight, see Taha Abdel-Rahman, *Ruh al-Dīn, min Dayq al-'Ilman ūyah ilā Si'at al-'Itiman ūyah* [The Spirit of Religion from the Narrow Confines of Secularism to the Wide Space of Trusteeship] (Beirut: Arab Cultural Centre, 2011). For an English introduction to Abdel-Rahman's intellectual project, see Wael Hallaq, *Reforming Modernity: Ethics and the New Human in the Philosophy of Abdurrahman Taha* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019).

This article conceives of dialogue in the Qur'ān as a verbal exchange that takes place in a given setting. In dialogic exchange, two or more speakers communicate, regardless of the subject matter and speakers' moral character.¹¹ The primary aim of this article is to furnish a different way of understanding human rhetoric – a way of understanding that recovers the civic function and aesthetic virtues of dialogic communication. From the speaker's position, rhetoric refers to the desire and skills needed to enable the listener to understand one's viewpoint and agree with proposition(s). From a listener's position, rhetoric refers to the skills needed to enhance responsive and responsible listening. To be responsive entails following “what has been said and [noting] the intention that prompts it. But you also have the responsibility of taking a position.” This includes not agreeing, disagreeing or suspending judgement until one has listened carefully and is sure to have understood the speaker/author's intent. In its specific sense, Aristotle defines rhetoric as “the power to observe the persuasiveness of which any particular matter admits.” Here, the art of rhetoric refers to a science of persuasive aspects that is underpinned by three proofs available to the rhetorician: those achieved by argument, those by character and those by emotion.¹²

The Qur'ān's dialogic embodiment of justice and *ihsān* (excellence) is an ideal to which the reader can aspire. I argue the dialogic exchanges derived from the Qur'ānic medium redefine the meaning of these exchanges for the reader's self-understanding and self-discovery. By shifting from a debating rhetoric to an invitational rhetoric,¹³ the reader becomes less concerned with winning an argument or taking pleasure in seeing the Other defeated. Instead, the reader becomes more concerned with exploring possibilities for renewed learning that transcend destructive habits of communication, such as deliberate confrontation and desired domination. Dialogic learning underpinning invitational rhetoric finds its clearest manifestation in enlightened introspection.¹⁴

A HYBRID APPROACH TO THEMATIC EXEGESIS

This article endorses tools of thematic exegesis to build a well-rounded perspective on dialogic exchanges in the Qur'ān. Thematic exegesis is classified into three main categories: thematic *tafsīr* concerned with terminology (studying a term in the Qur'ān by tracing its

¹¹ Mustansir Mir, “Dialogue in the Qur'an,” *Religion & Literature* 24, no. 1 (1992): 3.

¹² Mortimer J. Adler and Charles van Doren, *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* (New York: Touchstone, 2014), 140-141; Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, ed. and trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 16-17.

¹³ This term was developed by Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin in 1995, and is a viable alternative to the conventional mode of rhetoric as persuasion. According to Foss and Griffin, “invitational rhetoric is an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination.” Change may be the result of invitational rhetoric, but change is not its purpose. Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric,” *Communication Monographs* 62, no. 1 (1995): 5-6, doi: 10.1080/03637759509376345. See Qur'ān 16:125 for a succinct extrapolation of invitational rhetoric. Interestingly, in its address to the Prophet, the Qur'ān uses the same word for ‘invitational’ in the Arabic language instructively and verbally. This is known as *da'wah*.

¹⁴ Dialogic learning is the heuristic capacity of the learner to carefully understand the speaker's message, revisit the message in a new light, draw moral lessons (‘*ibar*) from dialogic exchanges and actively action the best possibilities of such lessons in given social contexts.

derivatives); thematic *tafsīr* concerned with a topic or theme; and thematic *tafsīr* concerned with one chapter of the Qur'ān. A thematic commentary comprises defining the goal of study (intention of God and immutability), the method (through themes) and the limitation of study (according to human capability).¹⁵

The thematic Qur'ānic framework has important consequences for transforming our learning attitudes towards the Qur'ān. It encourages readers to understand the Qur'ān on its own terms by steering clear from boxing it in preconceived models of exegesis. Confining our understanding of the Qur'ān to pre-existing models presupposes a sacralisation of such models by taking them out of their historical context. As a result, rote learners will no longer see any need to continue the incomplete intellectual task of their predecessors. Metaphorically, the Qur'ān is then perceived as an enclosed sacred space that denies access to its visitors. In contrast to the rote learner, an active learner conceives of the Qur'ān as a limitless mine. Active learners are cultural miners who can carefully extract the buried gems of the Qur'ān. These gems are then converted into timely messages that meet the needs and questions of society. A hybrid approach to thematic readings of the Qur'ān can build the reader's capacity for renewed learning. However, as Azharite scholar Muhammad A. Draz stresses, this does not entail falling into "dogmatic self-disclosure, that would prevent comparison and engagement."¹⁶ Knowledge is cumulative, but its accumulation cannot be purely quantitative. One must break through the quantitative mass of knowledge by qualitatively teasing out the viable elements of past thought. Hence, active learners build models of explanatory power that connect renewed Qur'ānic knowledge with socially consequential issues. This thematic methodology maintains checks and balances so no Qur'ānic understanding would become radically textual, hence socially ineffectual.

This article will combine the first and second thematic categories outlined above. I will employ 'content analysis' as a research tool to determine the presence and frequency of certain dialogic exchanges within the Qur'ānic medium. For the first thematic level, this article will survey the frequency of two morphological derivatives pertaining to the word '*qawl*,' which signifies the 'act of speech' in the Arabic language. Here, the word *qawl* qualifies as the semantic equivalence to the word dialogue in Arabic and English. The morpheme *qawl* and its morphological derivations constitute a basic unit of dialogic exchange in the Qur'ān.

For the second thematic level, this article will decipher and interpret the frequency of the surveyed pool of morphological data related to the two derivatives of the word *qawl*.¹⁷ Concurrently, the article's central topic – dialogic exchange – is an inductive outcome emerging from the need to address the crisis in communication resulting from the effects of widespread debating. Retrospectively, the article's hybrid approach to thematic analysis takes

¹⁵ Ammar Fadhil, "An Analysis of Historical Development of Tafsir Mawdu'i," *Jurnal Usuluddin* 20 (2014): 96-97; Samir 'Abd al-Rahmān Rashwānī, *Manhaj al-Tafsīr Mawḍū'ī Li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* [Methodology of Thematic Commentary for the Glorious Qur'ān] (Halab: Dar al-Multaqī, 2009).

¹⁶ Mohamed El-Mesawi, "From Al-Shatibi's Legal Hermeneutics to Thematic Exegesis of the Qur'an," *Intellectual Discourse* 20, no. 2 (2012): 209, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1285239530/>.

¹⁷ Any morphological derivative of the word *qawl* in the Qur'ān testifies to a dialogic exchange regardless of its length, intensity or discontinuity.

off from the crisis of debating into the open skies of the dialogic academy of the Qur'ān. However, this flight into the Qur'ān is not a romantic one that escapes reality without any plans to return. In short, the article's framework is designed to *consult* the Qur'ān for *insight*, not for solutions per se.¹⁸ It is important not to mistake insights for solutions. Solutions in the human context are constructed according to the questions, needs and challenges of specific organisations, institutions and communities. Insights fuel seekers' passion for finding the right solution, not any solution, in response to a problem. By the same token, Qur'ānic insights will not yield any fruits if the seeker fails to actively open their spiritual and intellectual receptors by internalising a profound and genuine desire to heal society's wounds.

Hence, my thematic reflection on dialogic exchanges in the Qur'ān avoids a prolonged stay within the philological boundaries of the text and argues for the responsible return to the communicative context of society. This back and forth strategy lies at the heart of dialogic thinking and practice. It empowers the active learner to make sense of the attained insights in a constructive interaction with their environment, be it at school, at an organisation, in a government setting or in university spheres of academic discussion.¹⁹ By entrusting the active learner with enlivening insights, as opposed to concrete solutions, the Qur'ān reinforces its worldview for the human being – a worldview that conceives of the human being as the steward of God on earth who is equipped with the latent potentials to become *responsibly creative*.

MAPPING THE TERRITORY OF DIALOGUE IN THE LITERATURE

Researchers sought to theorise dialogue in the Qur'ān across various areas of interest spanning hermeneutics, global politics, interfaith dialogue, Islam and the West.²⁰ These areas of research encompass a variety of approaches that intersect to enable multi-dimensional learning.

This section will discuss facets of three thematic cases of Qur'ānic studies on the notion of dialogue:

1. *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* by Muhammad Abdel Haleem²¹
2. *Dialogue in the Qur'an* by Muntasir Mir²²
3. *Islam, the Religion of Dialogue* by Mohammad Hussain Fadlullah²³

¹⁸ For more insight on this discussion, see Ali Paya, *Islam, Modernity and a New Millennium: Themes from a Critical Rationalist Reading of Islam* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2018), 40-42.

¹⁹ The word "discussion" has the same root as "percussion" and "concussion." "It really means to break things up. It emphasizes the idea of analysis, where there may be many points of view, and where everybody is presenting a different one—analyzing and breaking up." Bohm and Lee, *On Dialogue*, 6-7. For more information on practical strategies, see Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 3rd ed. (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2015).

²⁰ For supplementary reading, see Roger Boase, *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace* (London: Routledge, 2016).

²¹ Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'ān: Themes and Style* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011).

²² Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an."

²³ Muḥammad Ḥ. Fadlullah, *Islam: The Religion of Dialogue* (Beirut: Almalak Ed., 2003).

In his book *Understanding the Qur'ān: Themes and Style*, Muhammad Abdel Haleem combines thematic, stylistic and comparative approaches to understanding the Qur'ān. Abdel Haleem uses the story of Joseph in the Qur'ān and Bible to illustrate his hybrid methodology through the notion of storytelling. Unlike the historiographical account of Joseph's story in the Bible, the Qur'ān's style of telling Joseph's story is called "dramatic."²⁴ The latter is characterised by brevity of expression, dialogic exchanges, movement of scenes (with gaps between) and clarity of message.²⁵ The author reports how the 28 scenes in the Qur'ānic story of Joseph are structured on dialogue and movement. He states,

... what little narrative there is serves mainly to introduce the characters by 'he said', written as one word in Arabic and followed by the direct speech of the character. I counted 75 occurrences of 'he/they said' in the 100 Arabic verses of the story.²⁶

Abdul Haleem's former account opens a spacious field for revisiting the notion of dialogue anew. The Qur'ān's technique of storytelling drives home the moral message behind the story of Prophet Joseph through a *dialogic medium*. The dialogic medium is the shared textual and symbolic space in which dialogic exchanges appear regardless of their length, depth and subject matter. It comprises the multiple voices that make up the Qur'ānic academy for learning dialogic exchange. The medium is designed by literary and thematic techniques, such as the derivatives of the morpheme *qawl* (the act of speech), which represent the linguistic index of dialogic exchange in the Qur'ān. Further, the dialogic medium also refers to the implied dialogic lessons through the style, structure and composition of Qur'ānic stories. Metaphorically, this medium behaves like the theatre space (stage), the learner is the audience, the dialogic exchanges are the performers, the text is the subject matter of these exchanges, God is the director and the style of the Qur'ānic discourse is the design aspects.

This focus on dialogic exchanges between real human characters expands the learner's intellectual and spiritual horizons. It transforms the notion of dialogue from an abstract concept monopolised by the elites of society into an interactive context marked by *dialogic exchanges* among real human characters. However, Abdul Haleem does not attempt to send down his bucket deeper into Joseph's well. In other words, he does not explain how the implications of the Qur'ān's dialogic medium can enrich studies that critique 'formal dialogue' as an elitist conception restricted to formal conferences, academic symposiums and diplomatic arenas. For example, in his bold fieldwork titled *The Problem with Interreligious Dialogue: Plurality, Conflict and Elitism in Hindu-Christian Muslim Relations*, Muthuraj Swamy observes: "In [elitist] dialogue, grassroots people (and their life and issues) are silent objects of elite discussions and only passive listeners to whom 'knowledge' of dialogue should be passed on by the elites."²⁷

²⁴ Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 156.

²⁵ Ibid., 156-157.

²⁶ Ibid., 157.

²⁷ Muthuraj Swamy, *The Problem with Interreligious Dialogue: Plurality, Conflict and Elitism in Hindu-Christian-Muslim Relations* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 2.

However, the notion of dialogic exchanges in the Qur'ān questions 'dialogue' as an elitist discourse that excludes ordinary people from partaking in the construction of a moral and social story about their everyday struggles. This is vividly portrayed in the story of the woman who dialogically complains to the Prophet about her husband for saying words of *zihār* to her.²⁸ All the elements of dialogic exchange beyond the elitist notion of dialogue can be discerned in this woman's story. The chapter is titled according to her dialogic action '*al-Mujādilah* (The Pleading Woman). God acknowledges her emotional pain, assures her that He has been listening to her whole dialogue with the Prophet concerning her husband, and He responds to her skilful and rightful voice.²⁹ In short, the pleading woman, which the Qur'ān records, is ordinary in social status, but extraordinary in dialogic praxis.

The Qur'ān's unique dialogic medium does not permit elitist manipulation of language. In logic, there are two types of definitions:

- **Intensional:** defines a term by relating it to other words, categories, etc. For example, one can define the word "horse" as a large solid domesticated herbivorous mammal.
- **Extensional:** defines a term by pointing to a non-verbal referent or fact. Thus, one can define "horse" by pointing to an actual horse.³⁰

The Qur'ān is extensional in that it prefers not to talk about dialogue, family or monotheism in abstract terms. For example, the notion of family is enacted through interactions between members of the basic family unit (i.e. mother, father, children, siblings; see chapter 'Yusuf' in the Qur'an). Therefore, this article describes the model of dialogue in the Qur'ān as 'dialogic exchange.'

Furthermore, dialogic exchanges in the Qur'ān challenge 'dialogue' as a rigid rhetoric confined to the argumentative sphere of logic. Argument as a way of thinking emerged in the Greek tradition. As Edward de Bono states, "Socrates saw his role as simply pointing out what was 'wrong'. He wanted to clarify the correct use of concepts like justice and love by pointing out incorrect usage."³¹ Although argument is critical for coherent thought based on reasoning, it can decrease the possibility for the unpredictable discovery of meaning. In argumentation, the critical exchange between arguers can evolve into a polemical contest that absorbs time and attention away from the shared object of reflection. Abdul Haleem's thematic, comparative and stylistic reflections on the story of Joseph offer clear insight for understanding the democratic notion of dialogic exchanges in the Qur'ān beyond argument. The author highlights the distinctively linguistic features of Joseph's story. Nonetheless, he falls short on explaining the unspoken meanings of these features for the modern reader. In other words, the Qur'ān employs the dialogic medium as an avenue for enlightened introspection. This dialogic medium *invites*

²⁸ *Zihār* "... is a pre-Islamic practice whereby the man declared that his wife is as his mother to him, thereby dismissing her sexually without letting her go by way of divorce." For more details, see Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna: Examining the Major Sources of Imami Shi'i Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 88.

²⁹ Ibid. See Qur'ān 58:1.

³⁰ For more insight, see Bruce I. Kodish, *Dare to Inquire: Sanity and Survival for the 21st Century and Beyond* (Pasadena: Extensional Publishing, 2003).

³¹ Edward de Bono, *Six Thinking Hats* (Australia: Penguin Group, 2008), 1.

the reciter, reader and learner to emphatically relate to the characters in the story of Joseph. In effect, this medium performs a profound moral function. It continuously *invites* the reciter and learner to build their emphatic capacity for understanding the paradoxical predicament of the human drama – a predicament that is endowed with possibilities for self-transformation and reconciliation.³² As Lindsay Cummings boldly asserts when revisiting the role of empathy in the political theatre beyond concerned empathy (kindness) “...but of critically expanding our understanding of how others experience the world so that we might work collaboratively toward solutions that benefit more people in a more democratic way.”³³

In a similar vein, Muntasir Mir’s paper titled *Dialogue in the Qur’ān*³⁴ propagates a systematic study of dialogue as a literary feature of the Qur’ān. Mir presents a typology of Qur’ānic dialogues³⁵ and raises the following questions from the outset of his study:

Are there enough dialogical situations in the Qur’an to warrant a study of them? How much “dialogue” can one expect to find in a book that does not seem to have much sustained composition and moves from one subject to another within a few verses?³⁶

Mir’s provocative questions are not solely posed to respond to sceptical commentaries that question the Qur’ān’s dialogic message and method. In addition, these questions provoke the reader to think outside cynical and conventional bounds.³⁷ Nevertheless, the author of *Dialogue in the Qur’ān* highlights the structural nuances of dialogue in the Qur’ān, which supports his stipulation that dialogues in the Qur’ān would be better understood by studying them within the contexts in which they appear.³⁸ These structural nuances, specific to the literary style of the Qur’ān, manifest in a variety of forms. These include linguistic Arabic markers indicating the beginning of dialogue (such as *idh/wa idh* + verb – “Recall the time when such-and-such an event occurred” (e.g. Qur’ān 2: 260); punchline comments drawing the moral from the dialogue through stating the consequences of heedlessness (e.g. Qur’ān 5:26); dialogue embedded in other dialogue (e.g. Qur’ān 11:71-73); dialogue juxtaposed to one or more

³² The strains of Samuel Barber’s “Adagio for Strings” induce a musical embodiment of this paradox. See Marshall J. Hendrickson, “Samuel Barber - Adagio for Strings,” YouTube video, 8:01, April 7, 2008, accessed June 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izQsgEOL450>. For example, the beginning of Prophet Joseph’s story is as telling as its ending. Eventually, Joseph forgives his brothers as a reflection of his moral beauty; there are ‘no losers.’ See Muntasir Mir, “Irony in the Qur’an: A Study of the Story of Joseph,” in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata, (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 177.

³³ Lindsay B. Cummings, *Empathy as Dialogue in Theatre and Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 33.

³⁴ Mir, “Dialogue in the Qur’an.”

³⁵ Using the criteria of speaker and content, Muntasir Mir refers to several types of dialogues in the Qur’ān: between a prophet and the nation to which he was sent (see Qur’ān 11 and 26); between God and prophets (e.g. Qur’ān 2:260); usually involving human beings (different types of characters) with a moral edification as its main theme (e.g. Qur’ān 26:41-51, Pharaoh and his magicians); where speakers are in consultation with one another (e.g. Qur’ān 12:8-10); dialogue situated in the hereafter (e.g. Qur’ān 74:40-47); one-sided dialogue (e.g. Qur’ān 2:34-39); God addressing first Satan and then Adam and Eve; and instances showcasing several speakers, but hardly any listeners (e.g. Qur’ān 40: 23-44).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁷ The Qur’ān unleashes its rhetorical questions vis-à-vis the human reasoning faculties in 24 places. For more insight, see Qur’ān 2:44; 2:73; 2:76; 2:242; 3:65; 3:118; 6:32; 6:152; 7:169; 10:16; 11:51; 12:2; 12:109; 21:10; 21:67; 23:80; 24:61; 26:28; 28:60; 36:62; 37:138; 40:67; 43:3; and 57:17.

³⁸ Mir, “Dialogue in the Qur’an,” 9.

dialogues (e.g. see examples in the Qur'ān chapters 11, 20, 26); dialogue that may involve more than two speakers (e.g. Qur'ān 20:86-98); and dialogue underpinned by parenthetical observations (e.g. Qur'ān 20:47-59).³⁹

Mir's study of dialogue in the Qur'ān reveals that speakers in Qur'ānic dialogue are "distinguished from each other on the basis of the content of their speech."⁴⁰ This intentional attention to the substance of the speech ensures the reader's focus does not side-track from the moral lesson of the dialogue, which inevitably applies to the reader's personal and social growth. The dialogic implications of this Qur'ānic strategy are significant. The reader learns the variety of character traits mirrored in the speaker's speech, which reinforce the variety of personality types. Such character differences and personality types play out in the temperament and outcomes of the speaker's positions, whether in situations that require submission to the truth, confession of mistakes, reaction to reality checks, etc.⁴¹ However, these character traits are not implied to encourage the reader of the Qur'ān to apply a moralistic judgement against the speaker in the dialogic exchange. This is because the message of the Qur'ān (content) cannot be inconsistent with its medium (the dialogic style); the two work together to deliver the meaning. For example, the Qur'ānic message prohibits fault finding, "and do not spy, neither backbite one another; would any of you like to eat the flesh of his brother/sister dead? You would abominate it."⁴² So, how could the dialogic medium encourage a fault-finding mindset? This is an illuminating marker of the Qur'ān's dialogic medium.⁴³ It recalls dialogic exchanges embedded in stories to foster sustained introspection as a counterbalance to character assassination. For example, the Qur'ān uses relative pronouns (in Arabic relative nouns) to de-personalise events and de-stigmatise individuals and groups. These include *al-ladhi/al-lati* (who/which: *al-ladhi* masculine/singular, *al-lati* feminine/singular). Relative pronouns are used "as conjunctions, to join nouns and verbs to other nouns and verbs. They are used to link a noun that previously came in the sentence to its description provided in another sentence."⁴⁴

In short, the Qur'ān's academy for learning dialogic exchange invites the reader to exercise a fourfold mode of dialogic learning. First, the reader is invited to become an active listener. Second, the active listener should fathom the moral lesson underlying the interlocutor's speech regardless of the speaker's character and persona. Third, the active listener is then urged to act on the moral lesson. Fourth, the active listener is challenged to master actioning the moral lesson by exhausting its *best* and *most beautiful* (*aḥsan*) facets.⁴⁵

³⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁴¹ For more details, see *ibid.*, 6-7.

⁴² Qur'ān 49:12.

⁴³ This dialogic empathy is a new mode of performance in theatrical models. As Cummings puts it, "If we are to open ourselves to the other, entertaining the other's difference and critically examining ourselves in the process, we must also be open to *how this process might change us* [emphasis added]." Cummings, *Empathy as Dialogue*, 33.

⁴⁴ See Suhaib Sirajudin, *Master Quranic Arabic in 24 hours* (Aylesbury, UK: ShieldCrest, 2015), 138.

⁴⁵ This four-fold mode of dialogic learning is lucidly captured in an insightful Qur'ānic sign (*ayah*) – "Those who listen (first) to what is said (second) and follow (third) the best of it (fourth). Those are the ones God

One of the limitations in Mir's paper is the limited space created for the reader to exercise renewed dialogic learning. In other words, how can the reader make sense of the Qur'anic dialogue as a literary technique? What significance and implications do the learnings hold for the reader? Mir's paper opens a gateway to explore the need to convert Qur'anic insights into sociological realities. This opportunity is illuminated in the third thematic case of dialogic learning in the Qur'an.

In his book *Islam, the Religion of Dialogue*, Fadlullah disseminates the functional purpose of dialogic learning in the Qur'an. According to Fadlullah, dialogic learning in the Qur'an welcomes a culture of free questioning.⁴⁶ Free questions are recognised, but they are filtered by prophetic responses guided by critical thinking. The Qur'an through the Prophet harnesses the questioner's curiosity to the practical needs of society. For example:

they asked the Prophet what they spend in charity. In his answer, he chose to focus on those people on whom they should spend it...because it is not so important as what to spend. Rather, whom to spend it on.⁴⁷

This Qur'anic realignment of ineffectual questions to the present needs of society reaffirms an epistemic practice in the social science. The latter relates to field research, which "is less a matter of discerning answers to questions, for many a bored or kindly informant will give answers, than of slowly working out what the key questions are."⁴⁸ Despite the practical futility of some questions, the Qur'an does not devalue the people who raise them. As a matter of dialogic regard, the Qur'an unconditionally receives such questions and cites them as occasions for revealing a new facet of dialogic learning for the community as a whole. Questions, however presented and whenever voiced, are not censored, but are represented as constructive feedback that push a community forward. The Qur'an does not embarrass the questioner by avoiding naming and shaming. Subsequently, the Qur'an responds to the community, not just the individual questioner, opening a space of shared learning and shared responsibility. By doing so, the Qur'an's dialogic medium elevates the worth of the questioner, regardless of the futility of their question, by tacitly attributing the value of the emergent lesson to the intellectual courage of the initial questioner.

Fadlullah's thematic survey of dialogic lessons in the Qur'an analyses the multi-layered and holistic nature of dialogue. He establishes the importance of his approach in light of common misconceptions and misapplications of dialogue. For example, he focuses on guiding 'Muslim activists' in their intellectual and public advocacy for Islamic principles. Muslim activists' discourse with the Other should rest on viable understanding of the society's needs and communicate the message accordingly. According to Fadlullah, this methodology can empower Muslim activists to anticipate potential traps that hinder useful dialogue such as tit-for-tat arguments, hasty judgements and narrow-minded attitudes. However, Fadlullah's study

has guided," Qur'an 39:18 – as though the Qur'an makes dialogic learning a prerequisite for receiving guidance.

⁴⁶ Fadlullah, *Islam*, 162.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 169; Qur'an 2:215.

⁴⁸ Swamy, *The Problem with Interreligious Dialogue*, xi.

scarcely draws on world literature in the field of dialogue. His references are overwhelmingly Islamic, hence limited in scope. Furthermore, his target audience is the Muslim activist, despite the relevance of his discourse to the larger society. As this article demonstrates, the Qur'ān does not merely use the Other as an object of discourse (e.g. talking about dialogue through a pretentious projection of the Other), but sheds profound light on the voices of the Other by granting them unconditional agency to state their position. Hence, this article practically addresses Fadlullah's limitations by recognising the variety of perspectives in world literature while unpacking original insights that emerge from the Qur'ān's dialogic medium.

INVITATIONAL RHETORIC: A FRAMEWORK FOR RENEWED LEARNING

The Qur'ān Revisited: From Dialogue to Dialogic Exchange

The primary source of this study stems from the intellectual project of contemporary Moroccan thinker Abū Zayd al-Muqri' al-Idrīsī,⁴⁹ who recently published a two-volume book titled *The Qur'ān and Reason/Intellect (al-Qur'ān wal 'aql)*.⁵⁰ In his second volume of the book on applied examples (subtitle), he poses three questions:

1. Does the Qur'ān reflect a dialogical nature or is it a closed text revealed to merely guide people through a transcendental method of instruction?
2. Is the Qur'ān exclusive and one-sided as opposed to the inclusive and interactive nature of dialogic learning?
3. What communicative lessons do we acquire from the profound presence of dialogic exchanges in the Qur'ān?⁵¹

Because language is the primary medium of dialogic exchange, this article applies content analysis to the Arabic word *qawl* (statement/assertion) as a linguistical unit of dialogic exchange in the Qur'ān. Content analysis “mainly consists of breaking down or fragmenting the text into pertinent units of information for their subsequent coding and categorization.”⁵² David Crystal clarifies the internal structure of a text is not always obvious (e.g. heading of a restaurant menu), but sometimes needs to be “carefully demonstrated, as in the network of

⁴⁹ al-Idrīsī is not a well-known scholar in English literature since most of his books are in Arabic and have not been translated to English. This article is perhaps the first attempt to bridge the gap between Al-Idrīsī's body of knowledge on dialogue in Muslim-Arabic scholarship and the wider English scholarship in contemporary Islamic studies and the wider context of the humanities. As Raewyn Connell puts it, “No single knowledge formation exhausts the human possibilities of knowing... Universities produce and hold knowledge, but also need to learn from what is around them.” Raewyn Connell, *The Good University: What Universities Actually do and why it's Time for Radical Change* (Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2019), 141.

⁵⁰ Abū Zayd al-Muqri' al-Idrīsī, *al-Qur'ān wal 'aql* [The Qur'ān and Reason/Intellect] (Casablanca al-Dār al-Baydā'): al-Idrīsī Association for Research and Studies, 2016.

⁵¹ Ibid., vol. 2.

⁵² Jorge R. Ruiz, “Sociological Discourse Analysis: Methods and Logic,” *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 10, no. 2 (2009): 7, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/869719987/>.

relationships that enter into a literary work. In all cases, the task of textual analysis is to identify the linguistic features that cause the sentence sequence to *cohere*...”⁵³

I quantitatively surveyed two morphological derivatives of the word *qawl* across the whole Qur’ānic text. First, the morpheme *qul* (‘say,’ denoting God’s voice). Second, the morpheme *qālū* (‘they said,’ plural in the past tense, denoting voices of the Other vis-à-vis God). These two derivatives of *qawl* are profound because they signify two voices speaking from different yet interactive contexts and heighten the myriad meanings of dialogic exchange. I used two online Qur’ān applications to generate data and ensure its precision. For the word *qul*, I used the Qur’ānic Arabic Corpus, an annotated linguistic resource, which, as the program states, “shows the Arabic grammar, syntax and morphology for each word in the Qur’ān.”⁵⁴ For the second derivative *qālū*, I used Tanzil.net, which is an international Qur’ānic online application that provides a highly verified Unicode Qur’ān text.⁵⁵

The derivations of the tri-root *q-w-l* occur 1,722 times in the Qur’ān.⁵⁶ These derivations are further diversified into 49 morphological derivations.⁵⁷ (For examples, see Appendix: Table 1.) This number is compelling, suggestive and interesting to think about in the context of dialogic exchanges. This number also allows us to make inferences about the messages within the Book’s medium, the author, the audience and even the ethos of the Qur’ānic academy. Further, analytical reading techniques emphasise the process of coming to terms with an author, which is the ideal toward which writer and reader should strive.⁵⁸ Terms refer to “the skilled use of words for the sake of communicating knowledge.”⁵⁹ First, this means dialogic exchanges in the Qur’ān can be illuminated through the location of important words that point to dialogic communication. Second, it is important to determine the meaning of these words, as used, with precision.

In this realm, the Qur’ānic academy for learning dialogic exchange diversifies the morphological derivations of speech through the inclusion of various forms that make up the dialogic context. For example, the speaker, addressed subject, interlocutor, listener, interrupter, absentee, present subject, masculine, feminine, dual, plural, etc.⁶⁰ It was found the total number of the morpheme *qul* equalled that of the morpheme *qālū*: 332:332 (see Appendix: Table 2 for exact references). This inimitable outcome is an original Qur’ānic dissemination of participatory democracy sustained by the first principle of invitational rhetoric: equality. The equal distribution of God’s voice (*qul*) and the voices of others (*qālū*) attests to the Qur’ān’s

⁵³ David Crystal, *How Language Works* (Camberwell, Vic: Penguin Group Australia, 2008), 261.

⁵⁴ The Quranic Arabic Corpus, <http://corpus.quran.com/>.

⁵⁵ Tanzil Project, http://tanzil.net/docs/Tanzil_Project.

⁵⁶ al-Idrīsī, *al-Qur’ān wal ‘aql*, vol. 2, 30.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁸ Adler and van Doren, *How to Read a Book*, 97.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶⁰ al-Idrīsī, *al-Qur’ān wal ‘aql*, vol. 2.

fulfilment of the two external conditions essential for creating an atmosphere that allows the audience members' perspective to be offered: safety and value.⁶¹

This 1:1 ratio of dialogic exchanges between the voice of God and the rest of the voices in the Qur'ān's invitational rhetoric demonstrates three levels at which the Book of God exercises justice with the Other. First, the Qur'ān brings forth the perspective of the Other and grants the Other the right to exist and the space to voice a different perspective.⁶² Second, the Qur'ān opens a borderless space for the Other harbouring multiple voices within its textual medium – a borderless space that is consistently polyphonic (i.e. many voices). By doing so, the Qur'ān lands from its transcendental heights down to the dialogic level of human discourse.⁶³ Third, the Qur'ān recognises and reviews the claim of the Other despite its absurdity and audacity. In other words, the Qur'ān does not fear that recognition of the opposite argument may undermine the intellectual and moral morale of the faithful community.⁶⁴ As a matter of sheer justice with the Other, the Qur'ān does not obliterate, omit or remove the statement of the Other but grants it the full scope for expression.⁶⁵

The Dialogic Significance of the Word

What dialogic significance does the word hold that the Qur'ān gives it remarkable weight? The word is a vehicle that harbours the unspoken longings of the author and/or speaker. Words are endowed with possibilities that aid the speaking subject to share their deep message with the other. One's predisposition to express thought, experience and feeling presupposes a genuine intent to generate a mutual encounter. Thus, the spoken word is captured as an action that encourages a sense of continuity with life or participation.⁶⁶ In effect, the act of speech is the medium through which people make their existence notable and worthy of recognition. Hence, there is no existential crisis more painful to the human condition than voicing words in a vacuum of total indifference. Moreover, there is no spiritual crisis more detrimental to the dignity of human encounter than voicing words devoid of purpose, elegance and virtue. The Qur'ān is the word of God that is recited to elevate the human being ethically and aesthetically. God in the Qur'ān willed to use the word as the universal medium through which His timeless message is delivered to humankind. This delivery is not a one-off communication nor is it a

⁶¹ As both authors state, "Rhetoric contributes to a feeling of safety when it conveys to audience members that the ideas and feelings that they share with the rhetor will be received with respect and care...[and] the condition of value is the acknowledgement that audience members have intrinsic or immanent worth." Foss and Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion," 10-11.

⁶² al-Idrīsī, *al-Qur'ān wal 'aql*, vol. 2, 32. As mentioned above, the derivatives of the tri-root *q-w-l* occur 1,722 times, which attests to the profound presence of the Other in the Qur'ān's dialogic medium and reflects the Author's open-minded discourse.

⁶³ Ibid., 32-34.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 36-37.

⁶⁵ For example, see Qur'ān 5:64.

⁶⁶ Walter J. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2012), 21.

one-way interaction. God's word is coated with insightful eloquence and elegance.⁶⁷ The Qur'ān models a unique form of empathetic dialogue as opposed to a quasi "dialogue."

Empathetic dialogue is the Qur'ān's language that refines and redefines the purpose and practice of human rhetoric.⁶⁸ The God of the Qur'ān is the God of the whole world.⁶⁹ When one recites the word of God, one enables multiple voices other than God to be heard. It is as though the word of God encodes the variety of voices emergent from different times, places, positions, choices, characters, beliefs and fates. The Book of God is known as *al-Qur'ān*, the Recited Book. Put differently, the divine word, which encodes the variety of voices, exists as a text. However, the existence of the voices it encompasses become recognised and heard only when one recites the word. In short, emphatic dialogue in the Qur'ān is rediscovered through the act of recitation on the part of the human being. The Qur'ān alludes to one of the principles of emphatic dialogue and invitational rhetoric: the willingness to enable the Other to be present and heard. Therefore, the act of recitation is dialogic par excellence. Here lies the value of invitational rhetoric as a viable alternative to polemical rhetoric, otherwise known as debating.

Furthermore, the Qur'ān aesthetically demonstrates its virtuous dialogic approach by exercising the virtue of *ihsān* (excellence) in its recognition of the Other at three levels. First, the Qur'ān imbues the speech of the Other with the beauty of its rhetoric and the art of its style. For example, the Qur'ān reveals the perspective of the Other with its eloquent expression and deep articulation.⁷⁰ The Qur'ān's dialogic *ihsān* manifests in its anti-selectivity as it reveals the speech of *all* its participations with the same degree and quality of eloquence and beauty. Further, the Qur'ān's dialogic *ihsān* paraphrases the original statement of the Other to make it sound more beautiful.⁷¹ Second, the Qur'ān eternalises the speech of the Other with the eternal attribute of its discourse.⁷² When early Muslims strove to protect and preserve the Qur'ān, they were simultaneously protecting and rediscovering the speech of the Other. Hence, the Qur'ān's dialogic *ihsān* honours the dialogic dignity of the Other by granting its rhetorical existence eternity and continuity equal to that of the believing and righteous camp. Third, the Qur'ān on a number of occasions avoids explicit and direct debunking of the Other's claims to prevent intellectual censorship over the mind of the receiver, which could also thwart the claim of the Other from reaching the field of persuasion and influence.⁷³ This dialogic level of *ihsān* presupposes the Qur'ān's awareness of the effects associated with analysis paralysis. Here, the

⁶⁷ The word elegance stems from Latin *eligere*, which "consists in the choice of the most appropriate words and expressions, and in their composition, and clear and perspicuous order." For more details, see Frederick P. Leverett, *New Latin Tutor* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, & Company, 1832), 174.

⁶⁸ In the Qur'ān, speech is an integral part of man's open-ended moral struggle. The Qur'ān invites and reminds people to maintain the variety of virtues that refine the human rhetoric. For example, "Speak the truth" 3:17; "Speak straight" 33:70; "Speak justice" 6:152; "Speak kindly" 2:83; "Speak politely" 17:53; "Speak leniently" 17:28; "Speak graciously" 17:23; "Speak gently" 20:44; and "Speak not in vain" 23:3.

⁶⁹ Qur'ān 1:2.

⁷⁰ al-Idrīsī, *al-Qur'ān wal 'aql*, 40.

⁷¹ Take the following statement by the fatalistic Arabs as a case in point – Qur'ān 45:24 – and compare the depth of its eloquence with the following original formulation: *al-dunya arḥāmun tadf' wa arḍun tabla'* (The world is but wombs that bring forth and earth that swallows). Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 40-41.

⁷³ Ibid., 41-42. For example, Qur'ān 21:5, 36:47.

Qur'ān teaches the believing camp the art of patience for difference as well as thoughtful reflection prior to rushing to build counterarguments. In short, the Qur'ān's dialogic medium invites the learner to exercise dialogic *ihsān* in giving the Other the opportunity and right to be present in the beauty of language, a presence that is equally elegant.

The Qur'ān's method of storytelling allows for a spiral revisitation of dialogue's untapped potential. In the Qur'ān, dialogic exchanges form an unconditional medium shaped by every participant regardless of their ideological and moral positions. Interestingly, this Qur'ānic medium behaves as a buffer zone that allows for impartial observation of dialogic exchange.⁷⁴ The reader has the advantage of reflecting on the characters' thoughts while listening to their voices in a neutral space free from ambiguity, hostility and monopoly. For example, the Pharaoh in the story of Prophet Moses freely expresses his totalitarian mindset without being interrupted. This is an example of how the Qur'ān exercises the principle of justice with the Other. The Pharaoh's remarks are afforded the full scope of unconditional expression. The Qur'ānic buffer zone permits the reader to see each side of the dialogic exchange as represented by each participant, not as the reader wishes these exchanges to be. As a result, the dialogic medium in the Qur'ān converts dialogue from an owned property specific to an elite into an open-ended exchange of ideas, beliefs and judgements shared by a community of voluntary participants.

These dialogic exchanges are ideally real. On occasions, they are frustrated, interrupted and hampered.⁷⁵ On other occasions, they generate self-transformation, emotional healing and mutual understanding.⁷⁶ Further, dialogic exchanges in the Qur'ān are sometimes suspended to make room for self-reflection and self-learning.⁷⁷ This element of dialogic suspension is inextricably linked to the notion of lingering, which increases one's capacity for acute wisdom. The Qur'ān alludes to the relationship between the art of lingering and the burning desire for knowledge, “[Prophet], do not rush ahead with the Qur'ān before the revelation is fully complete but say, ‘Lord increase me in knowledge!’”⁷⁸ In other words, it is like the reader has to learn how to wait and when to pause upon living out the dialogic drama of everyday life. Umberto Eco nicely summarises the art of lingering when reflecting on Dante's *The Divine Comedy*: “The journey in Dante's dream might last a single night, but to reach the final

⁷⁴ The Oxford Dictionary of English defines a buffer zone as a “a neutral area serving to separate hostile forces or nations.” (p. 227). Buffer zones are also common in studies that explore environmental conservation. I have borrowed this term as a conceptual tool to help explain the dialogic medium of the Qur'ān.

⁷⁵ An example of frustrated dialogic attempts is in the story of Prophet Noah who appears to struggle for a long time in prompting his people to open a simple dialogic exchange. Noah is presented as a champion of dialogic hope; he exhausts every possible means that could secure a dialogic encounter despite being ignored by his people. For more insight, see Qur'ān 71:5-9.

⁷⁶ A case in point is Prophet Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, who communicated via messages and letters. Their dialogic exchanges are interestingly devoid of direct power struggles. One would expect two rulers to compete for control, but this was not the case. For more insight, see Qur'ān 27:15-44.

⁷⁷ The Qur'ān does not explicitly reveal why the suspension of dialogic exchange is maintained despite its incessant recording of dialogic encounters. Perhaps this is a Qur'ānic suggestion (*ishāra*) for the learner to ponder; intellectual complacency results from instant supply of ready-made answers, which the Qur'ān disfavours.

⁷⁸ Qur'ān 20:114.

apotheosis we have to work our way through a hundred cantos.”⁷⁹ In short, the Qur’ānic academy suspends dialogic exchanges by steering the wheel of its literary style from dialogic to didactic, and from the argumentative to enigmatic – a Qur’ānic literary technique that adds value to multi-dimensional learning by accommodating the varieties of human experience.

The hidden wisdom behind these contextual variations is compelling. Readers are challenged to maintain a rekindled curiosity that aids them to explore the reasons underpinning the outcomes of certain dialogic positions. Hence, dialogic exchanges in the Qur’ān are intended to prevent us from jumping to conclusions by passing hasty judgements before understanding the situational factors as well as the motives grappling the human condition. Dialogic learning is the antidote of prejudice, which means prejudgement (Latin: *prae + judicium*). As Julian Baggini states, “Prejudice arises because we reach a conclusion *in advance* of seeing the relevant facts. When we judge after having seen the truth, prejudice is replaced by fair judgement.”⁸⁰ In short, the logic of dialogue facilitates substantial learning and empathetic understanding. Thus, dialogic learning exceeds the logic of debating in virtue and practice. The latter embodies the will to dominate, which erodes trust and breeds contempt. This causes an enormous waste of energy. Dialogic exchange embodies the will to care, which encodes a common ground that nurtures friendship. In practice, debating is a loud combat characterised by mutual annihilation and dialogue is a humane encounter characterised by mutual recognition.

CONCLUSION: FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) cites an English hindsight that informs the relationship between speech and civility: “...the man who first flung a word of abuse at an enemy instead of a spear was the founder of civilization.”⁸¹ Today, dialogue as a counter-rhetoric to hate speech is often propagated against the violence of the Other. This is the popular conception of dialogue among many intellectuals. In effect, dialogue is employed on an ad hoc basis and subconsciously reduced to a mere tool that has a temporary reactionary function. This is not to deny dialogue’s vital role in resolving conflict. However, as this article has endeavoured to show, dialogue is more than a noun concept and cannot be downsized to elitist lip service. The Qur’ān’s down-to-earth guidance translates the notion of dialogue from a specialised noun concept into an interactive human context – ‘dialogic exchanges’ – describing people and their everyday interactions. Furthermore, debating as a war of words may constitute the bare minimum of civilisation, regulating physical violence. However, it creates the conditions for

⁷⁹ Umberto Eco, *Chronicles of a Liquid Society* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017), 226.

⁸⁰ Julian Baggini, *A Short History of Truth: Consolations for a Post-Truth World* (London: Quercus Editions Ltd, 2017), 91.

⁸¹ Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, “On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume II (1893-1895): Studies on Hysteria* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955).

symbolic violence, which can constitute a covert form of violence.⁸² Dialogic exchange is a precondition for the rebirth of a humane civilisation.

This article used the Arabic word *qawl* (statement/assertion) as a primary linguistic index of dialogic exchange in the Qur'ān. I quantitatively surveyed two morphological derivatives of the word *qawl* across the whole Qur'ānic text – *qul* ('say,' denoting God's voice) and *qālū* ('they said,' plural in the past tense, denoting voices of the Other vis-à-vis God). The interdisciplinary enquiry into the Qur'ān is an attempt to chart positive pathways to transition from debate to dialogic learning. The Qur'ān as an academy for learning dialogic exchange invites its learners to shift from one-dimensional rote learning to multi-dimensional renewed learning.

In the Qur'ān, the value of *all* dialogic exchanges is elevated to the rank of an art: ethically and aesthetically. The Qur'ān's dialogic medium illustrates such artistic elevation at two primary levels: justice and *ihsān* (excellence). To this end, this article employed content analysis by means of a basic coding system to analyse the emergent themes according to the three principles of invitational rhetoric: equality, immanent value and self-determination. The outcomes of the content analysis ascertained how the Qur'ān *records* multiple voices of dialogic exchange securing their autonomy and respect. Further, the in-text thematic analysis uncovered how the Qur'ān *accords* such voices, regardless of their moral character, with its aesthetic features, such as eloquence of speech. The Qur'ān's dialogic justice and dialogic *ihsān* with the other is hence inclusively modelled (angels, communities, prophets, polytheists, tyrants, Satan, etc.). This is a dialogic ideal that inspires active citizens to reconstruct the public sphere according to participatory notions of virtuous interaction and civic contribution.

The Qur'ān's dialogic medium is not a mere linguistic construct. What would a concrete dialogic medium look like in the public sphere beyond debating? It would be an open forum for people with genuine interest in meaningful discussion that develops their critical thinking and engagement with contemporary social issues.

Dialogic learning, which underpins the Qur'ān's invitational rhetoric framework for the learner, is comparable to the story of the five blind men who were asked to describe an elephant:

One man sees the elephant as a tree, another as a wall, a third as a rope, etc. When we ask the question, which of the blind men is right, the first answer tends to be, "all of them are right." But then immediately, comes the realization that, of course, none of them is right, in the sense of having a complete picture of the elephant. How the blind men need to interact in order for the elephant to emerge is a description of the skills and values of Dialogue.⁸³

In short, despite widespread debating, epistemic virtues such as a spirit of collective enquiry have not been explicitly rejected nor vices openly embraced.⁸⁴ This holds real hope for returning to a society of listeners that challenge the culture of total assimilation. Dialogic

⁸² A distinct example of symbolic violence is character assassination.

⁸³ Bela Banathy and Patrick M. Jenlink, *Dialogue as a Means of Collective Communication* (Boston, MA: Springer US, 2005), 84.

⁸⁴ Baggini, *A Short History of Truth*.

learning presupposes that, to get our interactions right, we need to get our attitudes to the interactions right.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Ibid.; Banathy and Jenlink, *Dialogue as a Means of Collective Communication*, 84.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Morphological derivations of the tri-root *q-w-l*

Arabic form of <i>qawl</i>	Transliteration	English translation
قال	qāla	He said
قالت	qālat	She said
قالا	qālā	They said (dual, masculine)
قالوا	qālū	They said (plural)
قلت	qulta (you said, masculine), qultu (I said, singular), qulti (you said, feminine)	You said or I said (singular)
قلتم	qultum	You said (plural)
أقول	aqūlu	I say (singular)
تقول	taqūlu	You say/she says (simple present Arabic verb, second person masculine, third person feminine)
تقولون	taqūlūna	You say (plural)
نقول	naqūlu	We say
يقولون	yaqūlūna	They say
قل	qul	Say (imperative)
قولا	qūlā	Say (dual, imperative)
قولوا	qūlū	Say (plural, imperative)
قيل	qīla	It was said
يقال	yuqāl	It is said

Table 2: References to the morphemes *qul* and *qālū* in the Qur'ān

Arabic morpheme	English translation	References		
		Page	Detail (chapter: verse)	Total
قل (<i>qul</i>)	Say	1	2:80; 2:91; 2:93; 2:94; 2:97; 2:111; 2:120; 2:135; 2:139; 2:140; 2:142; 2:189; 2:215; 2:217; 2:219; 2:219; 2:220; 2:222; 3:12; 3:15; 3:20 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 3:20 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 3:26; 3:29; 3:31; 3:32; 3:61 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 3:64; 3:73; 3:73; 3:84; 3:93; 3:95; 3:98; 3:99; 3:119; 3:154; 3:154; 3:165.	39
		2	3:168; 3:183; 4:63 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 4:77; 4:78; 4:127; 4:176; 5:4; 5:17; 5:18; 5:59; 5:60; 5:68; 5:76; 5:77; 5:100; 6:11; 6:12; 6:12; 6:14; 6:14; 6:15; 6:19; 6:19; 6:19; 6:19; 6:37; 6:40; 6:46; 6:47; 6:50; 6:50; 6:54 (<i>wa-qul</i> , then say); 6:56; 6:56; 6:57; 6:58; 6:63; 6:64; 6:65; 6:66; 6:71.	42
		3	6:71; 6:90; 6:91; 6:91; 6:109; 6:135; 6:143; 6:144; 6:145; 6:147 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 6:148; 6:149; 6:150; 6:151; 6:158; 6:161; 6:162; 6:164; 7:28; 7:29; 7:32; 7:32; 7:33; 7:158; 7:187; 7:187; 7:188; 7:195; 7:203; 8:1; 8:38; 8:70; 9:24; 9:51; 9:52; 9:53; 9:61; 9:64; 9:65; 9:81; 9:83 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 9:94; 9:105 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 9:129 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 10:15.	45

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		4	10:16; 10:18; 10:20 (<i>fa-qul</i> , so say); 10:21; 10:31; 10:31 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 10:34; 10:34; 10:35; 10:35; 10:38; 10:41 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 10:49; 10:50; 10:53; 10:58; 10:59; 10:59; 10:69; 10:101; 10:102; 10:104; 10:108; 11:13; 11:35; 11:121 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 12:108; 13:16; 13:16; 13:16; 13:16; 13:27; 13:30; 13:33; 13:36; 13:43; 14:30; 14:31; 15:89 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 16:102; 17:23 (<i>wa-qul</i> , but speak); 17:24 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 17:28 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 17:42; 17:50.	46
		5	17:51; 17:51; 17:53 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 17:56; 17:80 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 17:81 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 17:84; 17:85; 17:88; 17:93; 17:95; 17:96; 17:100; 17:107; 17:110; 17:111 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 18:22; 18:24 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 18:26; 18:29 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 18:83; 18:103; 18:109; 18:110; 19:75; 20:105 (<i>fa-qul</i> , so say); 20:114 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 20:135; 21:24; 21:42; 21:45; 21:108; 21:109 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 22:49; 22:68 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 22:72; 23:28 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 23:29 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 23:84.	39
		6	23:85; 23:86; 23:87; 23:88; 23:89; 23:93; 23:97 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 23:118 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 24:30; 24; 31 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 24:53; 24:54; 25:6; 25:15; 25:57; 25:77; 26:216 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 27:59; 27:64; 27:65; 27:69; 27:72; 27:92 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 27:93 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 28:49; 28:71; 28:72; 28:85; 29:20; 29:50; 29:52; 29:63; 30:42; 31:25; 32:11; 32:29; 33:16; 33:17; 33:28; 33:59; 33:63; 34:3; 34:22; 34:24; 34:24; 34:25.	46
		7	34:26; 34:27; 34:30; 34:36; 34:39; 34:46; 34:47; 34:48; 34:49; 34:50; 35:40; 36:79; 37:18; 38:65; 38:67; 38:86; 39:8; 39:9; 39:10; 39:11; 39:13; 39:14; 39:15; 39:38; 39:38; 39:39; 39:43; 39:44; 39:46; 39:53; 39:64; 40:66; 41:6; 41:9; 41:13 (<i>fa-qul</i> , then say); 41:44; 41:52; 42:15 (<i>wa-qul</i> , but say); 42:23; 43:81; 43:89 (<i>wa-qul</i> , and say); 45:14; 45:26; 46:4; 46:8; 46:9; 46:10; 48:11.	48
		8	48:15; 48:16; 49:14; 49:16; 49:17; 52:31; 56:49; 62:6; 62:8; 62:11; 64:7; 67:23; 67:24; 67:26; 67:28; 67:29; 67:30; 72:1; 72:20; 72:21; 72:22; 72:25; 79:18 (<i>fa-qul</i> , and say); 109:1; 112:1; 113:1; 114:1.	27
		Source: Quran Search, http://corpus.quran.com/search.jsp?q=%D9%82%D9%8F%D9%84%D9%92&s=1&page=1		
قالوا (<i>qālū</i>)	They said	1	2:11; 2:13; 2:14; 2:14; 2:25; 2:30; 2:32; 2:67; 2:68; 2:69; 2:70.	11
		2	2:71; 2:76; 2:76; 2:80; 2:88; 2:91; 2:93; 2:111; 2:116; 2:133; 2:135.	11
		3	2:156; 2:170; 2:246; 2:246; 2:247; 2:249; 2:250; 2:275; 2:285; 3:24; 3:75.	11
		4	3:81; 3:119; 3:147; 3:156; 3:167; 3:168; 3:173; 3:181; 3:181; 3:183; 4:46.	11
		5	4:77; 4:97; 4:97; 4:97; 4:141; 4:141; 4:153 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , so they said); 5:14; 5:17; 5:22; 5:24; 5:41; 5:61.	13
		6	5:64; 5:72; 5:73; 5:82; 5:85; 5:104; 5:109; 5:111; 5:113; 6:8 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they say).	10
		7	6:23; 6:27 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , and they said), 6:29 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 6:30; 6:31; 6:37 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 6:91; 6:124; 6:130; 6:136 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , and they said).	10
		8	6:138 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 6:139 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 7:5; 7:28; 7:37; 7:37; 7:43 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 7:44; 7:47; 7:48; 7:50.	11

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		9	7:70; 7:75; 7:77 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and then they said); 7:82; 7:95 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 7:111; 7:113; 7:115; 7:121; 7:125.	10
		10	7:129; 7:131; 7:132 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 7:134; 7:138; 7:149; 7:164; 7:172; 7:203; 8:21.	10
		11	8:31; 8:32; 9:59 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 9:74; 9:74; 9:81 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 9:816 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 10:68; 10:76; 10:78; 10:85 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , so they said).	11
		12	11:32; 11:53; 11:62; 11:69; 11:70; 11:73; 11:79; 11:81; 11:86; 11:91.	10
		13	12:8; 12:11; 12:14; 12:17; 12:44; 12:61; 12:63; 12:65; 12:71; 12:72.	10
		14	12:73; 12:74; 12:75; 12:77; 12:78; 12:85; 12:88; 12:90; 12:91; 12:95.	10
		15	12:97; 14:9 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 14:10; 14:21; 15:6 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 15:15 (<i>la-qālū</i> , they would say); 15:52 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , and they said); 15:53; 15:55; 15:58.	10
		16	15:63; 15:70; 16:24; 16:30; 16:86; 16:101; 17:49 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they say); 17:90 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 17:94; 17:98 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said).	10
		17	18:4; 18:10 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , and they said); 18:14 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , and they said); 18:19; 18:19; 18:21 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , and [then] they said); 18:94; 19:27; 19:29; 19:88 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 20:63.	11
		18	20:65; 20:70; 20:72; 20:87; 20:88 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , and they said); 20:91; 20:133 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 20:134 (<i>la-qālū</i> , they would have said); 21:5; 21:14.	10
		19	21:26 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 21:53; 21:55; 21:59; 21:60; 21:61; 21:62; 21:64 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , and they said); 21:68; 23:47 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , they said).	10
		20	23:81; 23:82; 23:106; 23:113; 24:12 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 25:5 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 25:7 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 25:18; 25:60; 25:63.	10
		21	26:36; 26:41; 26:44 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 26:47; 26:50; 26:71; 26:74; 26:96; 26:111; 26:116.	10
		22	26:136; 26:153; 26:167; 26:185; 27:13; 27:33; 27:47; 27:49; 27:56; 28:36.	10
		23	28:48; 28:48; 28:48 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 28:53; 28:55 (and they said); 28:57 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 29:24; 29:29; 29:31; 29:32; 29:33 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 29:50 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , but they said).	12
		24	31:21; 32:10 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 33:22; 33:67 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 33:69; 34:19 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , but they said); 34:23; 34:23; 34:35 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 34:41; 34:43; 34:43 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said).	12
		25	34:52 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said), 35:34 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 36:14 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , and they said); 36:15; 36:16; 36:18; 36:19; 36:52; 37:15 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 37:20 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , they said).	10
		26	37:28; 37:29; 37:97; 38:16 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 38:22; 38:60; 38:61; 38:62 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 39:71; 39:74 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said).	10
		27	40:11; 40:24 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , but they said); 40:25; 40:50; 40:50; 40:50; 40:74; 40:84; 41:5 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 41:14; 41:15 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 41:21 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 41:21.	13

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		29	44:14 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 45:24 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 45:25; 46:13; 46:22; 46:24; 46:29; 46:30; 46:34; 47:16.	10
		30	47:26; 51:25 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , they said); 51:28; 51:30; 51:32; 51:52; 52:26; 54:9 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 54:24 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , and they said); 57:14.	10
		31	58:3; 60:4; 61:6; 63:1; 64:6 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , but they said); 67:9; 67:10 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 68:26; 68:29; 68:31.	10
		32	71:23 (<i>wa-qālū</i> , and they said); 72:1 (<i>fa-qālū</i> , and they said); 74:43; 79:12; 83:32.	5
Source: Tanzil.net, http://tanzil.net/#search/quran/قَالُوا				

Qur'ānic morpheme	Total frequency in the Qur'ān
قل (qul) Say (God's instruction to Prophet Muhammad)	332
قالوا (qālū) They said (the Other)	332

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