CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS TO UTOPIAN ASPIRATIONS: EXPLORING AL-FĀRĀBĪ'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY FROM HIS BOOK ĀRĀ ʾ AHL AL MADĪNAT UL FĀḌILAH AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRENT MUSLIM COUNTRIES

Muhammad Umar Quraishi[1] and Mujahid Hussain Sargana[2]

[1]PhD Scholar, International Open University, The Gambia.
[2]Assistant Prof. Dr., Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Bahria University, Islamabad.

ABSTRACT

Al-Fārābī's vision of an ideal society, characterized by virtuous governance and the pursuit of wisdom, represents a utopian aspiration that resonates with the fundamental values of justice, ethics, and the common good. This study uses several qualitative analytical methods to understand Al-Fārābī's ideas and how they can be applied to address the complex political, social, and economic challenges faced by today's Muslim states. Furthermore, this paper explores the implications of Al-Fārābī's philosophy in the contemporary era, offering insights into the potential avenues for political reform, governance, and societal development. It discusses the role of wisdom and virtue in leadership, the importance of ethical principles in public policy, and the significance of fostering a harmonious and just society. By bridging the gap between Al-Fārābī's classical political philosophy and the contemporary Muslim world, this research aims to shed light on how his ideas can contribute to the development of a more equitable and prosperous future for Muslim countries. It underscores the enduring relevance of Al-Fārābī's utopian aspirations and invites a critical re-

[1]

_____

evaluation of his philosophy in the context of today's complex geopolitical landscape.

Keywords: *Fārābī, Politics, Khilāfah, Virtuous, Utopia.*

Corresponding author: Muhammad Umar Quraishi can be contacted at umar.leaderman@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Al-Fārābī (872-950CE) was originally from Central Asia, but mainly worked, lived and studied in Baghdad during the Abbasid Khilāfah. He later worked for the government of the Emirate of Aleppo under its Shia founder, Sayf al Dawlah al Ḥamdānī. He was "ascetic; he did not marry and did not have money" (Hussein, 2020). He was a prolific author, with his surviving works covering topics such as philosophy, medicine, psychology, and politics (Al-Fārābī's Psychology and Epistemology (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy), 2020). Having emigrated between Turkic and Arab lands, conversing in multiple languages including Greek, having a deep desire for knowledge meant he was widely respected and able to "overcome the existing differences in ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious grounds" (Turekhanova et al., 2016).

His philosophy was so highly regarded that Al-Fārābī (Alpharabius) is known as the second teacher, after Aristotle. The French 19th Century philosopher Massignon commented: "Al-Fārābī was one of the leading Islamic philosophers; highly interested in ancient sciences and like no other philosopher" (Hussein, 2020). The influence of Plato and Aristotle can be seen in Al-Fārābī's ideas, however, he simultaneously ensured they did not contradict common Islamic principles and showed

[2]

the ability to infuse them upon an Islamic basis. For example, he was influenced by Aristotle regarding humans being social animals and therefore society being an interaction of people based on needs. However, he differed with him, believing humans are the best of Allāh's creation, by having the power of reason. He extended classical philosophy and idealism with his ideas of personal pursuit of perfection and the Virtuous State.

According to Suleimenov et al. (2017) his "political doctrine represents the most developed and detailed reflection on the state and politics in the entire medieval Muslim political culture" and used his sophisticated ability to relate Muslim ideology to ancient philosophy. Al-Fārābī's own view on the relationship between philosophy and politics can be seen from his statement: "Philosophy is a theoretical art giving true knowledge of existence. Politics is an art correcting actions and guiding souls to happiness. They must exist in unity, as a philosopher-politician is one and the same. Philosophy and politics in their unity give both the required knowledge and the desired behavior" (Al-Fārābī, 2014, as cited in Suleimenov et al., 2017).

This paper explores Al-Fārābī's political ideas and their potential impact in the current context, where Muslim countries lag behind most other countries according to the UN Human Development Index (HDI) and have largely embraced a secular ideological political strategy. The authors explore how Al-Fārābī's frameworks of different states, his utopian virtuous ideal state and qualities of a ruler are relevant to Muslim countries today.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Walzer (1985) English translation and commentary of *Ārāʾ Ahl Al Madīnat Ul Fāḍilah* (*Opinions of The People of The Virtuous City*) was reviewed and as the title alludes the approach Al-Fārābī takes in discussing his political views is from the perspective of the population, their philosophical ideas and objectives. Although Al-Fārābī discussed his political ideas in several books such as *Kitab Al-Siyāsah Al-Madaniyah* (*The Book of Civil Politics*) this paper focuses on *Ārāʾ Ahl Al Madīnat Ul Fāḍilah* (*Opinions of the people of the Virtuous City*) (hereinafter *Ārāʾ*), as this is regarded as Al-Fārābī's magnum opus and covers the main ideas of *Kitāb Al-Siyāsah Al-Madaniyah* (Bukier, 2018). Additionally, it is considered a more significant book as it was completed at a later stage of his life when his ideas were more mature, and because it thoroughly focuses on fields related to both politics and philosophy such as metaphysics, ethics, psychology and sociology (Hussein, 2020).

Ārāʾ presents three major themes:

- Theology, angelic form and astronomy (chapters 1-6).

- Physical, spiritual, intellectual aspects of beings (chapters 7-14).

- Political philosophy and ethics (chapters 15-19).

The topics covered within the book show interdependence between natural science, the human soul and politics with religion. However, the authors have mainly focused on the third section to delve into Al-Fārābī's ideas on political philosophy, where he describes multiple spectrums of states according to

their purpose and levels of virtue. He also discusses the responsibilities of the ruler, as well responsibilities of the state.

Like many scholars, Al-Fārābī's logical foundation was that a state is required for cooperation and progression. Beyond the essential reasons, his uniqueness is that he entices his readers to a higher ideal: *the Virtuous City* (*Al Madīnat ul Fāḍilah*). This espouses a political system based upon divine law, encourages its citizens to upright moral character, and structures society based upon a hierarchical order akin to a meritocracy. In the socio-political aspects the virtuous city is at odds with the liberal paradigm. Unsurprisingly, in the pre-modern era neither nationalistic identity nor territorial borders were used to characterize a state.

Al-Fārābī's views on practical qualities of a ruler are discussed below, however, his philosophical, doctrinal and utopian stance can be observed, when he states the ideal ruler is a Prophet, who possesses full intellectual perfection. Turekhanova et al. (2016) discusses this further: "God is the ruler of the universe…God can govern the world and universe equally and can bring happiness….If the ruler can be like God, the ruler can bring genuine happiness to the people." The notion of a perfect ruler could be an extension of the Quranic notion of 'Khalīfat Allāh' people being Allāh's representatives on earth (Qurʾān 38:26).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative analytical methods to study Al-Fārābī's primary source, *Ārāʾ*, along with scholarly commentary and discussion from secondary sources. A thematic and

inductive approach is taken on the topic of Islamic governance to summarize his theories. The research approach covered:

- Descriptive analysis of his historical perspective.

- Categorization of his ideas into frameworks.

- Identifying where his ideas are missing and still relevant in the current era.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the discourse of political theory, scholars frequently model various forms of states and distinct stages of development, for example, Al-Ghazālī gives a pragmatic approach discussing the validity of imperfect imam (political leader) and touches on interdependence of different societal factors (Al-Ghazālī, 2013). Ibn Khaldūn provides a historical and sociological perspective describing the rise and decline of states, and an ideal state, which he calls Siyāsah Madaniyah (Khaldūn, 2015). Shah Waliyullāh describes a 4-stage civilizational maturity model he calls Irtifiqāt (Hermansen, 1982).

Similarly, Chapters 18 and 19 of *Ārāʾ* explain the nature and values of non-perfect states. Al-Fārābī uses a comparative government approach to construct a spectrum of states, where he ranks states based on their size, starting with city states and ending in the great society which is a union of multiple states. Of greater interest to this paper is his modelling based upon the goals a state pursues, and his ranking in a maturity model. Al-Fārābī uses constructivism to describe the societal values of some of the lower-level states and uses idealism to reach the pinnacle of his model, a utopian Virtuous State.

[6]

4.1 Framework of State Goals

Al-Fārābī's discussion on state goals hints at the political ideology of the state, and explains the goals which the state pursues, but not *per se* the methods, culture and artefacts used to pursue them. Although this section of the paper takes a largely descriptive approach to his political theories and models, it could be thought-provoking to extend this study by applying causal research to understand the underlying reasons for these pursuits. As Walzer (1985) discusses, at times it is lack of knowledge or due to inherent corruption, however this is beyond the scope of this paper. His state conceptualizations include:

1. Ḍarūriyah (Necessity) - Bukier (2018) lists this is as the lowest state where only the basic needs are prioritized, such as food, clothing, shelter and carnal gratification. Al-Fārābī considers this classification on states with economic problems and subsequently having these basic policies as their main goal (Khayrullaev 1967, p. 308). This stage of development could be relevant to a large proportion of OIC countries which on average lag approximately 30% behind the world average in Human Development Index (Human Development Reports, 2022), which measures countries on three fundamental dimensions; health, education, standard of living (Wibowo, 2019).

2. Badala or Nathala (Exchange or Meanness) – due to a difference of opinion over the Arabic text this category could be interpreted under two names. This difference could be reconciled by concluding the citizens of this

state have inherent meanness in accumulating wealth by exchanging commerce and have rejected the ultimate goal of *Sa'ādah* (happiness) for this (see below for elaboration on *Sa'ādah*).

3. Khawla Shaqwata (Hedonism and depravity) - where citizens focus on pleasures of senses, and pastimes. The state is pleased that first necessities of life are fulfilled, then there is abundant wealth, and then citizens are ignorant and focus on their pleasures. Since the era of Locke and the rise of Individualism this ideology has been spreading across the world in general and Ikenberry (2018) argues will prevail and "are deeply rooted and likely to persist".

4. Karāmah (Timocratic/Oligarchic) - basis of leadership and honor is derived from wealth, victory or personal relationships. In Muslim countries exhibit such qualities where wealth inequality is high in comparison to the rest of the world (and still increasing), a small number of rich elites' rule and serve their own kind. For example, in the MENA region, the "richest 10% of the population control 76% of all income, and 37 individual billionaires own as much wealth as the poorest half of the whole adult population." (United Nations. ESCWA, 2020)

5. Taghallub (Tyrannical/Despotic) - citizens co-operate to give victory and dominance over others, by force or persuasion. Al-Fārābī distinguishes between types of despotic states based upon their aim, mastery over others, desire to acquire possession for power. Across

the Muslim world currently there is a wide spectrum of states with authoritarian regimes, and regional powers vying for domination over smaller countries.

6. Jam'iyyah (Collective) – a state based on freedom and equality, however he warns this system faces challenges when there are widening socio-economic classes, such as disparity between rich and poor.

There are some contemporary gaps Al-Fārābī's political theory which would not have been apparent during his time (see limitation section for details). There is one missing aspect which is central to the topic of this paper: Islamic political ideology. To address this, the authors wish to add two more types of state based on the level of implementation of Islam with the political system of the state.:

7. Secular - this is a state that wishes to distance its political governance from the Islamic faith. Kuru (2009) highlights there are 20 Muslim majority countries currently who declare themselves as secular states.

8. Symbolically Islamic - there are a small number of states which claim to represent some aspect of Islam constitutionally and politically. Kuru (2009) mentions 15 Muslim countries have Islam as the established state religion and eleven make a claim of an "Islamic Government". The extent to which this claim can be validated is beyond the scope of this paper.

There are several points to note regarding the state categorizations above:

- There are causal factors which drive states towards one of the categories above, such as ideology, political structure, social structure, wealth distribution, etc.

- There exists an inter-dependent cycle between the type of state and its social economic political progress, such that they are both the cause and the effect of each other.

- The categories overlap and it is difficult to precisely and practically map contemporary states to them. It could be argued Muslim countries are frequently led by despotic oligarchic regimes with growing liberalistic and hedonistic tendencies and meanness in accumulating wealth. Therefore, Muslim countries are simultaneously affected by several of the adverse factors above.

The categorization of states is useful to consider against the 57 OIC Muslim states and what they pursue. Al-Fārābī makes specific mention of the rulers having greater responsibility than the citizens, in that the rulers are not ignorant but more morally deviant (fāsiq) to impose such a type of state. His concept of a deviant leader potentially going beyond repair has parallels with Ibn Khaldūn's notion of a senile state going beyond repair.

4.2 Framework of Virtue

Al-Fārābī introduces another scale for assessing states, based on the level of virtue, he categorizes the following:

1. Ignorant (Jāhiliyyah) – This state and its citizens have deviated from virtue the most and are ignorant of true

happiness (*Sa'ādah*). So much so, if they happened to be guided to happiness, they lack the ability to comprehend it or the desire to believe it.

2. Immoral - this is the state that wantonly rejects true happiness *Sa'ādah*, in pursuit of worldly happiness and pleasures.

3. Astray/Erring - this is the state that has misunderstood *Sa'ādah*

Across all the above states the rulers' and citizens' primary concern is in the worldly happiness of pleasure, physical health and wealth. According to Suleimenov et al. (2017), as a consequence the state is frequently involved in conflict with other states. Ultimately, such a state pursues worldly aims instead of divine aims of pleasing Allāh, and its methods would lack Islamic justice and morality, this would distance it from the ideology of an Islamic Political System.

Al-Fārābī's historical context explains his focus on the notion of virtue. At the time the Abbasid rulers such as Al-Muqtadir faced doctrinal rivalries, political revolts, assassinations from family members and such conditions must have driven the desire for virtuous and stable leadership. This is relevant to the current era where unstable leadership, implementing secular political systems and liberal social systems dominate much of the Muslim world and as a result Al-Fārābī's desire for virtuous leadership appears even more relevant. As Turekhanova et al (2016) argues "against mass vulgarization and profanation of religious values, growth of extremist, ultrarevolutionary moods …it is necessary to propagandize more actively philosophical

and political and sociological ideas of classical Islamic thinkers who offered peaceful, evolutionary manners and forms of transformation of society which cornerstone the priority of universal internal, spiritual and moral values."

4.3 Qualities and Responsibilities of the Ruler

Al-Fārābī is similar to other major Islamic political science scholars, such as Al-Mawārdī, Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Khaldūn, in giving a detailed interdisciplinary discussion on the qualities and responsibilities of an Islamic ruler. There is consensus on fundamental qualities such as the leader being a free, sane, Muslim, male and adult. They all delve into competency related attributes such as eloquence, wisdom, discernment and insight, physical health and bravery. Al-Fārābī is unique to the three scholars mentioned above, in that he does not comment upon personal qualities expected such as the piety and character of a ruler. This is highly applicable for the ruler of an Islamic ideological state and in stark contrast to secular Muslim rulers of today. Al-Fārābī does, however, discuss other Islamic knowledge related strengths; Fiqhi (jurisprudential) knowledge and ability to perform Ijtihād (independent legal reasoning).

Al-Fārābī's view on the ideal ruler was partly influenced by Plato's ideal ruler being the philosopher-king. However, he differed and applied an Islamic doctrinal theory describing the ideal ruler as a Prophet, who is uniquely supported with divine guidance and combines practical, rhetorical and moral virtue (Al-Fārābī, 2014, as cited in Suleimenov et al., 2017). Turekhanova et al (2016) adds a moral angle to Al-Fārābī's utopian aspirations for the ruler to be "abstinent, despise wealth and was exempted from money-making and other defects." By

way of responsibilities, Doskozhanova *et al* (2016) summarize Al-Fārābī's process of development of the ruler "The perfect philosopher reaches first theoretical virtues, and then the practical virtues, and then is able to endow these virtues among peoples and cities". Al-Fārābī's ethical virtuous leadership style could be applied in the current era through the notion of servant or stewardship leadership style and governance staying within the Sharī'ah limits. Of all the leadership qualities discussed in this section, virtue is perhaps the most absent and would create an environment most in line with Islamic principles. The relevancy of an overall utopian model is further discussed in the Relevancy and Limitations sections below.

Al-Fārābī displays pragmatism when he steps back from his utopian prophetic description and reduces the qualities of rulers to:

1. Wisdom - Intelligence-related competencies he mentions include eloquence, wisdom, discernment, and insight. These would be necessary components of most rulers across all times, and therefore would constitute the criteria for choosing a ruler in a contemporary state.

2. Knowledge of the laws and customs established by the former imams of jurisprudence. This is largely absent today and irrelevant to the ruler of a secular state.

3. Ability to perform Ijtihād (independent legal reasoning) - There is difference of opinion regarding the ability of the ruler to perform Ijtihād. Al-Fārābī (like Al-Mawārdī and Ibn Khaldūn) states it is a requirement which is contrary to scholars such as Al-Ghazālī and Ibn

[13]

Taymiyyah who hold the idea it was abrogated beyond the initial Khalīfahs, and it was sufficient for the ruler to rely upon and follow scholarly opinions from others. In contemporary times where complexity has increased and political jurisprudence is underdeveloped from premodern times, it would be more appropriate for the ruler to rely upon scholars in each field.

4. Discernment, ingenuity and eloquence – These are all natural leadership qualities and would be desirable in any ruler.

5. Physical health allowing the ruler to be both a warrior and a military leader - Physical competency qualities, such as physical health and bravery could be less critical in the current era of sedentary lifestyle and where disability aids are more available.

He also discusses the notion of a Joint Management Team, where the ruler "relies on the faithful talented assistants and advisers" and leverages their additional skill sets (Turekhanova et al, 2016). This has parallels to the consultive and collaborative approach used by the Prophet (ﷺ) with his companions for institution building based on Qurʾān 3:159 "It was thanks to Allāh's mercy that you were gentle to them." (Hussain et al, 2016).

Another quality frequently discussed is the that of being Qurayshi descent (as required according to Al-Mawārdī, Al-Ghazālī and Shah Waliyullāh). Amongst other evidence, this is based on the ḥadīth "*There will be 12 Muslim rulers.... all of them will be from Quraysh*" (Bukhārī 7222, with subtly different

[14]

wording in Muslim 33:8). However, Al-Fārābī appears to stay quiet regarding this quality.

4.4 Responsibilities of the State

Islamic political scholars typically address the following key themes when discussing the responsibilities of the Islamic polity:

- Islamic justice and penal system.

- Islamic and moral education.

- Islamic departments, such as ministry of prayer (ṣalāh) and propagation (daʾwah).

- Other government departments, such as trade, economics, defence.

Al-Fārābī takes a more spiritual and ideological approach to focus on the first two themes, as opposed to the more practical aspects of governance in the last two themes. In contrast, later scholars such as Al Mawārdī in his *Al-Aḥkām as-Sulṭāniyyah* (The Laws of Islamic Governance) and Shah Waliyullāh in his *Hujjat Allāh Al-Bālighah* (The Conclusive Argument from God) have written extensively across all four themes. Kamālī (2016) describes how the structure of the state and its source of power changed and evolved over several centuries. The main power base revolved between the ruler, his governors and the Sharīʾah. During the Khilāfah Rāshidah and immediately after, the Khalīfah was the strongest stakeholder. However, by the time of Al-Fārābī, the Khalīfah in the capital Baghdad was weak, after the Sultans and military rulers of provinces had usurped most

[15]

_____

power from him, in exchange for symbolic recognition, for example on coinage and during the Friday Khuṭbah (sermon).

4.5 Al Madīnat ul Fāḍilah (The Virtuous State)

One of central themes to Al-Fārābī's political philosophy is that of an ideal state, which may have been influenced by Plato and Aristotle who also discussed the concept. From the modern era political scholars such as Hobbes and Locke had similar ideas, as well did Muslims scholars such as Ibn Khaldūn and Shah Waliyullāh.

In Al-Fārābī's opinion, human happiness is the ultimate aim of the state and the path to true happiness is possible through virtue (such as chastity, noble actions, opposing evil). Bukier (2018) states the highest stage _Al Madinat ul Fāḍilah_ (The Virtuous State), is where all needs are complete, all vice is removed, and knowledge and ideas are discussed and progressed. Suleimenov et al (2017) explains Al Fārābī's ideal society-state is an association of virtuous people who aim at achieving universal happiness. "The goal of the inhabitants of the virtuous city is not to achieve domination and possession of the world and other people, but to aspire to a higher spiritual goal" (Kamarova, 2013, p. 3). Although this is the highest form of state Al-Fārābī describes, the pursuing of higher spiritual Islamic goals is fundamental shift in ideology, which is in stark contrast to the six categories of state goals mentioned above and in contrast to most of the Muslim world today. Al-Fārābī further mentions that of the six imperfect states, the state of Ḍarūriyah, Karāmah and Jam'iyyah have most potential of progressing to the Virtuous State (Suleimenov et al., 2017).

[16]

He differed from Plato's concept of freedom in "*The Republic*," which is rooted in personal liberty, through the introduction of his concept of *Sa'ādah*. Turekhanova et al (2016) expands the notion of *Sa'ādah* from intra-society to an international level "A virtuous society strives to preserve the souls of all its inhabitants...In a virtuous society (*al-ijtimā' al-Fāḍil*) and a virtuous city (*al-Madīnat ul Fāḍilah*), everyone cooperates to gain happiness through goodness. A virtuous world (*al-Ma'mūra al- Fāḍilah*) is one in which all nations collaborate to achieve universal happiness. A virtuous society strives to preserve the souls of all its inhabitants." Whereas these are the fundamental aspects of an Islamic society, the focus on citizens attaining felicity through virtue is lacking in the current era. Most Muslim states have adopted capitalist and liberal values for fulfilling citizens' needs. Although the Islamicate may respect traditional values, the overarching political institutions are secular in nature and therefore the concept of virtue and morality is largely ignored.

4.6 Sequence of *Sa'ādah* (Felicity)

Al-Fārābī describes an inter-connected sequence of measures through which true happiness of inhabitants is achieved (Suleimenov et al, 2017):

1. Establishment of justice by a ruler - described as the heart of the state.

2. Enlightenment of the people and education in basic existential sciences - which is the reasonable means to achieving happiness.

3. Moral and intellectual education – responsibility of the ruler to heal the soul, (unlike a doctor who heals the body).

4. Dissemination of good and the best manners, habits and moral standards promoting the achievement of happiness, mutual respect, support and understanding.

5. All other areas of life e.g. economic and political ones – promote the solution of the main task of spiritual improvement of people in order to achieve happiness.

The longer-term consequences from the Virtuous State focusing on happiness (i.e. perfect knowledge and high moral standards) is that it serves humanity after the death of an individual and these benefits of spiritual culture transfer from one generation to another, growing exponentially over time. The best intellectual and moral achievements worked out by each generation are developed and perfected by their descendants.

This sequence is relevant for contemporary states working top-down and politically towards increasing morality and *Sa'ādah* in their society. In that the first step is establishment of a just ruler (Al-Imām Al-Ādil), whose justice would be based on Sharī̄ʿah, which is institutionally absent today. Turekhanova et al (2016) explains "Justice of Al-Fārābī [is] one of the main living conditions of the ideal society. Justice concerns everything, including distribution of general welfare (material and moral)". The leader would then implement and disseminate good practices via educational policies and other state apparatus.

4.7 Features of the Virtuous State

Suleimenov et al (2017) notes personal interests take second place, to the whole of society, "In "Aphorisms of the Statesman", Al-Fārābī analyzes human society starting from the family and home, which serve a common purpose. In the Virtuous State, all layers of the population peacefully coexist since there is no sharp inequality of people. The state cares about all citizens in general, about each group of people, about each person." This is in contrast to a hedonistic state where personal pleasures and individual autonomy are given preference over broader societal values.

Regarding structure of the population and an epistemic elite community he had similar views to Plato who considered an ideal society as the unification and hierarchy of three unequal social groups: rulers, strategists, producers, thereby showing that in an ideal society people cannot be equal in their duties, but, on the contrary, each person fulfils a certain assigned role (Suleimenov, 2017), since each person has his or her own soul. Al-Fārābī, however, regarded Plato's ideas as incomplete. Regarding the Ruler he said requires knowledge, practical skills and rhetorical skills. As they are meant to lead by example then they need moral virtue.

Suleimenov et al. (2017) comments on the foreign policy of the Virtuous State. Like most states it is to fundamentally protect its citizens from attacks of external enemies, i.e. to organize cohesive defence, but uniquely it only carries out defensive wars and there is no suggestion of promoting or spreading the virtuous ideology to other states. This utopian view does not provide strong international relation policy based upon anarchy

[19]

theory, the security dilemma or realpolitik. It also misses the duty of propagating the Islamic ideology to other states.

4.8 Relevancy

Although this paper takes a nostalgic approach to understand Al-Fārābī's classical political ideas, no substantial comprehensive form of Islamic political implementation has existed for a century and as Hallaq (2012) resolutely states the "Sharia is institutionally dead and politically abused". Therefore, in order to apply Al-Fārābī's theories in a new modern context which is very distinct in multiple aspects from his era, long after any previous implementation and even more distant from the era of revelation, it would require reinterpretation of classical ideas, reconceptualization of key notions and stakeholders, before any relevant and sustainable reimplementation can occur. Even the most fundamental constituent parts of the Islamic polity have evolved over 1300 years of implementation, such as the notion of power moving between the Amīr, the Khalīfah, the Sultans and the Ummah. As Ovamir Anjum summarizes "The institutional design of any future confederation of Muslim governments, in short, will have to use the ancient resources of Islamic tradition, but equally important will be the adoption of compatible contemporary institutions" (Who Wants the Caliphate? | Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, n.d.).

A principle emphasized by Al-Fārābī is that of justice and rule of law. Although this may seem obvious and already implemented in current times, it is important to make a distinction between the various departments of the justice system of a secular state in contrast to an Islamic State, which Al-Fārābī was implying.

The Islamic system would be based on upholding Sharī'ah and Allāh's rights, as opposed to a secular liberal state implementing positive laws, upholding personal freedoms, and limits are set so individuals cannot harm each other.

Al-Fārābī's highly theoretical and philosophical approach to discussing political ideas makes his ideas more timeless in contrast to classical scholars who have delved into laws and rulings which are inevitably contextual to their times. Al-Mawārdī details the contractual process of *Bay'ah* (pledging oath of allegiance to the ruler), via touching or kissing the Imām's hand, or by kissing his ring. As the structure of society, industry and political agency has changed significantly such rulings seem less relevant and Al-Fārābī's ideas seem even more useful in helping to understand and implement the fundamental objectives and spirit of the Sharī'ah. An important example could be the process of selecting a ruler and the notion of political participation has been neglected since the era of Khilāfah Rāshidah, when the process became hereditary and remained that way for the most part of 1250 years.

Some areas of the Islamic political system are completely missing today among secular Muslim countries. Besides the functional Islamic departments for establishing acts of worship, such as Ṣalāh, Zakāh, Ḥajj, Al-Fārābī particularly mentions a department for Enlightenment of Citizens. This would be responsible for promoting morals and spiritual standards, enjoining good and forbidding evil. Such a department provides strategic benefits of ongoing spiritual development, however, there is a short-term critical need for spreading such thought. In the contemporary era, a century since the last Khilāfah was

[21]

abolished, the desire to live under Sharīʿah and understanding of its benefits has waned. This would need to be addressed before the full power and spirit of the Sharīʿah is implemented in a state.

4.9 Summary

To summarize Al-Fārābī's theories on types of States and levels of virtue the authors have illustrated the following conceptual framework. This simplifies and categorizes the political theories a state implements. In reality, these are multifaceted and the priorities are overlapping. Additionally, these evolve throughout the life of the state, and vary based on several factors such as size, location and culture.

Figure 1. Pursuit of different states
Source: Authors' own model.

4.10 Limitations

Al-Fārābī is known for his rich mix of knowledge and skills; being a political scholar, with a philosophical background and applying Islamic principles to derive solutions. However, it would be accurate and balanced to critically analyze some of his weaknesses and limitations.

Although the strength and uniqueness of Al-Fārābī's reasoning and ideas came from Greek Neo-Platonist philosophical (O'Meara, 2003) and rational influences, this could also be regarded as a weakness in that he provides little primary religious evidence (from the Qurʾān and Sunnah). This is unusual to other political scholars such as Al-Mawārdī, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Khaldūn who frequently cite the Qurʾān, Sunnah and the era of Khilāfah Rāshidah, especially evidence from the second Khalīfah, Umar.

Al-Fārābī's aspirations and descriptions of a utopian state ruled by a Prophet or philosopher are criticized by practitioners and pragmatists, who question its purpose, and conclude such a state will never be established. Indeed, in the post War on Terror era, a Virtuous State based on morality and decency according to Islamic ideals, is frequently labelled fanatic or extremist. Bukier (2018) responds, despite being "imaginative and fanciful....it embodies great themes and aims at noble human goals and objectives", thereby providing a useful vision and ambitious goal to aim towards. Targeting an ideal vision is consistent with Muslims following the best of example (*Uswatul Ḥasanah*) in the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in all aspects of their life. In particular his prophecy that there would exist once again a "state based upon the Prophetic method" (*Musnad Imām*

[23]

Aḥmad, 18430). The deep and strategic influence of philosophical ideas should not be underestimated based on a narrow context, "the virtuous mind of modern civilization was founded by thinkers as al-Fārābī .... who aspired to reorganize public life on reasonable bases" (Al-Fārābi, 1973, p. 95).

An obvious limitation in Al-Fārābī's theoretical utopian vision is the lack of practical description of its functional aspects and in the methodology that could bring it into existence. His reliance on abstract values such as virtue means he ignores any pragmatic approaches rooted in Realpolitik. Therefore, although the moral virtuous aspirations are desirable, missing and relevant in the Muslim world today, little practical implementation process is provided. Understanding how Al-Fārābī's theories could inform government policy and bureaucracy would be a useful way to extend this study.

Suleimenov et al (2017) notes Al-Fārābī's text discusses the concepts of cities and societies despite large states existing at the time, particularly the Abbasid Khilāfah which was the largest of all Khilāfah states by land mass. This could have been due it being easier to describe political theories on city states in contrast to large complex empires, or because of his exposure to Greek philosophy which was developed in and based upon multiple city-states in ancient Greece.

There are several developments since Al-Fārābī's historical context, which naturally leaves contemporary gaps in his political theory. Addressing such gaps are beyond the scope of this academic paper but would be useful to consider in order to extend this discussion and due to the impact across Muslim

countries in the post-colonial era. These include notions such as:

- State identity - factors such as nationalism and changes in identity due to a globalized world order.

- Foreign policy - In focusing on the internal ideas and policies of the state, Al-Fārābī has perhaps left a gap in International Relations. This is more pressing in today's globalized era and all states must establish international relations with other states and non-state actors, to manage economic Hyper-globalizationism and cultural Homogenism influences.

- Education policy - covering Islamic and secular policies to address individual morals and societal corruption. Al-Fārābī discusses moral and virtuous values which a modern state would need to propagate via educational policies and systems in order to spread and protect these values and Islamic ideology amongst its citizens.

- Multiple Muslim states – Although at the time of Al-Fārābī, there existed three main seats of power across Cordoba, Fatimid Egypt and Abbasid in Baghdad, along with tens of smaller Emirates, in today's era there are 57 Muslim majority countries, with largely secular ideologies and mainly led by Muslim rulers. Addressing any form of political revival would need to address relations with other Muslim countries.

5. CONCLUSION

Al-Fārābī's views are broadly in consensus with other Islamic scholars in terms of the need for an Islamic political order, guided by Islamic principles, where sovereignty belongs to Allāh and citizens pursue happiness via virtue. He differed in his ability to rejuvenate classical idealism of Platonic era, evolve ideas through an Islamic perspective, pay special attention to the political branch of philosophy and make it relevant for his era. Although it has been more than one thousand years since Al-Fārābī's political philosophy, his ideas on the perfect state, the virtues to pursue and the ways of building a civil society largely retain their value and are important to modern Islamic Political science discourse and to today's Muslim states.

This is one of the key reasons why Al-Fārābī's work has been studied with the aim of understanding his historical ideas and to inform the reader on how more Virtuous States can be formed in the current time and context.

The central themes to Al-Fārābī's political philosophy can be summarized as:

- Humans require mutual understanding in order to live and collaborate together. Actively using the power of reason and categorization by goals, virtue etc leads to secure human progress.

- The ruler (Khalīfah) should have deep philosophical knowledge, besides understanding and following Islamic rulings and their derivations.

- His utopian state helps not only to create order allowing citizens to collaborate effectively, but also encourages at a personal level the pursuit of perfection.

Applying Al-Fārābī's ideas could help in understanding and developing economic, political, moral and spiritual maturity in Muslim countries, which currently lag behind the rest of the world on most major indices.

REFERENCES

Al-Ghazali, A.H. (2013). Al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād Moderation in Belief. Trans. Aladdin M. Yaqub (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

Bukier, A. A. (2018). Utopian Literature of the Ideal Society A Study in Al-Farabi's Virtuous City & More's Utopia. *Al-Andalus journal for Humanities & Social Sciences*, *17*(18).

Doskozhanova, A., Nurysheva, G., & Tuleubekov, A. (2016). State policy as virtue in doctrines of Plato and Al-Fārābī. *Man India*, *96*, 1979-1993.

Fārābī, A. N. M., & Walzer, R. (1985). Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr Al-Fārābī's Mabādiʾ Ārāʾ Ahl Al-Madīnah Al-fāḍilah: a Revised Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary. Great Books of the Islamic World, Inc.

Germann, N. (2016). Al-Fārābī's philosophy of society and religion.

Hallaq, W. (2012). *The impossible state: Islam, politics, and modernity's moral predicament*. Columbia University Press.

Hermansen, M. K. (1982). *Shah Wali Allāh's Theory of Religion In" Hujjat Allāh Al-Baligha" With A Translation of Volume I Of" Hujjat Allāh Al-Baligha."* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Chicago).

Hussain, M., & Khan, S. M. (2016). Leadership Qualities of Administrators in the Light of Seerat-Ul-Nabi (Saw). Abha'th, 1(4), 17.

Hussein, A. D. N. A. (2020). AL-FĀRĀBĪ POLITICAL THOUGHT. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, *17*(6), 15879-15889.

Ikenberry, G. J. (2018). Why the Liberal World Order Will Survive. Ethics & International Affairs, 32(1), 17–29. Cambridge University Press.

Kamali, M. H. (2016). Caliphate and Political Jurisprudence in Islam: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. The Muslim World, 106(2), 384-403.

Khaldūn, I. (2015). The Muqaddimah: an introduction to history-abridged Edition. Princeton University Press.

Kuru, A. T. (2009). Secularism and state policies toward religion: The United States, France, and Turkey. Cambridge University Press. Musnad (n.d.), https://ia600701.us.archive.org/29/items/musnad_hanbal/musnda14.pdf

O'Meara, D. J. (2003). *Platonopolis: Platonic political philosophy in late antiquity*. Oxford University Press.

Suleimenov, P., Kuanyshkyzy, I., Sandykbayeva, U., Kussainova, K. T., & Smagulova, K. (2017). The Doctrine of the Virtuous City of Abu Nasr al-Fārābī: A Philosophical Analysis. *Man of India*, *97*(23), 473-484.

Turekhanova, A. B., & Akshalova, B. N. (2016). Al-Fārābī and his view of ideal society. *ХАБАРШЫ*, 238.

United Nations, ESCWA. (2020). A SOLIDARITY TAX TO ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON POVERTY IN

THE ARAB REGION. https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/20-00187_covid-19-policy-brief-en.pdf

Who wants the caliphate? | Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research. (n.d.). Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research. https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/who-wants-the-caliphate

WIBOWO, M. G. (2019). Quality of human development index (HDI) in Muslim countries (Case study of OIC members). JEBI (Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Bisnis Islam), 4(1), 1-13.