**Research interests Summary**

Ali Elyasi, PhD. ABD

Carleton University,

Contemporary political life is decidedly marked with unprecedented institutional distrust and misinformation actively undermining public discussions and exasperating political polarization. These divisive political conditions carry grave risks for liberal democratic governments. My dissertation looked at polarized conditions of 18th England and David Hume’s responses to these conditions. In so doing, I came to realize that Hume’s theories share surprising similarities with a 10th century Muslim philosopher, Abu Nasr Muhammad Alfarabi. To be more precise: it was David Hume’s philosophy of the mind that proved compatible with Alfarabi’s philosophy of religion and its relationship with politics.

My post-doctoral project will be a continuation of my dissertation work, whereas my dissertation primarily focused on David Hume’s theories, I would like to focus my post-doctoral project on Alfarabi by reclaiming and correcting some historical and ideological preconceptions surrounding his political philosophy. To this end, I will be engaging with two sets of literature on Alfarabi’s work. The first set of literature portrays an Alfarabi who is a Neo-Platonist Muslim focused on aligning politics with the teachings of the Qu’ran; while the second set of literature portrays Alfarabi as a philosopher engaging in a fiercely confrontational intellectual discourse with theological opponents. The first set of literature includes Iranian political philosophers, Richard Walzer, Majid Fakhry and Massimo Campanini, all of whom helped propel Alfarabi into academic intellectual conversation and continue to dominate interpretations of his works. My project will be critical of these scholars’ work and in so doing will align me more closely with scholars from the second group who read Alfarabi as a philosopher; academics in this group include names such as Leo Strauss, Muhsin Mahdi, David M. DiPasquale and Rasoul Namazi. My research squarely aligns with the second group of scholars and contributes to the continued transformation of Alfarabi scholarship. My focus will be on rediscovering and correcting many of the misconceptions about Alfarabi’s work pertaining to political polarization and the role of religion in politics.

My doctoral dissertation compared Hume’s theory of the mind and Alfarabi’s philosophy of religion. The comparison helped me see Alfarabi’s potential for modern political life by analyzing his work away from historical events and ideologies dominating interpretations of his work, to which many scholars subscribe. In my post-doctoral research, I will use textual analysis, archival research, and historical studies to explore how Alfarabi’s writings on politics can provide insights for contemporary polarized political life. Alfarabi’s political philosophy has received less attention from democratic and liberal theorists, because he is primarily associated with the Islamic tradition by the first group of scholars. My project aims to break this presupposition and show how Alfarabi’s political theories respond to the universal human condition and by extension provides an underexplored philosophical lens for reflection on contemporary modern liberal way of life.

Despite the advancements made in diversifying liberal political theory, few scholars have seriously considered Alfarabi’s thoughts on practical grounds for modern western philosophical difficulties. This makes my research significant in two distinct ways: if Alfarabi’s insights prove theoretically and practically applicable to contemporary politics, the post-doctoral research will kindle scholarly interest in Alfarabi’s works from a practical angle for liberal democratic theorists. Alternatively, if Alfarabi’s political philosophical insights prove incompatible with liberal way of life, then understanding his theoretical weaknesses would be useful in designating viable theoretical alternatives more effectively. Hence, the novelty of this project is in the fact that either underutilized theoretically reflective tools will be unearthed, or Alfarabi’s theoretical weaknesses will help theorists find suitable alternatives. The research will contribute to the literature on Alfarabi and history of the Islamic golden. Two papers will be produced: the first on Alfarabi’s historical conditions and the second on his theoretical potential today. The theme that connects the two papers is political polarization and the tensions between private life and politics.

I believe University of Toronto’s Elahe Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies will be a perfect place for me to bring this project to life. The institute has the resources I need to challenge many false assumptions about a great Iranian Polymath, Alfarabi. In times when Iran’s ancient philosophical culture is becoming quickly forgotten or destroyed, it is more imperative than ever for Iranian enthusiastic scholars to vigorously revive and preserve this rich history.

**Synopsis of Monograph**

Ali Elyasi, PhD. ABD

Carleton University,

**Title:** Unlikely Alliance: Hume and Alfarabi on political factionalism and imagination.

**Chapter Breakdown:**

Introduction. 26 pages

Chapter 1 (Hume’s Enduring Stability): The chapter establishes Hume’s basic political theoretical premises with a focus on his thoughts on political polarization. 43 pages.

Chapter 2 (Abstractions Against Politics): The chapter focuses on Hume’s institutional model of tackling factionalism in “The Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth”. 45 pages

Chapter 3 (A Gentlemanly Approach): The chapter focuses on Hume’s ideal of rhetoric and persuasion and demonstrates a tension in his theoretical solutions and historical analysis. 45 Pages.

Chapter 4 (Challenges of Abstractions): The chapter focuses on Hume’s idea of ‘True Religion’ and argues, against the common reading of Hume’s ‘True Religion’, that Hume treated ‘True Religion’ as a serious political theory in order to counteract the sentiment of zealots. 48 pages.

Chapter 5 (An Unlikely Alliance): the chapter focuses on the similarities between Hume’s theory of the mind and Alfarabi’s theory of virtuous religion in order to demonstrate that a theoretical conversation between the two is not only possible but could prove productive. 45 pages.

Conclusion. 15 pages.

**Contribution to the field:** My contribution to the field is the fact that my work demonstrated unlikely similarities between David Hume and Alfarabi in their theory of the mind and persuasion. Alfarabi and Hume have never been put into conversation with each other since they are believed to be from two drastically different schools with drastically different projects. My dissertation proves that these assumptions are faulty and unnecessary limit political philosophical discussions. My dissertation demonstrated that not only is a theoretical discussion between David Hume and Alfarabi possible, but that can be theoretically beneficial for modern democratic theorists focused on the problem of political polarization.