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CONCEPTUALISING STATE BENEVOLENCE FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The advent of COVID-19 pandemic brought in its wake, the need for the state to show benevolence towards the vulnerable during crises. However, the term 'state benevolence' appears ambiguous in literature, and could either be referring to activities of the welfare state, or foreign aid donations by governments. This paper intends to resolve the ambiguity by propounding a state benevolence concept from an Islamic perspective. Based on content analysis of extant literature, the findings indicate the Islamic worldview considers government environmental protection endeavours, together with the activities of the welfare state and foreign aid donations by the government, as three main ways in which the state can exhibit benevolence to all creations of Allah. The inadequacy of literature on state benevolence, the lack of clarity from the Islamic worldview about the role of the state in providing benevolence, and the lack of information on the type of rewards expected to accrue to a benevolent state, are three main limitations of this study. By providing a holistic description of state benevolence using both conventional and Islamic economics literature, this paper is novel in the political economy literature. If adopted, the Islamic state benevolence concept will avail a country's government in reducing poverty among its citizenry, contribute to reducing income inequality existing between rich and poor countries, and enhance the sustainable management of the environment.

KEYWORDS: STATE BENEVOLENCE, ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW, WELFARE STATE, FOREIGN AID DONATIONS, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

ABSTRAK

Kemunculan pandemik COVID-19 membawa bersamanya keperluan bagi negara untuk menunjukkan kemurahan hati terhadap golongan yang terdedah semasa krisis. Namun, istilah 'benevolensi negara' kelihatan samar dalam kesusasteraan, dan boleh merujuk sama ada kepada aktiviti negara kesejahteraan atau sumbangan bantuan asing oleh kerajaan. Kertas kerja ini bertujuan untuk menyelesaikan kekaburan tersebut dengan mengemukakan konsep benevolensi negara dari perspektif Islam. Berdasarkan analisis kandungan kesusasteraan sedia ada, dapatan menunjukkan pandangan dunia Islam menganggap usaha perlindungan alam sekitar kerajaan, bersama-sama dengan aktiviti negara kesejahteraan dan sumbangan bantuan asing oleh kerajaan, sebagai tiga cara utama di mana negara dapat menunjukkan kemurahan hati kepada semua ciptaan Allah. Kekurangan kajian mengenai

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benevolensi negara, ketidakjelasan dari pandangan dunia Islam mengenai peranan negara dalam menyediakan kebajikan, dan kekurangan maklumat mengenai jenis ganjaran yang dijangka diperoleh oleh negara yang melakukan kebajikan, adalah tiga kekangan utama dalam kajian ini. Dengan menyediakan gambaran holistik tentang kebaikan negara melalui literatur ekonomi konvensional dan ekonomi Islam, kajian ini membawa pendekatan baharu dalam wacana ekonomi politik. Sekiranya konsep kebaikan negara Islam ini diterimapakai, ia dapat membantu kerajaan sesebuah negara dalam mengurangkan kadar kemiskinan dalam kalangan rakyatnya, menyumbang kepada pengurangan jurang pendapatan antara negara kaya dan miskin, serta memperkukuh pengurusan alam sekitar secara mampan.

KATA KUNCI: KEBAIKAN NEGARA, PANDANGAN DUNIA ISLAM, NEGARA KEBAJIKAN, SUMBANGAN BANTUAN ASING, PERLINDUNGAN ALAM SEKITAR

1. INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, the advent of COVID-19 which pushed about 71 million people globally into extreme poverty (Chikwira *et al.*, 2022), resulted in the need for more state benevolent interventions in salvaging the vulnerable against risks. According to the Montevideo Convention, an entity is recognized as a state if it possesses a permanent population, a defined territory, a government and has capacity to enter into relations with other states (Eggers, 2007). Indeed, any globally recognized country acceptable to the United Nations (UN) is a state. Benevolence on the other hand, refers to acts of charity, philanthropy, beneficence, almsgiving, goodwill, perfection and excellence (Wahab & Ismail, 2019). Further, state benevolence is said to occur when a country's government exhibits acts of charity, philanthropy, beneficence, almsgiving, and compassion towards others in the latter's vulnerability. Rare as it is, examples of state benevolence can be found in Turkey. In a paper titled, "Making the Indebted Citizen: An Inquiry into State Benevolence in Turkey," the author indicates the government of Turkey employs state benevolence to provide free cash transfers, microcredit, food, clothing, and healthcare benefits to the poor, as a welfare policy (Yoltar, 2020). Similarly, Turkey employs the concept of state benevolence to provide foreign aid to many poor and deprived countries (Korkmaz & Zengin, 2020).

Based on the above, the Nordic countries including Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, mostly noted for exhibiting generous welfare state systems, implement a certain form of the state benevolence concept. Likewise, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, whose main objective is to contribute resources for providing foreign aid to deprived nations (Tawiah *et al.*, 2019), should be seen as implementing another variety of the state benevolence concept. These examples notwithstanding, a deliberate policy that considers the Islamic perspective of state benevolence, is yet to be implemented by any country.

Despite its simplicity, state benevolence has been described in different ways in the body of knowledge. In mainly the conventional economics literature, state benevolence has commonly been associated with activities of the welfare state (Yoltar, 2020). Another group of literature, specifically in development economics, sees foreign aid donations by governments, as acts of state benevolence (Korkmaz & Zengin, 2020). This discrepancy served as a motivation for authoring the current paper. To the best of the current authors' knowledge, only two studies have specifically highlighted the concept of state benevolence. First, in the paper by Yoltar (2020), the author described the concept as embedded in the Turkish social welfare system. Yoltar's (2020) description of state benevolence in that regard, restricts the concept to a government's care for the welfare of its citizens only. Second, in the study by Korkmaz and Zengin (2020) titled "The political economy of Turkish foreign aid," the authors described state benevolence as a measure of the quantity of foreign aid donations provided by the country. On this basis, the description by Korkmaz and Zengin (2020) restricts state benevolence to a country's foreign aid donations only. The main objective of this paper therefore, is to develop a

comprehensive representation of the state benevolence concept from an Islamic perspective. As a universal religion, Islam provides complete and true information on all aspects of human endeavour, as represented in the *Quran* and *Sunnah* (sayings and ways of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him (PBUH))), and other sources of the faith. The *Quran* affirms this in the verse below;

‘Say, O Prophet, ‘Should I seek a judge other than Allah while He is the One Who has revealed for you the Book ‘with the truth’ perfectly explained?’ Those who were given the Scripture know that it has been revealed ‘to you’ from your Lord in truth. So do not be one of those who doubt. Quran 6:114).

Based on content analysis of extant literature, the current paper unearthed three different forms of state benevolence to include government environmental protection engagements, in addition to activities of the welfare state and foreign aid donations by the government. Then, the paper suggests the concept of state benevolence from the Islamic perspective.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs content analysis of relevant literature in the body of knowledge. As a result, searches for articles, books and other relevant documents containing information on state benevolence were conducted. Google Scholar database was the primary source employed for the search as it contains huge amounts of scholarly works, especially for topics on Islamic economics. However, other databases including ScienceDirect and Emeralds Insight were used to search for literature.

Content analysis method is used for analysing written, verbal or visual communication messages (Cole, 1988; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The method can be employed to formulate a conceptual model to represent a certain phenomenon, the process of which could be either an inductive or a deductive. Irrespective of the process adopted, the three main phases involved in content analysis are the preparation, organizing and reporting phases (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Through content analysis, words and phrases can be classified into the same groups, allowing them to share the same meaning (Cavanagh 1997; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). One important attribute of content analysis is its concern for meanings, intentions, consequences and context associated with data being analysed (Downe-Wamboldt 1992; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

In situations where extant literature on the phenomenon to be studied is scarce or fragmented, the inductive approach of content analysis is most useful for application. As such, data from inductive content analysis are relied upon in formulating conceptual models (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Under the inductive approach, there is a movement from specific to general, implying that the specific instances observed are combined to obtain a general statement (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Given that the literature on state benevolence is scarce, the current paper employed the inductive approach of content analysis method for arriving at the findings.

In the preparation phase, the unit of analysis is selected which could be either a word or a theme (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In the current study, the unit of analysis consists of words, phrases or sentences that carry the meaning of a benevolent activity being undertaken. A unit of meaning may consist of more than one sentence and have several meanings (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), as in the case of benevolence which could also mean kindness, charitable, goodwill and beneficence.

In the organising phase, the researcher tries to make sense of the data, understand the direction of information flow, and gain a sense of the whole (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Organising the data requires thorough reading of the unit being analysed culminating into asking the main five questions of; who is telling? - Where is this happening? - When did it happen? - What is happening? - Why? (Dey, 2003; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Once the data are sufficiently organised and there is an obvious sense of direction, an inductive or deductive process is undertaken (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), and the findings are accordingly provided in the reporting phase.

The inductive content analysis method involves the use of open coding, creating categories and abstraction. Codes are created from the materials being read and analysed, and the former are put into different categories. In the abstraction stage, the categories are further grouped into higher order headings (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Consequently, abstraction allows for a general description of the research topic through categorization (Burnard 1996; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

To efficiently retrieve the relevant articles, keywords were relied upon. The primary keywords employed were 'state benevolence', 'benevolence' and 'benevolence in Islam'. Secondary keywords including 'Islamic state', 'Islamic welfare state', 'foreign aid donation in Islam' and 'environmental protection in Islam' were also utilised. Together, the keywords provided adequate scholarly documents for undertaking the current study. In the final phase of the methodology, detailed reading of the documents were undertaken, and the contents analysed to gain a comprehensive understanding of opinions and findings of the scholars in relation to state benevolence, especially from the perspective of Islam. Some of the keywords, for instance 'state benevolence', generated conventional economics literature, and these were also analysed for obtaining the concept of state benevolence from the perspective of the Western world.

3. CONTENT ANALYSIS

Analysing the literature unearthed the thoughts of scholars regarding the nature of benevolence, the state and its responsibilities, and the various ways in which benevolence can be manifested, all from the Islamic perspective. Understanding the various ways for showing benevolence is vital for conceptualizing state benevolence holistically. In this regard, this section discusses the positions of the scholars on the subject matter, from which the current authors designed the concept of state benevolence from the Islamic worldview.

Benevolence in Islam

In building the concept of state benevolence, it is imperative to appreciate what benevolence stands for in Islam. From the literature reviewed, the Arabic definition of benevolence (*ihsan*, in Arabic) implies engaging in acts of charity, philanthropy, beneficence, almsgiving, engaging in good works, perfection and excellence (Wahab & Ismail, 2019). This show of goodwill and kindness towards others should be undertaken without expecting any benefits in return (Hajli, 2015). Several verses in the *Quran* including *Al-Nahl* (16:90), *Al-Baqarah* (2:112) and *Al-Ankabut* (29:69) mention *Ihsan*, indicating the importance attached to the act by Allah (God) (Wahab & Ismail, 2019). Despite having a slightly different meaning in Islam, the universal usage of the term benevolence agrees with the common description of *ihsan*. Such commonalities include values of kindness, goodness, charity, and social responsibility. Acts of benevolence can be exhibited through the donation of material support including financial aid, or by providing non-material support such as actions that are capable of comforting the hearts of the vulnerable (Mohseni & Bighash, 2020).

Islam aims at achieving the objective of establishing *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all beings). This calls on all Muslims to exhibit good deeds in their *hablu minallah* (relationship with God), *hablu minnas* (relationship with humans), and *hablu minal'alam* (relationship with nature), if they are to attain perfection of religion and obedience to Allah. In particular, humans are expected to be protective of the environment as the latter provides habitation for nature. This is because the three forms of relationships must be manifested through good deeds (Alam & Cipto, 2022). Thus, inappropriate behaviour towards the environment can cause damage to Allah's creatures (Wani, 2022). Charity or doing-good, is accomplished when individuals or groups provide spiritual and material support, and care to others (Alam & Cipto, 2022), only for gaining Allah's pleasure (Yi, 2018). In addition, Islam advocates compassion and generosity, which are realised through the Islamic institution of almsgiving (Alam & Cipto, 2022).

From the Islamic worldview, benevolence is regarded as an instrument of social justice (Ciftci, 2019), through which fairness for all Muslims and non-Muslims, is established by leaders and institutions of state. Accordingly, in matters of wealth redistribution, the institutions of *sadaqah*, *infaq*, and *zakat*,

play important roles in alleviating the sufferings of the poor in communities. In Iran for example, benevolent savings have been utilised allowing households to make available their surplus incomes for onward lending without interest, to poor individuals through the Islamic banking system (Tohidinia *et al.*, 2021). The use of Islamic banking for show of benevolence is especially important, given that funding from charities and the public may not be sufficient for meeting the demands of the poor for such benevolence (Asbeig, 2019).

There are some advantages to be derived from being benevolent. These include the acquisition of better human values, mental health status, and social relationships (Mohseni & Bighash, 2020). Mohseni and Bighash (2020) identify two effects accruing to benevolent individuals namely; the worldly and the hereafter effects. According to the authors, the worldly effects lead to increased lifespan, livelihood and receipt of divine mercies among others. The hereafter effects for those who are benevolent include protection against hell, attainment of heaven, and receipt of eternal rewards. Empirically, Shalihin and Sholihin (2022) find that benevolence mediates a positive impact of mechanical solidarity on social cohesion. On that basis Shalihin and Sholihin (2022) opined that charity through *sadaqah* and *infaq* strengthens solidarity which in turn impacts positively on social cohesion. Ciftci (2019) findings show that because Muslim communities prefer benevolence, they support democratic governance while showing dislike for authoritarianism. In the opinion of Ciftci (2019), pious Muslims trust democratic institutions to provide redistributive and social justice in their communities. Both empirical studies indicate the importance Muslims attach to the need for show of benevolence.

In summary, extant literature has shown the importance of benevolence both at the micro and macroeconomic levels. Under microeconomic perspective, it addresses the contribution of individuals towards helping the poor, and exhibiting good deeds or benevolence in their relationship with other humans and nature (Alam & Cipto, 2022). This means that benevolence is to be exhibited towards both humans and nature (or the environment). On the macroeconomic front, the role of the state in providing and establishing benevolence through politics (Ciftci, 2019), and public financial and economic management (Asbeig, 2019), cannot pass unnoticed.

Humans' good relationship with Allah is for the former, to follow the dictates of, and revere Allah ardently. Humans' good relationship with other humans, is for them to be benevolent towards vulnerable people without regards to geographical boundaries. Having a good relationship with nature, would require humans to show benevolence to all creatures of Allah inhabiting the environment, including living and non-living things. If the state were to follow the dictates of Allah, as spelt out by Islamic tenets, and undertake to have good relationships with humans and nature, such acts could be deemed as benevolence exhibited by the state.

The Islamic State

Analysis of the literature provided also, an understanding of the researchers' intuition with regards to the nature of a state, and its responsibilities in line with Islamic teachings. Especially important, is the role of the Islamic state in the show of benevolence to all beings. Gaining a deep understanding of the nature of an Islamic state, and its responsibilities are important for this study, in the attempt to design the concept of state benevolence. Abu Hamid Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Ghazali, an Arab-Islamic philosopher, described a state as a vital institution for ensuring proper guidance and functioning of society, and for the fulfilment of societal *Shari'ah*-mandated obligations (*furud kifayah*). In al-Ghazali's view, there exists a link between the state and religion where the former becomes the necessary foundation required for the promotion and protection of religion. Also, al-Ghazali finds the state useful for controlling undesirable conflicts stemming from jealousy, competition, and selfishness in society, thereby undertaking the important function of managing society's affairs to achieve cooperation and reconciliation (Islahi & Ghazanfar, 1998).

Imam al-Ghazali's notion of the function of the state has some commonalities with classical economists such as Adam Smith and his contemporaries. For al-Ghazali, the state should be responsible for establishing justice, peace and security, in order to promote economic prosperity. Al-

Ghazali's views the Prophet's (PBUH) mission as not only for transforming unbelievers, but also, bringing development and prosperity to the world through just and equitable rule (Islahi & Ghazanfar, 1998). Moreover, he places the responsibility for attaining economic progress, through the achievement of justice, peace, prosperity, and stability at the doorstep of the state and its leader (Irijanto *et al*, 2015). Al-Ghazali draws similarities between the state and its leader (sultan) and sometimes, using them interchangeably. This aligns with the thinking of Abd Ar Rahman bin Muhammed ibn Khaldun, the renowned Islamic Philosopher, who states that politics requires the function of control, to be placed in the hands of only one person, so as to avoid its destruction (Ibn Khaldun, 1958). On this note, actions taken by the sultan stand in the name of the state, and the former would be called upon on the Day of Judgment to account for how royal or state authority was exacted. Ibn Khaldun (1958) provides evidence with the following verse:

"If there were other gods except God in the two (heaven and earth), they (heaven and earth) would have been destroyed." (Quran 21.22).

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun (1958) notes that the institution of caliphate headed by the caliph, is a substitution for the Prophet (PBUH), and must be seen to perform the dual roles of safeguarding the religion, and providing political leadership for the world. In this respect, the head of an Islamic state would be required to function as a *khalifah* for the country's citizens, and for Muslims worldwide (Ibn Khaldun, 1958). According to al-Ghazali, the kings of old were cognisant of the importance of societal prosperity to their continuous reign in authority, and how religion depends on authority which also depends on the strength of the army. The strength of the army hinges on supplies which in turn depend on prosperity. Establishing justice is a prerequisite for prosperity to be realised. For this reason, al-Ghazali stresses the importance of establishing justice and peace by the state without which citizens would lack a foothold, abandoning cities, territories, and cultivated lands. This would eventually lead to reduced state revenues, and unhappiness amongst the people (Islahi & Ghazanfar, 1998).

Among others, al-Ghazali mentions some important functions of the state to include establishment of an army, judiciary, and jurisprudence for ensuring security, justice, peace and stability necessary for securing economic prosperity and development. The establishment of the institution of *al-hisbah* (the market inspectorate) that functions to check and eliminate malpractices in the marketplace, also gained the approval of al-Ghazali. On his part, Ibn Khaldun (1958) lists the functions of the caliphate to include preservation of religion and political leadership of the world, enhancing civilization, securing public interest, and the exercise of royal authority through the creation of religious institutions for steering state affairs. Worth to mention, the religious functions of prayer, the office of judge, the office of mufti, the office of holy war, and market supervision, are directly supervised by the "great imamate" (the caliphate) (Ibn Khaldun, 1958).

In recent times however, the nature of an Islamic state seems ambiguous. Dean and Khan (1997) suggest the only "true" Islamic state known in human history, existed during the period of the Prophet (PBUH), and the first four of his companions who succeeded him after his demise. Dean and Khan (1997) assert that an Islamic state should be considered in the contexts of religion and ideology. To Dean and Khan (1997), the *Quran* considers Muslims as belonging to a community (*Ummah*), without giving attention to the idea of an Islamic state. Though some countries have arrogated to themselves the status of an Islamic state, the conception of a Muslim community broadens the boundaries of an Islamic state, extending beyond national borders.

In terms of national affairs, an Islamic state is expected to establish universal brotherhood among Muslims, and promote social and economic justice (Abdullah Kuyateh, 2022). Additionally, it has the responsibility of providing security and protection to all citizens, without regards to individuals' religious affiliations. With regards to the role of the state in providing safety and security, Begum *et al*. (2022) provide an indication that the state or ruler is expected to act as "the guardian of anyone who has no other guardian," based on the following *Hadiths*:

"Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "I am closer to the believers than their selves in this world and in the Hereafter, and if you like, you can read Allah's Statement: "The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves." (33.6) So, if a true believer dies and leaves behind some property, it will be for his inheritors (from the father's side), and if he leaves behind some debt to be paid or needy offspring, then they should come to me as I am the guardian of the deceased." (Sahih al-Bukhari Volume 3, Book 41, Number 584).

The function of promoting socio-economic justice among the *ummah* could be realised if the state ensures the protection of peoples' rights and redistribution of wealth. The state could also facilitate the collection and distribution of *zakat* by establishing a treasury (*Bait al-Mal*) at vital locations (Dean & Khan, 1997), and ensure that proceeds of *zakat*, *sadaqah*, *infaq* and other state revenues, are efficiently managed to benefit the vulnerable.

Through its leader, sultan or caliph, the Islamic state undertakes several activities on the basis of which, the leader's relationships with Allah, humans and nature shall be evaluated. If the state chooses to be benevolent to humans and nature, the leader (sultan) would be seen as fulfilling the tenets of Islam, and as having a good relationship with Allah. Any adverse treatment of the same by the state, would portray the leader as negligent of obeying Allah's commands expected of persons vested with the power of the state, and would be called to account on the Day of Judgment.

Meanwhile, the state can show benevolence to humans in two ways based on structures of nation states in the contemporary era. The state could show benevolence to its citizens as spelt out in the functions of the welfare state. If the state chooses to help humans in foreign countries, such a benevolent act is captured under the concept of foreign aid donation by governments. Goodness towards nature by the state, would entail the use of public resources for securing the protection of the environment. Begum *et al* (2022) indicate that protection of the environment is important for promoting the welfare of all creatures.

Welfare state as an Activity of State Benevolence

In the conventional economics literature, welfare state denotes the purposeful action of a country's government to seek the welfare of its citizens, especially the vulnerable (Larasati *et al*, 2023). In an Islamic setting however, the notion of welfare state is different given that Islam provides much prominence to spiritual and mental aspects of wellbeing of the vulnerable, in addition to their material needs (Abdullah Kuyateh, 2022). Achievement of materiality and spirituality is connected to the concept of goodness (*falah*), which is vital for the realization of balanced welfare of this world and the hereafter (Syafuruddin & Mukhlisin, 2022). According to Akhtar *et al* (2022), the Prophet's (PBUH) administration established a culture of ensuring socioeconomic welfare for all.

Seeking goodwill for all humans is necessary in establishing an Islamic welfare state. Such a state was realised in Medina because prior to the migration (*hijrah*), the Prophet (PBUH) admonished his companions to seek peoples' goodwill, and be steadfast against any hardships (Akhtar *et al*, 2022). An Islamic state must be seen to provide material assistance for poor and needy citizens economically (Begum *et al.*, 2022). According to Begum *et al.* (2022), the Islamic welfare state should be seen to promote goodwill, help the needy, show tolerance, educate the poor, ensure economic growth and establish peace. Other functions of the Islamic welfare state should include equal rights of citizens, provision of food, freedom of worship, creating avenues for employment, health and shelter, care for the elderly, provision of disability and unemployment benefits, and the provision of security (Begum *et al.*, 2022).

The Prophet (PBUH), in his capacity as the leader and head of state, is known to have dedicated himself to helping the poor and needy (Begum *et al.*, 2022), which falls under the function of the welfare state. In the exercise of state authority, it has become necessary in understanding how state revenues are to be deployed in achieving state benevolence. Sources of revenue for the Islamic state according to al-Ghazali, include property and assets without heirs, and *awqaf* (charitable endowments) without caretakers. In addition *zakah*, *sadaqah*, *fai*' (possessions acquired without

actual warfare), *ghanimah* (spoils of war), *jizyah* (poll tax), and *amwal al-masalih* (tributes) (Islahi & Ghazanfar, 1998) are other recognised revenue sources. Again, *kharaj* (land tax), *usyur* (import tax) and mineral tax also serve as sources of revenue for the Islamic state (Sarkun & Hasan, 2015). Despite his criticism about the imposition of additional taxes on the citizenry, al-Ghazali endorses actions of the state to establish extra-*Shariah* taxes aimed only for purposes of undertaking the public welfare function, in case the public treasury is depleted of the necessary funds to deal with the urgency. His conditions for allowing the imposition of additional taxes by the state are; (1), for the defense of the Islamic state, and (2), as the guardian and protector of the society, the state may impose new taxes to enhance the society's overall wellbeing (Islahi & Ghazanfar, 1998). The second condition is also a function of the welfare state.

Al-Ghazali also provides indications of how the Islamic state should undertake public financing activities. He mentioned the three broad categories of public finance to include catering for the establishment of justice, state security, and development of societal prosperity. Al-Ghazali called specifically for public expenditure to be earmarked for the achievement of distributive justice, encouraging the use of state resources for eradicating poverty and vulnerability from the citizenry (Islahi & Ghazanfar, 1998). Besides, al-Ghazali signposts four broad classification of public expenditure requiring the attention of the Islamic state namely; *asnaf zakat*, social security (to cater for the poor and vulnerable elderly, healthcare, unemployed, and natural disaster victims), development (infrastructure, schools, hospitals, place of worship) and administration (salary, construction, and maintenance cost) (Sarkun & Hasan, 2015). Further, he emphasised on the deployment of resources for entrenching socio-economic infrastructure that directly benefit the people (Irijanto *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, al-Ghazali called upon the state to deploy state resources in providing assistance to the people during crises such as in drought or unusual price escalations. In addition, he advocates for the provision of food and financial assistance procured with state resources, for the vulnerable. All these are indications of al-Ghazali's calls on the Islamic state to show benevolence to its citizens facing vulnerabilities. Meanwhile, al-Ghazali recognizes that the recipients of *waqf*, *zakah* and *ghanimah* have already been spelt out in the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, but in the case of the other revenues, they should be employed for community projects and for assisting the needy (Islahi & Ghazanfar, 1998). Furthermore, al-Ghazali asserts that the wealthy Muslims are not entitled to receiving any benefits from the public treasury.

Similarly, Ibn Khaldun (1958) notes that rulership (*malakah*) is important in determining the type of relationship that exists between the ruler and his subjects. According to Ibn Khaldun, a good and beneficial rulership serves the interests of the subjects, while a bad and unfair rulership is harmful. He observed that mildness requires the ruler to show kindness and beneficence to his subjects, and take interest in their wellbeing. When the ruler is mild towards his subjects, the latter trust and love the former, and are willing to sacrifice their lives for him. On the contrary, Ibn Khaldun (1958) suggests that a harsh ruler employs force and punishes his subjects at the slightest provocation, and this would make the subjects protective of themselves against him, and not willing to fight for the protection of their leader, or could conspire to kill the leader. Ibn Khaldun (1958) notes that a smarter and alert leader, fails to exhibit mildness towards his subjects and imposes on them excessive taxes putting them in difficulties (Ibn Khaldun, 1958). Accordingly, Ibn Khaldun (1958) draws attention to the condition by the Prophet (PBUH), requiring the ruler not to be too smart, which the former backed with the story about Ziyad b. Abi Sufyan: When Umar deposed him (as governor) of Iraq, Abi Sufyan asked Umar why he had been deposed, whether it was because of his inability or his treachery. Umar said, the reason for deposing him is because he disliked having people become the victim of Abi Sufyan's superior intelligence (Ibn Khaldun, 1958). Thus, the arguments put forth by Ibn Khaldun (1958) supports the need for the state to show benevolence towards its citizens as practiced in the welfare state setting.

Most importantly, Ibn Khaldun (1958) shares his opinion on how political leadership shapes the nature of human civilization, and contains vital characteristics of the Islamic welfare state. In Ibn Khaldun's (1958) view, people are better off being ruled under divinely revealed religious law, because of the benefits that accrue to them in this world and in the hereafter. In this regard, Ibn

Khaldun (1958) shares the contents of a letter by Tahir b. al-Husayn, a general to al-Ma'mun, to his son Abdallah b. Tahir, who had been appointed to the position of governor of ar-Raqqah, Egypt and the intervening territories. In the letter, al-Husayn's advice to his son was; "God has been benevolent to you. He has made it obligatory for you to show kindness to those of His servants whom He has made your subjects" (Ibn Khaldun, 1958). The advice contains a clear indication for the state to show benevolence to its citizens and subjects in general. Another important advice contained in the letter which relates closely to activities of the welfare state is found in al-Husayn admonishing his son to; "Be friendly to the weak" (Ibn Khaldun, 1958). "Friendliness" in the Islamic welfare state context, represents show of state benevolence in a non-material form of benefit to the weak and vulnerable. Other non-material forms of state benevolence in the form of welfare state in catering for citizens' welfare are indicated, when he implores his son to allow frequent visits for the people to him, and show them humility. Al-Husayn wrote; "Show them your smiling countenance, and be lenient towards them." Another advice worth mentioning from the letter is; "Be just in governing your subjects. Treat them honestly and with kindness through which you will reach the path of right guidance." (Ibn Khaldun, 1958).

In other parts of the letter, al-Husayn advised his son to eschew greed, be just, improve his subjects and supervise their affairs, protect his subjects and invest in their welfare, protect them from need, and support the unfortunates (Ibn Khaldun, 2019). All these activities are functions of the welfare state. It is said that when the letter got to the notice of al-Ma'mun, he found it very comprehensive for dealing with matters of the world, religion, administration, the formation of opinion, politics, the improvement of the realm and the subjects, the preservation of the government, obedience to the caliphs, and maintenance of the caliphate. As a result, al-Ma'mun ordered the letter's circulation to all officials in the various territories, for it to be employed as a model for political governance (Ibn Khaldun, 1958). Thus, Islamic tenets encourage the state to act benevolently towards its citizens as in the practices of the conventional welfare state system.

Foreign Aid Donation as an Activity of State Benevolence

Similarly, analyses of the extant literature employed, indicate foreign aid-giving from an Islamic perspective is an obligation, and this provides the motivation and justification for Islamic countries to engage in international cooperation and philanthropy (Al-Mezaini, 2012). Charitable-giving in Islam, is a tradition dating back to the beginning of the Islamic faith, as the faith seeks to secure the establishment of a social order of justice and proper ethics based on humanitarianism. Extending assistance to the needy, defines individuals' connections with their Maker, an indication of their social responsibility function, and a measure of the level of their religious faith. Concern for the welfare of the poor is considered to be moral law and a divine command, which if lacking in individuals, render their worship insincere and hypocritical. Islamic teachings indicate a neglect of the needy is displeasing to Allah (Tittensor *et al*, 2018).

The researchers are of the opinion that the call for charity towards the needy in Islam, is granted the level of importance equivalent to those attached to prayer and the declaration of faith by Muslims (Tittensor *et al*, 2018). Though not specifically mentioned in any Islamic text, the concept of foreign aid-giving can be found in the term "*ta'awun*" (help each other) in the *Quran* as indicated in the verse below (Alam & Cipto, 2022);

"And help one another in (doing) virtue and piety, and do not help one another in committing sins and transgressions. And keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is severe in punishment." (Quran 5:2).

This positions foreign aid, from the Islamic perspective, as an embodiment of good deeds or charity (Alam & Cipto, 2022), and portrays Islamic countries as being benevolent. Islamic traditions of generosity have been recognized as having an important impact on foreign aid donation practices of Islamic countries (Al-Mezaini, 2017). Yi (2018) agrees with this position by asserting that Islam's commitment towards the achievement of goodness, worship of Allah, and benevolence, form the foundations for Arab countries' aid motives. Further, Yi (2018) describes foreign aid from Arab donors as being guided by the concept of charity espoused in Islam. The altruistic nature of Islamic

aid donations embodies acts of selflessness through being charitable to others, while pleasing Allah concurrently (Ali & Tayeb, 2021). Indeed, the neglect of the poor by the wealthy results in misfortunes experienced among the former, for which the *Quran* draws attention to in the following verses (Tittensor *et al*, 2018);

“As for man, when his Lord tests him by exalting him and bestowing His bounties upon him, he says: “My Lord has exalted me.” But when He tests him by straitening his sustenance, he says: “My Lord has humiliated me. But no; you do not treat the orphan honorably, and do not urge one another to feed the poor, and greedily devour the entire inheritance, and love the riches, loving them ardently.” (Quran 89:15-20).

The scholars also addressed questions of whether the state is under obligation to extend benevolence to vulnerable foreign counterparts. Firstly, Chapra’s (1979) suggestion indicates if resources are available, the state should consider extending assistance to neighbouring countries facing hardships of poverty and economic challenges. Secondly, the concept of the Muslim *ummah* (Dean & Khan, 1997) suggests the need for an Islamic state to undertake cross-border welfare activities, especially if Muslims in other countries are under the threat of crises. Thirdly, Begum *et al.* (2022) indicate that Allah’s name ‘*Rahman*’, which implies the Provider of welfare, and beneficent to all living things, requires the state to provide assistance to the vulnerable no matter their geographical location. These arguments support the need for Islamic countries to participate in the international aid efforts, since all individuals have welfare rights regardless of their current country of residence.

Meanwhile, the scholars position *zakat* and *sadaqah* as constituting Islamic characteristics of aid. Infact, *Sadaqah*, a voluntary almsgiving in Islam, bears close resemblance to the current conventional foreign aid-giving by Western donor countries (Al-Mezaini, 2017). This comparison further strengthens the notion that foreign aid donation is an act of benevolence. Similarly, Yi (2018) likens the need for philanthropy as institutionalized in Islam, to conventional understanding of the institution of foreign aid in recent times. Islam promotes the treatment of one another with benevolence, which according to Yi (2018), implies showing of sympathy and mercy, and to help and love one another. Yi (2018) provides evidence from the *Quran*:

“Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbour, the neighbour farther away, the companion at your side, the traveller, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful.” (Quran 4:36).

The above verse is just one among several, which Allah has employed to call on Muslims to strive towards providing support for alleviating the worsening conditions of the poor and needy (Tittensor *et al*, 2018). The reference in the verse to “...*the neighbour farther away*...” could easily be referring to people in foreign countries. Consequently, countries are expected to show benevolence towards their foreign counterparts in need. The need to help one another, especially being charitable to the poor, constitutes the theoretical basis of Islamic humanism, and guidance for Arab foreign aid donations (Yi, 2018). A clear testimony that foreign aid-giving falls within the ambit of state benevolence, comes from Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) which declared Turkey as the most generous country in the world, based on the magnitude of the country’s foreign aid donations (Korkmaz & Zengin, 2020). According to Korkmaz and Zengin (2020), foreign aid-giving is an undeniable and indispensable foreign policy tool, through which Turkey gains international recognition, benevolent status, and access to new markets. Thus, the scholars generally agree that foreign aid donation by governments, is an act of state benevolence.

Environmental Protection as an Activity of State Benevolence

The literature reviewed indicates that in Islam, undertaking environmental protection activities is regarded as both an act of worship, and a show of benevolence. The environment contains Allah’s (God’s) creatures including plants, animals, humans, land and several other bodies, all of which, from the Islamic worldview, are to be treated with reverence (Llewellyn, 2003). The foundation of *tawhid*

(oneness of Allah) calls for service to the Lord of all beings, thus, the treatment of all creatures with greatest good is cardinal for identifying man's level of reverence to Allah (Islam, 2016). Begum *et al.* (2022) indicate that Allah's name "*Rahman*" means provider of welfare and benefits to all living things; animals and plants of all kinds found in the environment included. One of the reasons advanced for the need to protect all creations of Allah, whether plants, animals or any creature in the environment, is because each creature has value and purpose (Mohamad & Ismail, 2023), and this point is well articulated in the following verses:

"Not for sport have We created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them. We have not created them but for truth" (Quran 44:38–39). "The seven heavens and the earth and all that dwell therein proclaim His glory: There is not a thing that does not celebrate His praise, but you cannot understand their praises..." (Quran 17:44).

Also, the need for Muslims to undertake environmental protection activities as a form of worship is found in the concept of *Ubuddiya* (servitude to One God) which implies all creations are submissive to Allah. In this regard, humans shall be called upon on the Day of Judgment, to account for their stewardship responsibilities towards the environment. The *Quran* clarifies this point in the following verses (Raj & Subin, 2022):

"To Him belongs whatever is in the Heavens and the Earth. All are obedient to Him." (Quran 30:26). Environmental protection as an act of benevolence towards all creatures of Allah is supported by the following *Hadith* (Raj & Subin, 2022);

"The merciful are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Show mercy to those on Earth, and He Who is above the Heavens will show mercy unto you." (Abu Dawud 4941; Al-Tirmidhi 1924).

Animals who largely depend on the environment for their sustenance are expected to be treated with benevolence. Compassion towards animals attracts rewards from Allah. However, any ill treatment of the same contravenes Islamic teachings and attracts punishment (Raj & Subin, 2022). Begum *et al.* (2022) indicate Islam promotes providing welfare for all beings, and that ensuring favourable climatic and environmental conditions are necessary for achieving welfare for all creatures. Begum *et al.* (2022) add that the Prophet's nature (PBUH) was to always engage in helping the poor and needy, treated animals with kindness, prohibited water wastage and contamination, and was stern against indiscriminate cutting of trees. All these acts may seem to fall in the domain of state benevolence.

Further, the sustenance of all creatures are contained in the environment for which the latter needs protection. As guardians, humans are required to assume their responsibility of protecting the wellbeing of other creatures who also worship Allah, and are dependent on the earth or environment for sustenance (Islam, 2016). Again, Allah has made humans the only trustees for safeguarding nature (Mohamad & Ismail, 2023). Humans bear social coexistence with the environment due to the fact that all creatures are brought into being by, and worship the same one God (Deen, 1997). This interdependence and coexistence between humans and other creatures needs to be protected for the sustenance of life on earth, and for securing justice through man's kindness to other creatures of Allah (Islam, 2016):

"And the earth We have spread out, set therein mountains firm and immovable and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance. And We have provided therein means of sustenance for you and for those whose sustenance you are not responsible" (Quran, 15:19-20)

Lastly, Munib *et al.* (2022) provide the following *Hadith* that indicates environmental protection activities are regarded as show of benevolence in Islam;

"Hadith from Anas (may Allah be pleased with him (r.a)), he said: Rasulullah (PBUH) said: A Muslim does not grow a tree or sow seeds on the ground, and then a bird or a human or an animal consumes some of it; what is eaten is charity." (Narrated by Imam Bukhari)

Protection of the environment is undoubtedly necessary for the survival and welfare of all forms of Allah's creation. Environmental protection may directly benefit non-human creatures' wellbeing. Conversely, any form of disturbance or corruption in the natural environmental ecosystem, is detrimental to human welfare (Islam, 2016) as well as those of non-humans. As *khalifa* of Allah, humans hold the *amannah* (trusteeship) to be kind towards other creatures, for which accountability of stewardship, as managers of the earth, are expected to be exacted by Allah (Raj & Subin, 2022). The *Quran* and *Sunnah* have evidence to this effect (Raj & Subin, 2022):

"...it is He Who appointed you Khalifs on this Earth." (*Quran* 6:167).

"The world is beautiful and verdant, and verily God, be He exalted, has made you His stewards in it, and He sees how you acquit yourselves." (*Shahih Muslim*).

Philosophically, humans as *khalifah* on earth, are entrusted with the sustainable management of all natural resources within the planet so as to prevent any harm to human lives (Munib *et al.*, 2022). The cardinal objective of *Shariah* is intended for the attainment of the welfare for God's creatures (*masālih al-khalq* or *masālih al-'ibād*), both in the present world, and ultimately in the hereafter (Llewellyn, 2003). Protection of the environment allows humans to maintain their relationships with other created beings of Allah while upholding the concept of justice (*adl*) and kindness (*ihsan*) (Islam, 2016). It is evident, Islamic tenets place an obligation on humans to seek the welfare of all beings including humans, plants and animals. By protecting the environment, humans are able to fulfill this obligation, and in the process exhibit benevolence to all creatures of Allah. In good or bad times, environmental protection activities must be carried out to care for natural resources, animals and plants, and to improve and develop the environment. By so doing, humans (or the state) as vicegerents of God would be performing their religious duty of transmitting Allah's mercy to all within our reach (Wani, 2022).

The Concept of Islamic State Benevolence

Following the results of the content analysis of extant literature presented above, there is a realization that the conventional understanding of the term 'state benevolence' does not fully represent the true state of affairs. Though still in its rudimentary stage, state benevolence, in conventional economics literature, has been restricted to only two activities of governments namely; welfare state services (Yoltar, 2020), and foreign aid donations (Korkmaz & Zengin, 2020). This description falls short of the true nature of state benevolence under the Islamic worldview. Based on the findings in the current paper, the Islamic worldview identifies government environmental protection activities as a third form of state benevolence in addition to the activities of the welfare state and foreign aid donations. Thus, the Islamic worldview's description of the term is more comprehensive, the basis of which is principled under Islamic tenets stipulating that all creatures and creation worship Allah, and as a result, are required to be treated with compassion.

On the basis of the above, state benevolence under the Islamic worldview, refers to a country's government interventions, aimed at seeking the protection of the vulnerable among the citizens of the country, to provide aid to its needy foreign counterparts, and to protect biodiversity from environmental pollution and degradation. Figure 1 is a graphical representation of the Islamic state benevolence concept. The figure shows that the level of government involvement in the activities of the welfare state, foreign aid donations and environmental protection, would depend on how benevolent the state is. Specifically, the magnitude of public expenditures earmarked for providing social protection services, foreign aid donations and for undertaking environmental protection, would depend on the level of state benevolence of the respective country.

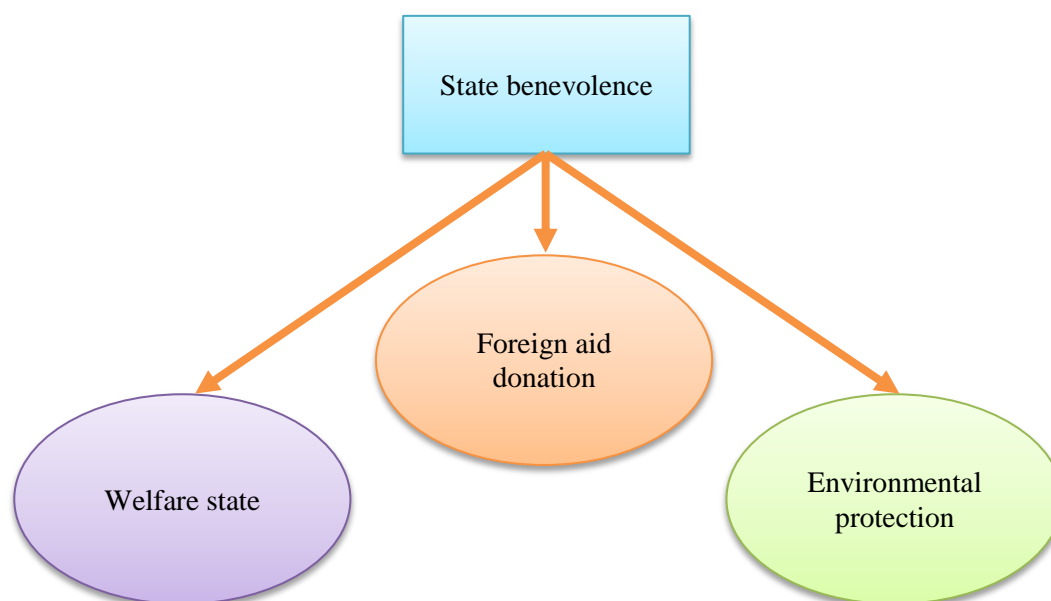


FIGURE 1: GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE ISLAMIC STATE BENEVOLENCE CONCEPT

Source: Figure by Authors

While we are on the subject, all the three forms of state benevolence align with major aspects of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), and if undertaken by various governments, could lead to a major breakthrough in the achievement of sustainable development for many countries. Specifically, activities of the welfare state align with SDG-1 (End poverty everywhere), SDG-2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture), and SDG-3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all). Foreign aid donation is in line with SDG-10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries), while environmental protection activities fall within SDG-6 (Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation), SDG-13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts), SDG-14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development), and SDG-15 (Promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, land degradation and biodiversity loss).

TABLE 1: FORMS OF ISLAMIC STATE BENEVOLENCE AND THEIR EXPECTED EFFECTS

Component of State Benevolence	Main Beneficiaries	Targeted SDGs	Main Effects
Welfare State Activities	Citizens of the benevolent state	SDG-1, SDG-2 and SDG-3	Reduce poverty and deprivation suffered by citizens of the benevolent state
Foreign Aid Donations by the Government	Recipient countries of the foreign aid	SDG-10	Reduce income and other inequalities existing between wealthy and poor countries
Environmental Protection by the Government	The environment and biodiversity within the jurisdiction of the benevolent state	SDG-6, SDG-13, SDG-14 and SDG-15	Ensure a healthy environment for humans, animals and biodiversity, and to achieve

Source: Table by Authors

Table 1 provides a summary description of the Islamic state benevolence concept. It shows the three different forms of state benevolence and their respective beneficiaries, and the latter description is important for obtaining clarity about the different forms of state benevolence. In addition, the immediate SDGs targeted by each component of state benevolence have been made available in the table, and most importantly, their main net expected effects have been spelt out clearly. If adopted, the Islamic state benevolence concept is expected to engender the benevolent state to contribute towards alleviating suffering and vulnerability faced by its citizens, support the fight against global poverty and inequality existing between nations, and contribute its quota towards the attainment of a sound environment and environmental sustainability.

4. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper employed content analysis of relevant literature, with the objective of developing the concept of state benevolence from an Islamic perspective. The findings from the content analysis undertaken indicates that the Islamic worldview provides three ways in which the state can show benevolence. These ways include the activities of the welfare state, government foreign aid donations, and government environmental protection activities. If adopted, the Islamic state benevolence concept has the potential to serve as a pivotal policy instrument for the eradication of global poverty, and for tackling environmental degradation currently being confronted by the world. The paper provides guidance to nation states, especially Islamic countries, to implement the Islamic concept of benevolence for resolving the numerous hardships faced by man and biodiversity in today's world. By looking at state benevolence from the Islamic perspective, the current paper extends the body of knowledge through the provision of a holistic view of the subject matter.

Because these three identified forms of state benevolence are dictates of Allah, Islamic countries and Muslim heads of states, would be under obligation to ensure their fulfilment. In this regard, the Islamic state benevolence concept developed in this paper, should act as a guide for adoption and implementation by Islamic countries. The mandate of the state and government institutions, is based on the principle of Islamic jurisprudence which asserts that "The management of subjects' affairs by the ruler shall accord with their welfare" (Mohamad & Ismail, 2023). In following the Islamic principle that Allah loves those who show compassion to other created beings, the Islamic state benevolence concept, serves as a guide for governments to be benevolent not only to their citizens, but to vulnerable foreign countries and the environment as well. This would draw countries, their leaders and citizens, closer to Allah's favours.

The fact that this paper could have excluded or missed relevant articles on the subject matter during the selection process, constitutes a limitation in the study. Utmost care however, was taken to ensure that many articles of importance were reviewed for arriving at the findings. Future research may look into the impacts of the three components of state benevolence, on macroeconomic performances of Islamic countries.

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