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IDEALS AND REALITIES: IBN KHALDUN'S JUSTIFICATION OF ASABIYYA AND POLITICAL POWER

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Today the Muslim world is in a state of social and political crises ranging from identity problems to suffering under autocratic or totalitarian regimes. The nature of the political regimes, their relationship with Islam, Islamic position vis-à-vis secularism, problems of democracy are all various aspects of these crises. In this context, one sometimes comes across academic writings suggesting some of Ibn Khaldun's views as possible remedies. In fact, various views and concepts of this thinker are still discussed in intellectual circles and especially his concept of *asabiyya* is very much alive in the fields of sociology, politics, history as well as philosophy of history. *Asabiyya*¹ has been increasingly employed by scholars, thinkers, and intellectuals in many issues of our day ranging for instance from the social and political problems of the Islamic world² to the future of the European Union.³ Thus I believe that Ibn Khaldun has important things to say to the world at large about current and essential issues such as sense of belonging, group psychology, and identity. In this paper I hope to shed some light on Ibn Khaldun's notions of *asabiyya* and political power.

The geography and the era in which Waliyyuddin Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) lived were replete with significant historical events and crises. Being a scholar, statesman, and diplomat who lived or traveled in most of North Africa and some parts of Spain as well as the present day Middle East, Ibn Khaldun was not only a keen observer of events and developments, but also was often part of them. He was involved in and occasionally victimized by some political events. Thus he had a chance to have firsthand experience as well as observation of social and political phenomena, as testified by narratives, assessments, and theories put forward in his monumental

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¹ For its origin, meaning and usage see Mustafa ağrı, "asabiyet", *T rkiye Diyanet Vakfı İsl m Ansiklopedisi* and F. Gabrieli, "asabiyya", *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd edition). For the development of the concept of *asabiyya* in Arabic literature, Ibn Khaldun's use of it as well as its translations to some Western languages, see T. Khemiri, "Der Asabija-Begriff in der Muqaddima des Ibn Haldun", *Der Islam*, 23, 1936. Also see, I.M. Khalifa, "An Analytical Study of 'Asabiyah': Ibn Khaldun's Theory of Social Conflict", Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1972; and H. Ritter, "Irrational Solidarity Groups: A Socio-Psychological Study in Connection with Ibn Khaldun", *Oriens*, 1, 1948. Due to lack of an adequate equivalent in English, in this paper I shall keep the original term *asabiyya*.

² Akbar Ahmed, "Ibn Khaldun's Understanding of Civilizations and the Dilemmas of Islam and the West Today", *Middle East Journal*, 56/1, 2002, pp. 20–45; Farid Alatas, "The Historical Sociology of Muslim Societies: Khaldunian Applications", *International Sociology*, 22/3, 2007, pp. 267–88.

³ Durmuş Hocaoglu, "Avrupa Birliđi'nin Geleceđi ve T rkiye", *Yeniağ* (daily), 19.7.2005.

Muqaddimah.⁴ As a jurist and historian he was also well-versed in Islamic thought, sources, and history and therefore was often aware of the disparity, incongruity, friction and sometimes contradiction between some Islamic ideals as revealed during the days of the Prophet Muhammad and what had happened subsequently. As one reads the *Muqaddimah*, one notices Ibn Khaldun's awareness of this problem as well as his efforts and attempts at reconciliation between the ideal and the real. His approach in the *Muqaddimah* to the perennial ideal-reality problem constitutes the subject matter of this discussion. I shall deal with this issue by focusing mainly on his treatment of two central concepts, namely *asabiyya* and *mulk*.

Asabiyya is one of the key dialectical concepts⁵ in Ibn Khaldun's social and political theory⁶ and its sphere is unexpectedly wide, ranging from its use in war to its role in prophecy. For Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyya* produces the ability to defend and protect oneself, to offer opposition, and to press one's claims, and whoever loses his *asabiyya* is too weak to do any of these things.⁷ Thus, *asabiyya* often leads to superiority in war,⁸ because defense and protection becomes successful only if fighters are bound together by feelings of common descent. This strengthens their stamina and frightens the enemies, since everybody's affection for his family and his group is more important than anything else. Compassion and affection for one's blood relations and relatives exist in human nature as God-given and foster mutual support and aid.⁹ However, *asabiyya* does not have to be based on kinship: although its purpose, which is defense and aggression, can materialize only with the help of a common descent, client relationships and contacts with slaves or allies have the same effect as common descent. Moreover, the consequences of common descent, though natural, still are something imaginary, because the real things to bring about the feeling of close contact are social intercourse, friendship, long familiarity, and the companionship that results from growing up

⁴ Ibn Khaldun completed this work in 1377.

⁵ For *asabiyya* as a dialectical concept and for a very brief comparison of Khaldunian and Hegelian dialectic, see Yves Lacoste, *Ibn Khaldun: The Birth of History and the Past of the Third World*, trans.: David Macey, London, Verso, 1984, pp. 157-8.

⁶ For a discussion of it, see Ali Çaksu "Causality in History: Ibn Khaldun's and Hegel's Transformation of Aristotelian Causes", Ph.D. dissertation, International Islamic University of Malaysia, 1999 (henceforth "Causality in History"); and Ali Çaksu, "Ibn Khaldun and Hegel on Causality in History", *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 35, 2007, pp. 61-2, 72-5.

⁷ W.A. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun*, ed.: Darwish al-Juwaydi, Sayda and Beirut, Al-Maktabat al-Asriyya, 2005, p. 133 [1:289] (henceforth *Muqaddimah* (without mentioning Ibn Khaldun's name). In references to Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* throughout the present article, the reference to the Arabic original is always followed by the reference (in square brackets) to its English translation by Rosenthal, that is, *The Muqaddimah*, trans.: Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols., New York, Pantheon Books, 1958.

⁸ *Muqaddimah*, p. 254 [2:87].

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121 [1:263].

together, living together and sharing the other circumstances of death and life. Close contact developed in such a manner will result in affection and cooperation.¹⁰

Yet, as I shall discuss below in detail, *asabiyya*'s use for Ibn Khaldun is not confined to defense, protection and pressing one's claims; on the contrary, it is necessary with regard to many other human activities such as prophecy, establishment of *mulk*, or propaganda for a cause. Without struggling, one cannot achieve anything here, since man has the natural urge to offer resistance, and thus one cannot do without *asabiyya*.¹¹

Having provided a brief description of *asabiyya* in Ibn Khaldun's formulation, we come to the issue in terms of ideals and realities. While the Holy Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad seemingly censure *asabiyya*,¹² one naturally asks how and why it becomes a central concept and is even justified in Khaldunian thought.

Ibn Khaldun accepts that the Prophet censured *asabiyya* and urged the Muslims to reject it and to leave it alone.¹³ The Prophet said: "God removed from you the arrogance of the pre-Islamic times and its pride in ancestors. You are the children of Adam, and Adam was made of dust." Further, God said: "the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct."¹⁴

In Defense of *Asabiyya*

A reading of the *Muqaddimah* reveals Ibn Khaldun's defense or justification of *asabiyya* on several grounds, ranging from ontological and epistemological bases to the teleological and historical. In this section, I will deal with the justification of *asabiyya* under such grounds and then continue with the thinker's use of *asabiyya* as a factor explaining, testing or even sometimes refuting, some allegedly ideal beliefs and principles.

Justification of *asabiyya* by analogy to human faculties

Ibn Khaldun defends *asabiyya* by likening it to some human qualities that should be controlled and used for good purposes: when the Lawgiver (Prophet Muhammad) prohibits or censures certain human activities or asks for their abandonment, he does not want them to be neglected altogether, nor does he want them to be completely eradicated, or the powers from which they result to remain altogether unused. He wants those powers to be used as much as possible for the right aims. For instance, Prophet Muhammad did not censure wrathfulness in order to annihilate it as a human quality. If the power of wrathfulness (*ghadab*) were no longer to exist in man, he would lose the ability to struggle for the victory of the truth. So there would no longer be proper

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 173 [1:374].

¹¹ Ibid, p. 121 [1:263].

¹² See Çağrı, "asabiyet", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*.

¹³ *Muqaddimah*, p. 189 [1:414-15].

¹⁴ *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, trans.: Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, Singapore, Omar Brothers Publications, n.d, 49:13 (henceforth *The Qur'an*).

defense, glorification of the word of God or *jihad*. Islam condemned the wrathfulness that is in the service of reprehensible purposes, while the wrathfulness that is in the service of God definitely deserves praise. Likewise, when the Lawgiver censures the desires, he does not want them to be abolished altogether, since for example a complete eradication of concupiscence (*shahwa*)¹⁵ in a person would make him defective and inferior. In brief, he wants the desires to be employed for permissible purposes to serve the public interests.¹⁶

Similarly, when the religious law censures *asabiyya* and says: "Your ties of kindred and your children will avail you naught upon the Day of Resurrection",¹⁷ this is directed against an *asabiyya* that is used for worthless purposes, as was the case in pre-Islamic times. It is also directed against an *asabiyya* that makes a person arrogant and haughty. On the other hand, an *asabiyya* that is used in the service of the truth and for fulfillment of the divine commands is something advisable. If it were gone, religious laws would no longer have force, because they come into existence only through *asabiyya*.¹⁸

Ontological foundation of *asabiyya*

Having defended the role and inevitability of *asabiyya* by making use of an analogy with human qualities that should be controlled and used for good purposes, Ibn

¹⁵ Ibn Khaldun borrowed these terms from the psychology of the Muslim philosophers where they had a Platonic-Aristotelian meaning. *Ghadab* and *shahwa* correspond to Greek *thymos* and *epithymia* respectively discussed by Plato in his tripartite division of the soul in 434d-441c. While for instance Fakhry draws attention to Ibn Khaldun's dependence on *The Republic* in the political parts of the *Muqaddimah*, especially in relation to the devolution of the perfect state, and in psychological-political model, Walzer asserts Ibn Khaldun's familiarity with the Greek analysis of political entities and his thorough digestion of it; Majid Fakhry, "The Devolution of the Perfect State: Plato, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Khaldun", in *Arab Civilization: Challenges and Responses Studies in Honor of Constantine K. Zurayk*, ed.: George N. Atiyeh - Ibrahim M. Oweiss, New York, Albany, 1988, pp. 90, 96; Richard Walzer, "Aspects of Islamic Political Thought: al-Farabi and Ibn Xaldun", *Oriens*, 16, 1963, pp. 55-6. Yet for Walzer, Ibn Khaldun has very important and original aspects such as his discovery of bedouin life for political thought, awareness of economic factors, and the importance of religious element and organized religion in politics and history; Walzer, "Aspects of Islamic Political Thought: al-Farabi and Ibn Xaldun", pp. 56, 58. Similarly, Fakhry points out Ibn Khaldun's originality: "For although he stands outside the mainstream of Islamic philosophy in its Neo-Platonic and Peripatetic forms, his philosophical erudition and his originality place him in the forefront of the more creative thinkers of Islam"; Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, New York and London, Colombia University Press and Longman, 1983, p. 328. Needless to say, there are so many interpretations of Ibn Khaldun, depending often on the authors' perceptions, approaches, understandings, and sometimes intentions. For a comprehensive study of various approaches to Ibn Khaldun, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun in Modern Scholarship: A Study in Orientalism*, London, Third World Center for Research and Publishing, 1981.

¹⁶ *Muqaddimah*, p. 189 [1:415-16].

¹⁷ *The Qur'an*, 60:3.

¹⁸ *Muqaddimah*, p. 189 [1:416].

Khaldun also defends it by referring to its necessity.¹⁹ According to him, all religious laws and practices and every social activity requires *asabiyya*, because only with the help of *asabiyya* can a claim be successfully pressed. Thus, *asabiyya* "is necessary to the Muslim community." Its existence enables the community to fulfill divine injunctions. Ibn Khaldun quotes a sound tradition of the *Sahih* as evidence: "God sent no prophet who did not enjoy the protection of his people."²⁰ Prophets have prestige among their people and this is a sign by which they are recognized. This means that a prophet has *asabiyya* and influence which protect him from harm at the hands of unbelievers, until he has completed his mission and established the necessary religious organization.²¹ Thus even prophets in their divine missions needed the support of groups and families, though they were the ones who could have been supported by God, if He had wished, but in His wisdom He permitted matters to take their "customary course."²² Thus, Ibn Khaldun goes further and makes *asabiyya* a cornerstone of true religions, including Islam.

Asabiyya's necessity is not limited to the prophets' eras; *asabiyya* is required for their followers too with respect to religious activities:²³ for example, religious propaganda cannot materialize without *asabiyya*, because every social activity, every mass political undertaking by necessity requires it. If *asabiyya* were necessary for the prophets, who are among human beings those most likely to perform wonders, it would certainly be necessary for the ordinary people whom one cannot expect to be able to work the wonder of achieving superiority without *asabiyya*. That is why, for instance, the Sufi shaykh Ibn Qasî (d.1151), the author of *Kitab Khal' an-na'layn* on Sufism, rose in revolt in Spain, but since he had no *asabiyya*, in spite of his initial success, he had to give up his cause and obey the Almohads who took over control of the Magrib.

Ibn Khaldun asserts elsewhere²⁴ the necessity of *asabiyya* very clearly. For him, the world of existence, that is to say, the reality, verifies the necessity of *asabiyya* for the caliphate, for only someone who has gained superiority over a nation or a race is

¹⁹ As Mahdi explains in detail, Ibn Khaldun uses necessity to mean three different things: "natural necessity", "necessary as a condition", or "necessary by compulsion"; Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1957, pp. 258-260.

²⁰ *Muqaddimah*, p. 189 [1:414].

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91 [1:187-8].

²² *Ibid.*, p. 148 [1:323-4]. For Ibn Khaldun nature as well as history functions in terms of "customary" or "ordinary course", that is to say, causality and causal and social laws. As a believer, he definitely accepts supernatural phenomena like divine intervention and prophetic miracles, but these are exceptional. For the significance of causality in Ibn Khaldun's thought, see Çaksu, "Causality in History", and Johan H. Meuleman, "La causalite dans la *Muqaddimah* d'Ibn Khaldun", *Studia Islamica*, 74, 1991, pp. 105-42.

²³ *Muqaddimah*, p. 148 [1:322-3].

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 183 [1:402].

able to govern it. "The religious law would hardly ever make a requirement in contradiction to the requirements of existence."²⁵ Thus, the ideal cannot be

Teleological defense of *asabiyya*

In fact, Ibn Khaldun sees *asabiyya* as "the secret divine factor" that restrains people from splitting up and abandoning each other, as it is the source of unity and agreement, and the guarantor of the intentions and laws of Islam.²⁶ According to him, this is a reflection of God's wise plans with regard to His creation and creatures.²⁷ Again, as mentioned above, the importance and strength of an *asabiyya* results from a close and direct relationship, "for God made it that way."²⁸

Ibn Khaldun does not stop with the justification of existence of *asabiyya* in Muslim society, but proceeds with its use as a factor explaining, testing or even sometimes refuting, some allegedly ideal beliefs and principles such as that of Quraishi descent for the imamate, Mahdism (Messianism) and the right to revolt against unjust rulers, each of which I shall now treat very briefly.

Ibn Khaldun deals extensively with the issue of Quraishi descent which had been considered by many jurists as a condition of the imamate or caliphate. He discusses several aspects of this issue, but again relates the gist of the matter to *asabiyya*. To him, it is *asabiyya* that is important when specific descent is made a condition of the imamate and the importance of descent lies solely in *asabiyya*.²⁹ *Asabiyya* is closely related to public interest (*maslaha*), as it gives protection and helps people to press their claims. The existence of *asabiyya* frees the leader of the Muslims from opposition and division. The Muslim community accepts him and he is on good terms with them.³⁰ In the early decades of Islamic history following the death of the Prophet, the Quraish represented the strongest available *asabiyya* and all the other Arabs acknowledged this and obeyed them. Therefore Quraishite descent was made a condition of the institution of the

²⁵ As this statement too shows, just like most of the Muslim thinkers, Ibn Khaldun did not have in his thought a reason-revelation dichotomy. As Leaman expresses:

A very influential school of interpretation originating with Leo Strauss is convinced that the basis of all work in Islamic philosophy is the opposition between religion and reason, between faith and philosophy, and between Islam and Greek thought...

It might be that that dichotomy lies at the heart of medieval Jewish and Christian philosophy, or at least of much of it, but there is no reason to import such a dichotomy as a leading principle in Islamic philosophy.

Oliver Leaman, "Introduction", in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, eds.: Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, vol.1, pp. 2-3.

²⁶ For a work on Shatibi who had a great impact on Ibn Khaldun especially on 'the intentions of religion', see Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Shatibi's Philosophy of Islamic Law*, Islamabad, Islamic Research Institute, 1995.

²⁷ *Muqaddimah*, p. 198 [1:438].

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 269 [2:120].

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 181 [1:398].

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 182 [1:399].

imamate. Thus a Quraishite imam would be more effective than anyone else in organizing the Muslim community and bringing harmony to it.³¹ Ibn Khaldun proceeds with his argument and links the Quraishite descent to the condition of competence, since "the Lawgiver (Muhammad) does not make special laws for any one generation, period, or nation." Ibn Khaldun considers it a necessary condition for the Muslim leader that he belong to people who possess a strong *asabiyya*, superior to that of their contemporaries, so that they can oblige the others to follow them and thus unity and security is achieved.³² "At the present time, however, each region has people of its own who represent the superior *asabiyya* (there)."³³ This was, of course, as Ibn Khaldun admits, the result of the disappearance of the Quraishite *asabiyya* in consequence of luxury and prosperity, and as a result of the fact that they spread in a vast geography.³⁴ To summarize in a few words Ibn Khaldun's approach regarding the issue of Quraishite descent, unlike the case with the issue of Mahdism (which we shall see in the following paragraph), he first defends the traditional views and narrations of hadiths on the matter, and then links that specific condition (of Quraishite descent) through *asabiyya* to a universal condition, that is, "competence." However, as the Quraish has no longer any strong *asabiyya* by comparison with other groups, then the specific condition becomes obsolete and is no longer relevant.

For Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyya* also functions as a yardstick for measuring the veracity of some beliefs. As an example, one can take the belief in Mahdism (Messianism) which was, and is still, considered by some Muslims as something like an article of faith. He devotes a lot of pages to the discussion of the traditions concerning the Mahdi (Messiah). He cites them one by one and analyzes them in terms of content and chains of transmission. He notes that al-Bukhari and Muslim do not include the traditions pertaining to the Mahdi. For instance, "Muslim's traditions do not mention the Mahdi, and there is nothing in them to show that the Mahdi is meant in them."³⁵ He concludes that very few of the traditions published by the religious authorities concerning the Mahdi and his appearance are free from criticism.³⁶ This is followed by a discussion of the Sufi opinions about the Mahdi and Ibn Khaldun's critique of them. And the lethal strike comes through *asabiyya*: no religious or political propaganda can be successful, unless power and *asabiyya* support the religious and political aspirations and defend them against the adversaries.³⁷ So, in brief:

³¹ Ibid., p. 182 [1:400].

³² Ibid., p. 182 [1:401]. Elsewhere (ibid., p. 180 [1:395]), when he discusses the four conditions governing the institution of the imamate (namely, knowledge, probity, competence, and freedom), he states, under the heading "competence", among others, that the imam must know about *asabiyya*.

³³ Ibid., p. 182 [1:401].

³⁴ Ibid., p. 181 [1:397].

³⁵ Ibid., p. 293 [2:169].

³⁶ Ibid., p. 298 [2:184].

³⁷ Ibid., p. 303 [2:195].

if it is correct that a Mahdi is to appear, there is only one way for his propaganda to make its appearance. He must be one of them, and God must unite them in the intention to follow him, until he gathers enough strength and group feeling [*asabiyya*] to gain success for his cause and to move the people to support him. Any other way... will not be feasible or successful.³⁸

In conclusion, even if a Mahdi comes to the earth, he must follow the "natural course" and have an *asabiyya* first, if he wants to achieve anything in the sociopolitical realm.

Asabiyya functions as a yardstick for another significant issue discussed by Muslim jurists, namely the right or duty to revolt against unjust rulers.³⁹ Many individuals who are convinced of the injustice of rulers revolt against them. They call for an end to evil practices and restoration of the justice. For their cause, they gather many followers and sympathizers among the people, but actually most of them are killed as a result of their activities. In fact, Ibn Khaldun believes,⁴⁰ God commands such activities to be undertaken only where there exists the power to bring them to a successful conclusion.⁴¹ It is because rulers and dynasties are solidly embedded and their foundations can be undermined and destroyed only through strong efforts backed by the *asabiyya*. Thus Ibn Khaldun's opinion becomes clear: it is right to revolt against injustice and tyranny, only if it will be successful. And for success in this matter, one definitely needs *asabiyya*. Eventually, there should be no revolt without the backing of a strong *asabiyya*.

Asabiyya also becomes a key factor in the explanation of some events in the early Islamic period in which the Companions of Prophet Muhammad were involved. One should not forget that in the classical Sunni tradition the Companions of the Prophet were all considered almost ideal personalities, or models, in accordance with some prophetic traditions such as the following: "The best men are those of my generation, then those who follow them." Ibn Khaldun shares the classical Sunni view about the Companions and consider them as models,⁴² although he does not see them as perfect

³⁸ Ibid., p. 303 [2:196].

³⁹ For a discussion of the issue by al-Mawardi (974–1058) who had a great influence on the Sunni political thought, see his classical *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyya*, Egypt, 1966, p. 3 (henceforth *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya*); and my "The Concept of Political Authority in al-Mawardi and al-Farabi", master's thesis, International Islamic University of Malaysia, 1993. For an English translation of al-Mawardi's work, see Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali ibn Habib al-Basri al-Baghdadi al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah: the Laws of Islamic Governance*, trans.: Asadullah Yate, London, Ta-ha Publishers, 1996.

⁴⁰ *Muqaddimah* p. 148 [1:323–4].

⁴¹ As a support of his view, Ibn Khaldun cites the following famous Prophetic tradition: "Should one among you see evil activities, he should change them with his hand. If he cannot do that, he should change them with his tongue. And if he cannot do that, he should change them with his heart."

⁴² "Their words and deeds are models to be followed. Their probity is perfect, in the view of Orthodox Muslim opinion." (*Muqaddimah*, p. 199 [1:441]). See also, *ibid.*, pp. 201 [1:447]; 299

human beings.⁴³ Nevertheless, after the death of the Prophet, some of the Companions were involved in events like the Incidents of Jamal (Camel) and Siffin, which included fighting and bloodshed. These are often analyzed and explained by Ibn Khaldun mostly in terms of *asabiyya*.⁴⁴ Just to illustrate how Ibn Khaldun "explains" these kinds of controversial events, let us quote him directly:

"When trouble arose between Ali and Mu'awiyah as a necessary consequence of group feeling [*asabiyya*], they were guided in (their dissensions) by the truth and by independent judgment. They did not fight for any worldly purpose or over preferences of no value, or for reasons of personal enmity. This might be suspected, and heretics might like to think so. However, what caused their difference was their independent judgment as to where the truth lay. It was on this matter that each side opposed the point of view of the other. It was for this that they fought. Even though Ali was in the right, Mu'awiyah's intentions were not bad ones. He wanted the truth, but he missed (it). Each was right in so far as his intentions were concerned..."⁴⁵

Thus *asabiyya*, a very visible part of reality, is not only justified by Ibn Khaldun, but also made an integral part of some institutions like prophecy and imamate, and also of some historical events where near-ideal people (Companions) were involved. Does this mean that *asabiyya* is an ideal for him? The answer is definitely negative, since for Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyya*, in addition to being a historical force, is primarily a conceptual tool used in "understanding" and "explaining" some past and present phenomena and events. He justifies *asabiyya*, but never idealizes it. Throughout the *Muqaddimah* Ibn Khaldun enumerates positive as well as negative impacts and roles of *asabiyya* in human societies, and gives a prominent place to *asabiyya* in history, but his ideal is what he calls "continuous civilization" where *asabiyya* is eventually transcended and disappears. Why should *asabiyya* be transcended and annihilated? His personal experience, observations and comparisons, his readings in history as well as reports by scholars, travelers, dervishes, and pilgrims about the conditions in far away Muslim lands led him to this view. Lack of *asabiyya* often meant primarily political stability and peaceful life under a *mulk*,⁴⁶ and then enjoying all the benefits of sedentary culture like

[2:187]; 388 [2:382], and 456 [3:93]. Also cf.: "They never differed among themselves except for good reasons. They never killed or were killed except in a holy war [jihad], or in helping to make some truth victorious" (ibid., p. 202 [1:448])

⁴³ For instance, "not all of the men around Muhammad were qualified to give legal decisions" (ibid., p. 416 [3:3]) and "the men around Muhammad were deficient in (writing)" (ibid., pp. 388-9 [2:383]).

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 198-202 [1:438-48].

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 192 [1:421].

⁴⁶ Ibn Khaldun observes that with the passage of time, obedience to the political power becomes like an article of faith:

It has become a firmly established article of faith that one must be subservient and submissive to them. People will fight with them in their behalf, as they would fight for the articles of faith... It

wealth and prosperity, tranquility, rule of law, arts, crafts, trade, education, and sciences. That is why, for Ibn Khaldun, in spite of significant changes in terms of political power, culture and even religion, civilizations continued for hundreds and even thousands of years in several parts of the world such as Egypt (under the Copts, Greeks, Romans, and Muslims), Iraq (the Nabataeans, Persians, Chaldaeans, Achaemenids, Sassanians, and Arabs), and Spain (the Gothic Dynasty and Umayyads).⁴⁷ In brief, the ideal of "continuous civilization" was not a utopia longed for and hoped to be reached one day in future. For him even in his age it existed both in Egypt⁴⁸ and Spain, where *asabiyya* had totally disappeared long ago.

In Defense of *Mulk*

Mulk is another Khaldunian concept the paper will examine in detail.⁴⁹ It is translated in many forms including "royal authority",⁵⁰ "monarchy",⁵¹ and "rule", "dominion", "power" or "power-state".⁵² However, one should keep in mind that Ibn Khaldun uses it in a wider and deeper sense and his *mulk*⁵³ goes beyond the "royal authority" or "kingdom" and corresponds to "political power" or "political authority" in general, although the term *mulk* (just like *asabiyya*) assumes various meanings at different stages of its development or on different occasions, as it will be clear in my discussion.⁵⁴ Moreover, one should also keep in mind its Qur'anic usage which includes theological connotations as well.⁵⁵

Ibn Khaldun has a similar approach to *mulk*. Just like he does with *asabiyya*, he needs to justify the concept first and then proceed with its use. Thus, first of all he draws our attention to the fact that Prophet Muhammad censured *mulk* and its

is as if obedience to the government were a divinely revealed book that cannot be changed or opposed. *Muqaddimah*, pp. 143-4 [1:314].

In fact, unquestioned or absolute obedience to the political power in lands with no *asabiyya* at all might perhaps be seen as another form of *asabiyya* keeping the people together.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 154 [1:334] and 342 [2:287-8].

⁴⁸ Probably for this reason, in December 1382 he moved to Egypt where, except for some travels in the East, including a pilgrimage, he remained for the rest of his life.

⁴⁹ *Mulk* stems from the verbal root *m-l-k* which signifies "possession" and, by extension, "rule" or "government." The Arabic word for king (*malik*) comes from this root as well. The term was used as a royal title by pre-Islamic Arabs in southern Arabia and Syria.

⁵⁰ Franz Rosenthal translation of the *Muqaddimah* uses "royal authority" throughout the text.

⁵¹ Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 329.

⁵² Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958, pp. 87, 88, 107.

⁵³ Rabi' sees Ibn Khaldun's study of the phenomenon of *mulk* as an original contribution to political thought in general; Muhammad Mahmoud Rabi', *The Political Theory of Ibn Khaldun*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1967, p. 167.

⁵⁴ That is why, in this paper I will keep the term *mulk* without translation.

⁵⁵ For instance, verses such as "To God alone belongs *mulk*, He has no associate therein"; "to Him belongs *mulk* over heaven and earth" and "He gives *mulk* to whom He will" are frequently mentioned in the *Qur'an*.

representatives. The Prophet blamed them because of their senseless, waste, wrongdoing, and deviations from the path of God, and recommended friendship among people and warned against strife and conflict.⁵⁶

Ontological basis of *mulk*

For Ibn Khaldun,⁵⁷ *mulk* is a "natural" quality of man which is necessary for mankind. As a matter of fact, one discerns even among some wild animals like bees and locusts the existence of authority and obedience to a leader. However, these are as a result of natural disposition and divine guidance, whereas in the case of human beings they are as a result of an ability to think or to administrate.

Ibn Khaldun justifies the existence of *mulk* as the natural goal of *asabiyya*. For him, *mulk* results from *asabiyya*, not by choice but through "inherent necessity and the order of existence."⁵⁸ For instance, when he responds to those who attempt to dispense with *mulk* by assuming that the institution of imamate is not necessary,⁵⁹ he argues as follows: observance of the religious laws is a necessary thing and it is achieved only through *asabiyya* and power, and *asabiyya*, by its very nature, requires the existence of *mulk*. Thus, there will be *mulk*, even if no imam is set up.⁶⁰

One might suggest that Ibn Khaldun defends the necessity of *mulk* also through the use of Aristotle's *form-matter* relationship as he understood and applied it as well as the notion of substance. There are several passages in the *Muqaddimah* presenting "the state" (or dynasty) (*dawla*)⁶¹ and civilization as form and matter. According to Ibn Khaldun,⁶² dynasty and *mulk* have the same relationship to civilization as form has to matter. A more detailed version⁶³ asserts that dynasty and *mulk* constitute the form of the world and of civilization, which, in turn, together with the subjects, cities, and all other things, constitute the matter of dynasty and *mulk*. Thus, the disintegration of civilization causes the disintegration of the status of dynasty and ruler, because their peculiar status constitutes the form of civilization and the form necessarily decays when its matter (in this case, civilization) decays.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ *Muqaddimah*, p. 189 [1:415].

⁵⁷ *Muqaddimah*, p. 47 [1:92].

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 130 [1:284] and 189 [1:414].

⁵⁹ As discussed in the opening pages of al-Mawardi's *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya*, one scholar called al-Asamm as well as some Kharijites argued that the institution of imamate was not necessary in Islam; Elie Adib Salem, *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawarij*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956, p. 51.

⁶⁰ *Muqaddimah*, p. 179 [1:392].

⁶¹ One should note that the state and dynasty are not identical, for a dynasty might be replaced by another without upsetting the fabric of the state.

⁶² *Muqaddimah*, p. 349 [2:300].

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 343 [2:291].

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 262 [2:104].

However, this form-matter relationship seems to be mutual, if one takes into consideration some other statements of Ibn Khaldun: For instance, in one place⁶⁵ he writes that "civilization... is the substance of the dynasty"; yet elsewhere⁶⁶ he says that "dynasty and government serve as the world's greatest market place, providing the substance of civilization." Moreover, he holds that form and matter are inseparable and therefore one cannot imagine a dynasty without civilization, while a civilization without a dynasty and *mulk* is impossible. In short, civilization is the matter of the state, and equally, the state provides matter for civilization, that is to say, civilization and the state stand to each other reciprocally both as matter and as form.

He also holds that the state and civilization are form and matter. Yet he adds that "the real dynasty, the one that acts upon the matter of civilization, belongs to group feeling [*asabiyya*] and power."⁶⁷ In other words, the state which is the form acts with its *asabiyya* upon the civilization which is the matter.⁶⁸

Epistemological basis of *mulk*

One needs to justify *mulk* based on religious knowledge if one were to use it as an element in political authority. This is what I mean by the epistemological basis of *mulk*. To Ibn Khaldun,⁶⁹ when the Lawgiver censures *mulk*, he censures it for achieving superiority through worthless means and for indulgence in selfish purposes and desires. He does not censure a *mulk* used for gaining superiority through truth, for making the masses accept the faith, and for looking after the public interest. If *mulk* is employed for such good purposes, there would not be anything blameworthy in it. Thus for instance Solomon said: "My Lord! Forgive me and bestow on me sovereignty [*mulk*] such as shall not belong any after me."⁷⁰ Solomon was sure of himself and knew that, as prophet and king, he would have nothing to do with anything worthless.

Thus, as seen clearly, according to Ibn Khaldun,⁷¹ the religious law does not censure *mulk* as such and does not forbid its exercise. It merely condemns the proceeding evils such as tyranny, injustice, and pleasure-seeking, which are often the concomitants of *mulk*. On the other hand, needless to say, the law praises justice, fairness, the fulfillment of religious duties, and the defense of the religion, which are

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 263 [2:107].

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 261 [2:102].

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 349 [2:301].

⁶⁸ The clarification of Ibn Khaldun's thesis is beyond the scope of the present work and therefore I will suffice with this much explanation. For a more detailed discussion see Çaksu, "Causality in History." Further, as Arslan states, Ibn Khaldun's view of the relationship among Islam, *asabiyya* and *mulk* is a bit complicated and seems to have some contradictions; Ahmet Arslan, *İbni Haldun'un İlim ve Fikir Dünyası*, Ankara, Vadi Yayınları, 1997, p. 200. For a comprehensive discussion on *asabiyya* and the state in Ibn Khaldun, see Muhammad 'Abid Al-Jabiri, *Fikr Ibn Khaldun: al-'Asabiyyah wa al-Dawlah*, Beirut, Dar al-Tali'ah, 1982.

⁶⁹ *Muqaddimah*, pp. 189-90 [1:416-7].

⁷⁰ *The Qur'an*, 38:36.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 179 [1:391-2].

concomitants of *mulk*, too. So, *mulk* is basically blamed only on account of its negative qualities and conditions. As we have seen above, the law also censures concupiscence and wrathfulness in responsible persons, but it does not want to see either of these qualities abandoned altogether, because "necessity calls for their existence."⁷² It only wants to make sure that they are used properly. As mentioned in the Qur'an, David and Solomon possessed unprecedented *mulk*, yet they were God's beloved prophets.

Thus, Ibn Khaldun concludes, when *mulk* obtained by a person, no objection can be raised if he uses it to further the truth.⁷³ So here we have a justification of power from the perspectives of religious knowledge and spirit of law.⁷⁴ As usual, Ibn Khaldun goes beyond the literal readings of some religious injunctions like those which are allegedly censuring *asabiyya* and *mulk* and points out the wisdom behind them. Besides, sometimes he also brings from the same religious texts counter-arguments supportive of his theories.

Justification of *mulk* from the perspective of history

Ibn Khaldun⁷⁵ believes that *asabiyya*, which determines unity and disunity in the "customary course" of the affairs, was not important at all during Prophet Muhammad's time, as religion won the hearts of the Muslims. The presence of the Prophet, the gradual revelation of the Qur'an as well as miracles and divine help had a great impact on the people and kept them together. However, after the Prophet's death, things began to change and affairs began to take again their "ordinary course."

Then, all the rightly guided caliphs (the four caliphs ruled following the death of Prophet Muhammad) refused *mulk* and its manners due to the low standard of living in Islam and the desert outlook of the Arabs. Thus they kept away from the world and its luxuries and instead preferred asceticism.⁷⁶

In the early Islamic era, the *asabiyya* of the Arabs was consolidated in Islam through Muhammad's prophecy. Arabs then advanced against the Persians and Byzantines, from whom they took away the *mulk*. They confiscated their worldly possessions and amassed enormous fortunes. Islam did not blame them for amassing so much, because, as booty, it was lawful property and they employed that property in a positive way.⁷⁷ For Ibn Khaldun, amassing worldly property for personal purposes is

⁷² In addition to concupiscence and wrathfulness, "amassing worldly property" is another matter to which Ibn Khaldun compares possessing *mulk* when he justifies it, as one shall see below.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 192 [1:422].

⁷⁴ As Davudoğlu states "in contrast to Western experience, the Islamic tradition has a complete theocentric interpretation and justification of political power, which becomes the theoretical background of religious-cultural pluralism and institutional monism in Islamic history"; Ahmed Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory*, Lanham, University Press of America, 1994, p. 151.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 197 [1:436-7].

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 190 [1:418].

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2 [1:419-21].

considered reprehensible the wealth acquired through legal channels should be used constructively in promoting "the intentions of religion." Likewise, *mulk*, as the early Muslims saw it, belonged in the same category as luxury and amassed property.⁷⁸ If it is used for good purposes and public interest, then there is nothing reprehensible in its possession.

Here, I suggest, one observes a justification of *mulk* from historical perspective. Moreover, Ibn Khaldun's historical justification of the *mulk* also reflects his view of the transformation of the caliphate into *mulk*.⁷⁹ According to him, the caliphate at first existed without *mulk*. Everybody had in himself the restraining influence of Islam. Then the characteristic traits of the caliphate, namely preference for Islam and its ways and adherence to the path of truth, became mixed up and confused. The restraining influence was now more *asabiyya* and the sword than Islam. Finally, the characteristic traits of the caliphate disappeared and only its name remained. The form of government came to be *mulk* pure and simple. The nature of *mulk* showed itself in the form of use of superiority and force.

Ibn Khaldun does not stop with the justification of *mulk*; he also attempts to establish its relations with an alleged ideal like caliphate, as he believes that caliphate and *mulk* are united in Islam.⁸⁰ For him, possession of *mulk* requires the existence of good qualities; otherwise *mulk* cannot survive.⁸¹ Good qualities bear witness to the potential existence of *mulk* in a person who in addition to his good qualities possesses *asabiyya*. Whenever one observes people who possess *asabiyya* and who have gained control over many lands and nations, one finds in them a desire for goodness and good qualities of leadership.⁸² This is something good which God had given them⁸³ in proportion to their *asabiyya* and superiority. Thus *mulk* is the good and the rank that most closely correspond to the *asabiyya* they have. Contrariwise, when God wants a nation to be deprived of *mulk*, He causes its members to commit blameworthy deeds and to practice all sorts of vices.⁸⁴

In addition to the religion's influence on *mulk* through the ethical qualities of leadership, *mulk* has a relation to religion from another direction: by uniting all hearts,

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 192 [1:421].

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 194 [1:426-8].

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 213 [1:473]. Religion still remains an important factor in the *mulk*. "He thus combines a primarily theological with a power-political concept of the state, without in any way abandoning the accepted Muslim position..."; Erwin I. J Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958, p. 96.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 134 [1:292-3].

⁸² However, cf. *ibid.*, p. 177 [1:385], where Ibn Khaldun states that *mulk* "requires superiority and force." Of course, superiority and force are essential for the possession of *asabiyya*.

⁸³ Cf. *The Qur'an*, 2:247: "Allah bestoweth His sovereignty [*mulk*] on whom He will."

⁸⁴ Cf. *The Qur'an*, 17:16: "And when We would destroy a township We send commandment to its folk who live at ease, and afterward they commit abomination therein, and so the Word (of doom) hath effect for it, and We annihilate it with complete annihilation."

religion provides a very strong *asabiyya* and thus supports and strengthens *mulk* and keeps it alive. By making use of the Aristotelian "four causes",⁸⁵ Ibn Khaldun asserts that "religion and religious organization constitute the *form* for existence and royal authority [*mulk*], which together constitute the *matter* for religion. Form is prior to matter."⁸⁶ He explains it as follows:⁸⁷ large and powerful dynasties have their origin in religion based either on prophecy or on truthful propaganda. This is because *mulk* results from superiority and superiority results from *asabiyya*. Individuals who struggle together for establishing God's religion become united. As God said, only religion could create this: "If thou hadst spent all that is in the earth thou couldst not have attuned their hearts, but Allah hath attuned them."⁸⁸ The secret of this is that when the people are after false desires and are inclined toward the world, jealousy and widespread differences arise among them. But when they are turned toward the truth and reject the world and whatever is false, they become one in their outlook. Jealousy disappears and differences are minimized. Cooperation and solidarity flourish and as a consequence, the extent of the state widens and the political power grows. In brief, religion provides a common ideal or ideology around which people are united and contributes to the development of strong *asabiyya*. Thus political power has a strong basis and sustained easily.

Ibn Khaldun avoids dealing with the "ideal city", or the best state of the philosophers and focuses on the forms of state that have actually existed in history. For him, philosophers' ideal state is based on hypothesis and is a mere utopia.⁸⁹ Therefore, he does not have a metaphysical idea of state, as he has a realist approach to *mulk* and the state whose economic and human foundations he emphasizes.⁹⁰ The ruler of the state is not a philosopher-king, but the sovereign ruler of the power-state, supported by *asabiyya* and religion.⁹¹

⁸⁵ For the "four causes" in Ibn Khaldun, see Çaksu, "Causality in History."

⁸⁶ *Muqaddimah*, p. 351 [2:305].

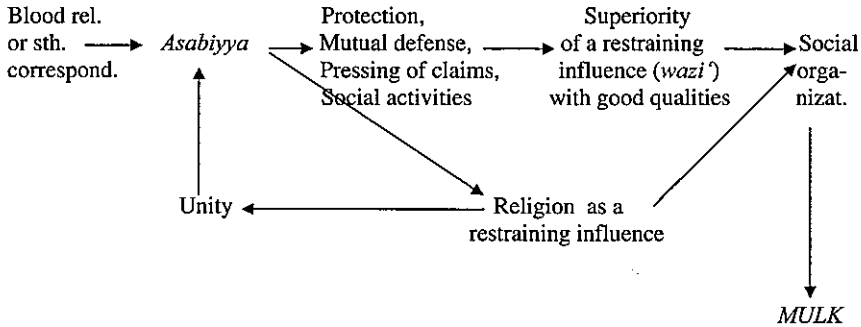
⁸⁷ *Muqaddimah*, p. 146 [1:319-20].

⁸⁸ *The Qur'an*, 8:63.

⁸⁹ *Muqaddimah*, p. 278 [2:138]. Here his reference is primarily to al-Farabi. For Ibn Khaldun's approach to the Muslim philosophers, see Erwin I. J Rosenthal, "Ibn Khaldun's Attitude to the *Falasifa*", *Al-Andalus*, 20, 1955, pp. 75-85.

⁹⁰ Ümit Hassan, *İbn Khaldun'un Metodu ve Siyaset Teorisi*, Ankara, 1977, p. 298. Further, one might suggest that "Ibn Khaldun clung to Islam as the superior State, as the ideal society of man striving for dominion and power, not for their own sake but in order to enforce the ideal of human perfection and happiness in this world and in the world to come."; Erwin I. J Rosenthal, "Ibn Khaldun: A North African Muslim Thinker of the Fourteenth Century", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 24, 1940, p. 319.

⁹¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the Khaldunian state and *asabiyya*, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation*, London, Frank Cass, 1982, pp. 28-36.



Before concluding this section on *mulk*, one should add that Ibn Khaldun does not ignore the material aspect of the power as elaborated in the *Muqaddimah*. However, interestingly even that aspect is sometimes somehow related to God's wise plan. For him, any *mulk* must be built upon two foundations: the first is might and *asabiyya*, which finds its expression in soldiers, while the second is money, which provides the whole structure needed by *mulk*.⁹³ Yet, for example, when one contemplates a bit, one finds out that even gold and silver are tools of a divine plan: "It was God's wise plan that gold and silver, being rare, should be the standard of value by which the profits and capital accumulation of human beings are measured."⁹⁴

Conclusion

By focusing on two central concepts from the *Muqaddimah*, namely *asabiyya* and *mulk*, I have attempted to display Ibn Khaldun's approach to some issues pertaining to the disparity of ideal-reality. I have tried to show how Ibn Khaldun saw the ideal and the real on the one hand, and the historical phenomena of *asabiyya* and *mulk*, on the other hand.

To conclude, some of the alleged ideals are part of the past, if ever existed at the first place. Even prophets, God's most select human beings, needed *asabiyya* and those

⁹² In line with the general approach in the classical Muslim political thought, Ibn Khaldun too has a sort of social contract: before the establishment of the *mulk*, as the existence of various *asabiyyas* might lead to a clash, one person with good qualities (*wazi'*) from the group whose *asabiyya* is the strongest acts as a restraining influence. For he has some sort of superiority over the others, he ensures order and peace and prevents a possible internal clash. However, although this chieftain is obeyed, in fact he has no power to force others to accept his rulings. He is merely the first among equals, whereas *mulk* means superiority and the power to rule by force. After the establishment of the *mulk*, the ruler serves as the restraining authority by making use of his superiority and force as well as his good characteristics. *Muqaddimah*, p. 47 [1:91-2].

⁹³ Ibid., p. 269 [2:118-9].

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 526 [3:277].

among them, who did not have it, lost their lives before completing their missions. One needs to understand the essence and spirit of the ideal to keep it alive. Without comprehending the ideal, one is likely to make grave mistakes in understanding and interpreting various Qur'anic verses, prophetic traditions, and significant historical events, just as various Qur'an commentators, hadith narrators, and renowned historians did.⁹⁵

With his realist outlook "informed by a truly systematic and philosophical bent",⁹⁶ Ibn Khaldun's approach to justification and explanation of *asabiyya* and *mulk* gives us an opportunity to see some historical and political phenomena from a different perspective and enables us also to employ those concepts in dealing with today's problems. Besides, as a Muslim scholar who was also well-versed in religious knowledge, his approach paves the way for the Muslims of today to reexamine their history, scripts, and civilization in the light of varied perspectives.

ÖZET

İDEALLER VE GERÇEKLER:

İBN HALDUN'UN ASABİYET VE SİYASİ İKTİDARI

MEŞRULAŞTIRMASI

Devlet adamlığı ve diplomatlığının yanı sıra, bir hukukçu ve tarihçi olarak İbn Haldun, İslam'ın ilk günlerinde dile getirilen idealler ile İslam tarihinde sonraki dönemlerde, özellikle de siyaset, sosyoloji ve ekonomi alanlarında ortaya çıkan gelişme ve uygulamalar arasındaki bazı aykırılık, uyumsuzluk, sürtüşme ve hatta çelişkilerin farkındaydı. Kendisi *Mukaddime*'sinde idealler ve gerçekler arasındaki bu boşluk üzerinde durmuş ve bunları bağdaştırmaya yönelik çaba göstermiştir. Bu girişiminde ise "asabiyyet" ve "mülk" gibi kavramsal araçlar kullanmış ve ilgi çekici sonuçlara varmıştır. Biz bu makalemizde, İbn Haldun'un en azından temel anlamıyla İslam'la çelişkili görünen veya görülen bu iki kavramı nasıl meşrulaştırdığını ve bunları bazı tarihi olay ve gelişmelerin açıklanmasında ve bazı inançların eleştiri ve reddinde birer araç veya ölçü olarak kullandığını inceledik.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İbn Haldun, asabiyyet, siyasi iktidar, ideal, gerçek.

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⁹⁵ For a discussion of the issue see, for instance, Çaksu "Causality in History."

⁹⁶ Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation*, p. 152.

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