Religion and the State in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah*

by

Damian Esteban

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Institute of Islamic Studies
McGill University
Montreal

2004

Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Canada

Abstract

Author: Damian Esteban
Title: Religion and the State in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah*
Department: Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University
Degree: Master of Arts

This study is an attempt to gain a better understanding of Ibn Khaldūn's political

theory contained in *The Muqaddimah* from the stance that religion and his faith in Islam

are at the core of his political theory. Though there is a great deal of scholarship that

has been dedicated to the interpretation of Ibn Khaldūn's political theory contained in

The Muqaddimah, there are a limited number of works that deal exclusively with the

role of religion in his conception of the State. Those that do tend to either exaggerate

Ibn Khaldūn's secular thought in the realm of politics or understate his originality as a

political scientist. Thus, this study will attempt to prove that his political theory is

indeed theocentric by way of examining the true nature of *'aṣabīya,* which to Ibn

Khaldūn was the basis for all forms of human social and political organization, and its

relationship with religion in terms of its function in the establishment and propagation

of the State. In addition, we will also attempt to dispel the notion that the overall tone

of *The Muqaddimah* is pessimistic and fatalistic; indeed when one examines the

political theory contained in *The Muqaddimah* from a theocentric viewpoint it is made

apparent that it was Ibn Khaldūn's strong religious convictions that ultimately present a

sense of optimism in his work.

Résumé

Auteur :   Damian Esteban
Titre :   La religion et l'Etat dans *la Muqaddimah* de Ibn Khaldūn
Département : Institut des Études Islamiques, Université McGill
Diplôme :   Maître des Arts

Cette étude a pour but de développer une meilleure compréhension de la théorie politique de Ibn Khaldūn, avancée dans *la Muqaddimah*. Cette étude présuppose que la religion de Ibn Khaldūn et sa foi en Islam sont au centre de sa théorie politique. Bien que la théorie politique de Ibn Khaldūn dans sa *Muqaddimah* a été interprétée par un grand nombre de chercheurs, seul un nombre très limité d'études a été dédié au rôle de la religion dans sa conception de l'Etat. Ces derniers essaient d'un cote d'exagérer la pensée séculaire de Ibn Khaldūn dans le domaine politique, et d'un autre, de sous-estimer son originalité en tant que politologue. Ainsi, cette étude tente de prouver que la théorie politique de Ibn Khaldūn est théocentrique. Pour prouver cela, nous examinons la vraie nature de *'asabīya*, étant donné qu'elle est pour Ibn Khaldūn la base de toute forme d'organisation humaine, sociale et politique, ainsi que la relation de *'asabīya* avec la religion en termes de sa fonction dans l'établissement et la propagation de l'Etat. Également, nous tenterons d'introduire l'idée que le ton général de *la Muqaddimah* est pessimiste et fataliste ; en effet, quand on examine la théorie politique établie dans *la Muqaddimah* d'un point de vue théocentrique, il devient clair que c'est irrémédiablement la conviction religieuse de Ibn Khaldūn qui démontre un sens d'optimisme dans son ouvrage.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Arabic Transliteration

Table of the system of transliteration of Arabic words and names used by
the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University.

b	=	ب	z	=	ز	f	=	ف
t	=	ت	s	=	س	q	=	ق
th	=	ث	sh	=	ش	k	=	ك
j	=	ج	ṣ	=	ص	l	=	ل
ḥ	=	ح	ḍ	=	ض	m	=	م
kh	=	خ	ṭ	=	ط	n	=	ن
d	=	د	ẓ	=	ظ	h	=	ه
dh	=	ذ	ʿ	=	ع	w	=	و
r	=	ر	gh	=	غ	y	=	ي

Short: a = ´ ; i = ِ ; u = ´

Long: ā = ا ; ī = ي ; ū = و

Diphthong: ay = ي ا ; aw = و ا

vi

Introduction

The history of Islam and Islamic political thought begins with the first of many revelations of the Qur'ān by God to the Prophet Muḥammad which occurred in the year 632. After facing early opposition which led to the *hijra* in 622, the date from which the Islamic calendar is dated, Muḥammad's revelation brought the tribes of Arabia into a new type of unity.[1] Nothing could have prepared Persia and Byzantium for the explosive military and political force that came zealously bursting forth from the Arabian Peninsula eventually following the *hijra*; between 634 and 656 the Arab armies defeated both empires and their lands were completely under Arab dominion. These early conquests were based on a new religion and new ideas which unanimously combined both faith and military might, and led to the beginning of a new type of political thought which was very different from anything that had preceded it.[2] When Muḥammad and his early followers forged a new *umma* they simultaneously created a new kind of international community, to quote Anthony Black: "For the first and only time in human history, the nation was transcended at the moment it was created…at the heart of the project was the transfer of power from empire to Prophet (and later, religious community)."[3]

The events surrounding early Islamic history can be explained by viewing it as a phenomenon that was both spiritual and political that was indeed a radical development at the time. Prior to the rise of Islam, Judaism had stressed a universal common law,

---

[1] Anthony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 9.
[2] Ibid., 10.
[3] Ibid., 10.

and later Christianity preached of a universal and spiritual brotherhood, however neither

had sufficiently dealt with the issue of military power and political authority and their

connection with faith.[4] In contrast, Islam called for a spiritual brotherhood, universal

law and universal political control which could be attained, if necessary, by political

force. Many of the original people who adopted Muḥammad's teachings had in common

a recent tribal past, and Islam intertwined itself with traditional local cultures,

specifically for much of its history with Arab-Bedouin tribalism and Iranian patrimonial

monarchy.[5] As a result of this, it is apparent that ethical and social mores of tribalism

played a part in the formation of Islamic culture and political values.

Firstly, tribal identity continued to be a significant factor in Islamic society.[6] In

early garrison cities such as Basra and Kufa, and much later in urban centers such as

Cairo, the bonds and connections of clans were often the basis for social and political

relations. One example of this is the fact that early non-Arab converts to Islam were

required to attach themselves to an existing Arab tribe as *mawāli* of one of the

tribesmen. Islam as a social system seemed to leave room for clans and tribes which

may account for the ease with which it spread in central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa,

and unlike the monarchical-feudal rulers of Christian Europe, Islamic rulers were able to

successfully link various segmental groups without doing away with their existing and

internal social structures.[7] It was observation of this very phenomena which

undoubtedly inspired Ibn Khaldūn to develop his intricate social and political theories.

Secondly, various features of tribal society were directly carried over as an integral part

---

[4] Ibid., 10.
[5] Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* vol. 1 (Chicago: University Press, 1974), 196.
[6] Black, 11.
[7] Ibid., 11.

of Islamic culture and society. One's lineage continued to be a factor in Islamic society, and tribal values seemed to exist in the moral prescriptions revealed in the Qur'ān: "Those that have kinship by blood are closer to one another in the book of God than the believers who are not kindred."[8] These tribal values were also however given an Islamic universal meaning. Muslims were ultimately to be bound together by belief in a common faith and system of justice in contrast to the pre-Islamic Arab tribes who were bound together solely by kinship. Islam drastically transformed tribal society by giving the individual great social responsibility; what ultimately mattered most was not tribe or race but rather godliness and adherence to the *sharī'a*, providing a new social identity for its followers.[9]

The *sharī'a* may be viewed as the "rock of Islam", the divine law which binds and unites all Muslims and prescribes for them their way of life in the temporal realm, and the means to reach the ultimate reward of heaven in the afterlife. Included in this prescription is of course the ideal model of political administration, which is embodied in the form of the *khilāfa*. Islamic political thought primarily is concerned with theories of the *khilāfa*, specifically its origin and purpose. Due to the inherent religious nature of the *khilāfa* it may not be viewed solely as a political entity as such, but rather an all-encompassing administrative body that simultaneously concerns itself with maintaining Islamic practice and belief and the political administration of its subjects from a religious standpoint. While the *khilāfa's* ultimate concern is providing for its subjects the means to attain the ultimate spiritual reward in heaven, it is also obliged to provide

---

[8] *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* trans. and ed. 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 1997), 33:6.
[9] Black, 12.

for its subjects the means to achieve happiness and a sense of fulfillment during their time in the temporal realm.

This seemingly dual and rather complex role of the *khilāfa* has led many Islamic political theorists to attempt to explore the nature of the relationship between religion (Islam) and politics, specifically the true role that religion plays in the Islamic state. Ibn Khaldūn, the great North African scholar and statesman of the 14th century concerned himself primarily with this task in developing his political theories, attempting to define the role of religion in the Islamic state. Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah,* an introduction to his *Kitāb al-'ibar,* is undoubtedly one of the greatest scholarly contributions to emerge from the rich intellectual tradition of the Muslim west in the middle ages. Ibn Khaldūn's groundbreaking work covers a wide range of topics including general themes in Islamic history, political theory and a classification of the sciences practiced in Islamic Civilization. The central topics of *The Muqaddimah* are human civilization and human association, and their history. The State, which is the basis for man's political and social organization is dealt with extensively in *The Muqaddimah,* and Ibn Khaldūn presents many political theories concerning its establishment, sustenance, and decline.

Many scholars have attempted to clearly define and classify Ibn Khaldūn's political theory which has proved to be difficult for several reasons. Part of the difficulty lies in the nature of the *The Muqaddimah* itself; it is certainly one of the most comprehensive and unique works written on the subjects of history and human association. Due to the wealth of information and varied opinions expressed in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah,* scholars have met particularly difficulty in reconciling two broad topics treated in his work which are his account of historical events and his

presentation of his new "science of culture" (*'ilm al-'umrān)* with each other.[10] The

second great difficulty one encounters in defining Ibn Khaldūn's political theory is both

his general Islamic background and the fact that he held political offices in both North

Africa and Spain, and was chief Mālikite *qāḍī* in Egypt. The combination of these

factors has led to varied interpretations of Ibn Khaldūn's political theory, at times

under-estimating the importance he assigned to the role of religion in the State.

It is the purpose of this study to carry out an in-depth analysis of the important

role assigned to religion in the formation and sustenance of the State by Ibn Khaldūn in

his *Muqaddimah.* This will be achieved by examining the true nature of *'aṣabīya* and

how its natural deficiencies and limitations are eradicated when it is complimented by

religious sentiment. Only through an in-depth analysis of the concept of *'aṣabīya* can

one truly understand the role of religion in Ibn Khaldūn's political theories. The second

objective of this study is to analyze and expose the cohesive and complimentary

relationship between *'aṣabīya* and religious sentiment he developed in his political

theories, this relationship being the ideal basis for a strong and prosperous state. The

third and final objective of this work is to gain a better understanding of Ibn Khaldūn's

political theory in general through a re-interpretation of sections of his *Muqaddimah*

from the standpoint that religion, specifically Islam, was at the deep roots of his

political theory, thus becoming the touchstone for his classification of the types of

political authority.

---

[10] Briton Cooper Busch, "Divine Intervention in *The Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldūn," *Islamic Quarterly* 29, (June 1985): 12.

Though there is a great deal of scholarship that has been dedicated to the interpretation of Ibn Khaldūn's political theory contained in *The Muqaddimah*, there are a limited number of works that deal exclusively with the role of religion in his conception of the State. Those that do tend to either exaggerate Ibn Khaldūn's secular thought in the realm of politics or understate his originality as a political scientist. One exception is Arnold Toynbee's multivolume work, *A Study of History*, which is quite relevant to this thesis. His assessment of Ibn Khaldūn's political theories and his view of history is that they are based first and foremost on religion, which led Toynbee to classify Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah* as "theocentric".[11]

While Toynbee's work provided for its time a sufficient interpretation of the religious basis of Ibn Khaldūn's political theories and his view of history contained in *The Muqaddimah*, it is necessary to re-evaluate his work in light of more recent studies. His scholarship was a step in the right direction, but he did not sufficiently explore the cohesive and complimentary bond between *'aṣabīya* and religion that Ibn Khaldūn puts forth as the basis for the ideal state. In addition, Toynbee did not specifically deal with Ibn Khaldūn's political theories as such, but rather focused more on his account of actual historical events. Thus, while this study will rely on Toynbee's basic assessment of Ibn Khaldūn's work, what is unique to this thesis is that we will also examine Ibn Khaldūn's political theories from this theocentric viewpoint. As a result, it is necessary to employ more recent works in addition to Toynbee's *A Study of History* to further explore Ibn Khaldūn's theoretical basis of the role of religion in the State. Additionally there seems to be a decreased amount of interest in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah* among

---

[11] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* vol. 9 (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 313.

the departure of the Marīnid rulers had left an intellectual vacuum there, and Ibn Khaldūn states in his *Ta'rīf* that he had a great thirst for learning.[15] He was invited to go to Fez, which was under the rule of Abū 'Inan, the son of Abū al-Ḥasan, who like his father promoted scholarship and learning in his court. Ibn Khaldūn graciously accepted the invitation and joined the sultan's *majlis al-'ilmī*, and it was there that he completed his formal education.[16] The wide range of scholars that Ibn Khaldūn met, worked and studied with in Fez likely contributed to his scholarly approach which many have characterized as inter-disciplinary.

While in Fez he was eventually offered the position of secretary from Abū 'Inan, and he accepted the position, though apparently with little enthusiasm. To quote Ibn Khaldūn's *Ta'rīf* "I devoted myself to reflection and to study, and to sitting at the feet of the great teachers, those of the Maghrib as well as those of Spain who were residing temporarily in Fez, and I benefited greatly from their teaching".[17] Even though he accepted the position, it seems that his desire to learn took precedence over his political interests.[18] Regardless of his true interests, his duties at the court of Abū 'Inan would be short-lived as after only three years of service he was accused of conspiring to aid the exiled Ḥafṣīd *amīr* of Bijāya, Abū 'Abdullāh, in regaining his throne and as a result of this was imprisoned for two years. Ibn Khaldūn's apparent betrayal was the first of many such events that would occur during his dual career of scholar and statesman,

---

[15] A. Ben Abdesselem, "Ibn Khaldūn".

[16] Miguel Cruz Hernández, *Historia del pensamiento en el mundo islámico* vol. 3 (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1996), 667.

[17] A. Ben Abdesselem, "Ibn Khaldūn".

[18] Franz Rosenthal, introduction to his English translation of the *The Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldūn, (Princeton University Press, 1967), lxxviii.

which would eventually cause him to be branded him as an opportunist who could not be trusted.[19]

After a brief period of acting as Secretary of the Chancellery to the new Sultan of Fez, Abū Sālim, he eventually obtained permission to go to Granada in August of 1359. He was graciously received in Granada by Ibn al-Khaṭīb, who Ibn Khaldūn had befriended while in Fez. Ibn Khaldūn's friendship with Ibn al-Khaṭīb assured his security at the court of Granada, and at the end of 1364 he was entrusted with a diplomatic mission to Pedro the Cruel of Seville.[20] The contact that Ibn Khaldūn had with the Christian world as a result of this mission certainly had an important influence on him.[21] Upon his return to Granada, Ibn Khaldūn once again switched allegiance, as he was offered the position of *ḥājib* by his old ally Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad at his court in Bijāya, and accepted the position.

Misfortune befell him once again when shortly after his arrival at Bijāya Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad was assassinated and Ibn Khaldūn found himself without a benefactor.[22] He spent the next nine years of his life traveling throughout various parts of the Maghrib arranging tribal alliances on behalf of the Marīnids, and during one of his expeditions briefly stayed at a Sufi shrine.[23] Ibn Khaldūn soon however grew weary of leading an active political life and decided to restrict himself exclusively to scholarship.[24] When he arrived in Tlemcen in 1357, he was asked by Abū Ḥammū to lead a political mission to the Dawāwidah Arabs, and Ibn Khaldūn seized the

---

[19] Calvert, 7.
[20] Hernández, 667.
[21] A. Ben Abdesselem, "Ibn Khaldūn".
[22] Calvert, 8.
[23] Yves Lacoste, *Ibn Khaldūn: The Birth of History and the Past of the Third World* trans. by David Macey (London: Verso Editions, 1984), 54.
[24] Ibid., 55.

opportunity as a path to retire from governmental service. After his departure from

Tlemcen he encountered the Awlād 'Arīf, the chief family of the Arab Zughbah tribes,

and had his entire family brought to him. The Awlād 'Arīf allowed Ibn Khaldūn and his

family to live under their protection in Qal'at Ibn Salāmah, a castle in the province of

Oran that was granted to the Awlād 'Arīf by Abū 'Inān years ago.

It was at the castle of Qal'at Ibn Salāmah that Ibn Khaldūn spent over three

years in peace and comfort and began to write his *History*. To quote an entry in his

Ta'rīf from November of 1377: "I completed its Introduction (*Muqaddimah*) in that

remarkable manner to which I was inspired by that retreat, with words and ideas pouring

into my head like cream into a churn, until the finished product was ready".[25] It would

take Ibn Khaldūn four more years to complete *The Muqaddimah*, after he had the

opportunity to perform research at the libraries in Tunis.

Ibn Khaldūn eventually grew restless in his seclusion at the castle of Qa'lat Ibn

Salāmah, and after falling ill for a brief period of time desired to travel to Tunis with the

work of his *History* that had yet to be completed on his mind.[26] He was eventually

permitted to go to Tunis in 1378 by the Ḥafṣid ruler Abū al-'Abbās, who had a deep

respect for Ibn Khaldūn's well-known family name. Ibn Khaldūn began to teach in

Tunis and came to be at odds with the great jurist Ibn 'Arafah al-Warghamī, which may

have resulted out of his jealousy of the great respect with which the students at the

university treated Ibn Khaldūn.[27] One author has even suggested that "Ibn 'Arafah's

opposition to Ibn Khaldūn may have had a deeper meaning, that it symbolized the

[25] Franz Rosenthal, liii.
[26] Ibid., lv.
[27] Ibid., lvi.

opposition of formal Muslim jurisprudence to the stirrings of a new spirit faintly noticeable in Ibn Khaldūn's thinking".[28] Regardless of the root cause of the tension between the two men, it is certain that Ibn 'Arafah disliked Ibn Khaldūn's presence in Tunis.

In addition there was also a growing tension between Ibn Khaldūn and Abū al-'Abbās. When Abū al-'Abbās decided to go on a military expedition he demanded that Ibn Khaldūn accompany him because the ruler feared that if he left Ibn Khaldūn behind in Tunis he would conspire against him in his absence. Ibn Khaldūn viewed this demand as a great interruption to his work. Abū al-'Abbās's mistrust of Ibn Khaldūn may have stemmed from the fact that when Ibn Khaldūn presented his completed *History* to the ruler it did not contain the common panegyric with which Muslim historians were often obliged to end their works.[29] In October of 1382 Abū al-'Abbās was preparing to embark on yet another military expedition and Ibn Khaldūn asked permission to make the pilgrimage to Mecca via a ship that was bound for Alexandria, and was allowed to do so. On October 24, 1382 Ibn Khaldūn began to sail to Alexandria, never to return to the Muslim West. His family was left behind temporarily until he could secure a means of sustenance in the East.

After forty days at sea Ibn Khaldūn arrived at Alexandria and eventually moved to Cairo on January 6, 1383. Egypt under the Mamelukes was more politically stable than the Maghrib, and Ibn Khaldūn was impressed with the beauty and prosperity of

---

[28] R. Brunschvig, *Etudes sur l'Islam classique et l'Afrique du Nord* ed. Abdel-Magid Turki (London: Variorum Reprints, 1986) 391.
[29] Franz Rosenthal, lvii.

Cairo.[30] He immediately sought a position that would enable him to stay in the East,

with hopes of eventually bringing his family to him as well. Though he had many

qualifications, both politically and scholastically, much of his success in the Maghrib

was due to the connections he had on account of his well-respected family name. In

order to establish himself in Egypt he had to rely primarily on his own resources solely

for the first time in his life, and his success in Egypt is proof of his exceptional personal

qualities.[31]

Fortunately Ibn Khaldūn was able to establish a relationship with Egypt's new

ruler, al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Barqūq, who was trying to attract new academic personalities to

his inner circle, and Ibn Khaldūn quickly gained the ruler's esteem and confidence.[32] He

was eventually given the opportunity to hold courses at al-Azhar University, and was

appointed to the professorship of Mālikite jurisprudence in the Qamḥiyah College.

Most of Ibn Khaldūn's lectures were on the religious sciences, though he also lectured

on *The Muqaddimah* itself, and throughout his time in Egypt continued to expand and

improve upon the book. On August 8, 1384 Ibn Khaldūn was appointed Chief Mālikite

qādī of Egypt, a position which he enthusiastically accepted. At the beginning of his

career as a judge he seems to have assumed the role of reformer, a stance he must have

know would prove difficult for him to actuate.[33] He must have realized that it would be

very difficult for him to introduce reforms in a foreign land without *'aṣabīya* to support

[30] Hernández, 668.
[31] Franz Rosenthal., lix.
[32] A. Ben Abdesselem, "Ibn Khaldūn".
[33] Franz Rosenthal, lxi.

him.[34] He attempted to weed out corruption and bribery in the Egyptian legal system, and as a result of his efforts lasted only one year in his position.

He once again obtained a teaching position at al-Azhar University, and in 1385 attempted to move his family to him in Cairo. Misfortune befell Ibn Khaldūn once again, however, when the ship bound for Alexandria carrying his entire family was wrecked, killing his entire family. For the next 14 years Ibn Khaldūn held various teaching positions, regained the Mālikite judgeship for a short time, and made his long-postponed pilgrimage to Mecca.[35] In November of 1400 the Tatar hordes under Timur were approaching the Syrian gateway to Egypt, and Ibn Khaldūn was asked to accompany the ruler of Egypt Faraj on an expedition to Damascus.[36] Ibn Khaldūn witnessed the sacking and destruction of Damascus by the Tatars firsthand, and eventually Timur himself asked to meet with Ibn Khaldūn, having heard of his wide fame and reputation. On January 10, 1401 Ibn Khaldūn met with Timur outside the city of Damascus. Ibn Khaldūn's main concern in meeting with Timur was to ensure the safety of himself and his companions, while at the same time he was no doubt enthralled to meet one of the great makers of world history.[37] Timur had particular interest in Ibn Khaldūn because of his knowledge of the western Muslim world that he intended to attach to his vast empire, and viewed Ibn Khaldūn as a potential asset he could attach to his court.[38] During his time in Egypt, Ibn Khaldūn had kept in contact with the West

---

[34] Ibid.
[35] Fuad Baali & Ali Wardi, *Ibn Khaldūn and Islamic Thought-Styles: A Social Perspective* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1981), 3.
[36] Ibid., 4.
[37] Hernández, 668.
[38] Ibid.

through travelers and letters, partly to keep his *History* up to date, but also partly for political purposes, and Timur was well aware of this.

Timur asked Ibn Khaldūn about the geography of the West, and asked him to write a detailed description of it to be translated into Mongol for himself and his military advisors. Ibn Khaldūn complied with his request, though at the same time wrote another lengthy letter to the Marīnid in Fez in which he provided an extensive history of the Tatars and an estimation of Timur's personality. He no doubt felt guilty about the information he had given Timur, and wanted to neutralize it by providing valuable information to the rulers in the West.[39] Ibn Khaldūn never joined Timur's staff, and obtained permission from the ruler to return to Egypt.

In March of 1401 Ibn Khaldūn finally reached Egypt, after being robbed on his journey and meeting Bāyazīd Yildrim, the Ottoman ruler of Asia Minor. We know very little about the last five years of his life, though he was appointed and dismissed from the judgeship several times. On Wednesday, March 17, 1406 he died suddenly, and was buried in the Sufi cemetery outside Cairo's Naṣr Gate.

Influential figures on Ibn Khaldūn's political thought

While Ibn Khaldūn's political theory is highly original it does bear obvious influences from several figures in particular, and it is necessary to briefly mention them here so that we may gain a better understanding of the origins of his theocentric political thought. Throughout *The Muqaddimah* Ibn Khaldūn comments on and criticizes the works of historians and other scholars who came before him, and acknowledges the influence that the Muslim literature of political administration and

---

[39] Franz Rosenthal, lxi

Fürstenspiegel had upon him.[40] Two works that he mentions in particular are al-Māwardi's *Aḥkam al-sulṭānīyah,* and al-Ṭurṭūshī's *Sirāj al-mulūk.*

al-Māwardī was a Shāfiʿī jurist and taught at Baṣra and Baghdād. He held the office of *qāḍī* in various towns, and was chief *qāḍī* of Ustuwā near Nishapur.[41] In his best-known work, *Aḥkam as-sulṭānīyah,* his purpose was to give a legal exposition of the theory of government speculatively derived from the basis of theology and to set out the formal basis of government so that a ruler could fulfill his rights and duties.[42] In this work he puts forth the sources of all political and social order, which include: (1) an established religion, whereby man's passions are in check, (2) a powerful ruler, for neither religion nor reason is by itself sufficient to prevent people from committing wrongdoing, (3) justice, to ensure mutual love and submission to authority, (4) law and order, resulting in a universal sense of security, (5) economic prosperity, and finally (6) vast hope, which is the pre-condition of any productive activity.[43] According to al-Māwardi religion, kinship, and friendship are bases of *ulfa* (mutual affinity) upon which social solidarity and the above mentioned sources depend on.[44] One can certainly see the connection between al-Māwardi's political theory and that of Ibn Khaldūn. Like al-Māwardi, Ibn Khaldūn believed that all political and social order had its basis in some form of social solidarity, which Ibn Khaldūn defined as *ʿaṣabīya,* similar to al-Māwardi's definition of *ulfa.*

---

[40] Ibid., lxxxv.
[41] Ann K.S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 83.
[42] Ibid.,84.
[43] Ibid., 84.
[44] Ibid., 86.

In addition to *ulfa* as the basis for political and social organization, al-Māwardi

(like Ibn Khaldūn after him) held that the Muslim religious polity needed a superior

form of political organization, the Caliphate, which could not be known by reason alone,

but rather from revelation.[45] Ultimately al-Māwardi placed an emphasis on revealed

religious law over reason in the realm of political organization, which Ibn Khaldūn also

followed in *The Muqaddimah.*

al-Ṭurṭūshī's *Sirāj al-mulūk,* completed in 1122, is a large compilation which

includes many anecdotes and moral statements concerning the way in which a ruler

should govern his people. Though Ibn Khaldūn states that "his (al-Ṭurṭūshī's) work is

merely a compilation of transmitted material similar to sermons in its inspirational

purpose…in a way, al-Ṭurṭūshī aimed at the right idea, but did not hit it…"[46], the

political theory contained in the *Sirāj al-mulūk* undoubtedly had an influence on his

thought. Throughout his work al-Ṭurṭūshī attempts to represent the governmental ideal

of the Islamic state, and gives theoretical views concerning the general rules of the

public law of Islam.[47] He pays particular attention to the dual religious and political

character of the ideal Islamic state, and the way in which the laws of this state enable

the ruler to fulfill the material interests of his people while at the same time and more

importantly lead his subjects to their ultimate spiritual reward in heaven.[48] To quote

Maximiliano Alarcón, in his introduction to his translation of the *Sirāj al-mulūk:* "To al-

Ṭurṭūshī, religion is the base, the corner stone that sustains the State, the soul that gives

[45] Ibid., 87.
[46] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* vol. 1 translated by Erwin Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 83.
[47] A. Ben Abdesselem, "Ibn Khaldūn".
[48] Maximiliano Alarcón, introduction to the *Lampara de los principes [Sirāj al-mulūk. Spanish]* by Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Walīd aṭ-Ṭurṭūshi translated by Maximiliano Alarcón (Madrid: Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, 1930), xvii. (my translation).

life to justice, law, and correct actions...the State is a theocratic organism whose

primordial ends (that are to be realized) pertain more to the dominion of the

supernatural than to the temporal, and the ruler an instrument to those ends..."[49] This

notion in particular is quite apparent in Ibn Khaldūn's political thought, as he too

believes that religion is the basis of the ideal state, and that the ideal Islamic state

ultimately places an emphasis on the world to come, while at the same time provides its

subjects with a means to feel fulfilled during their temporal existence.

Finally it is necessary to mention the work of the jurist Ibn Taymīyah, who died

only four years before Ibn Khaldūn was born. While there is no explicit mention of Ibn

Taymīyah's work by Ibn Khaldūn in *The Muqaddimah*, his theories of the role of

religion in the State and human association (*ijtimā*) certainly had an influence on Ibn

Khaldūn's political thought though at times this influence has been exaggerated[50]. Ibn

Taymīyah's main political work is his *al-Kitāb al-siyasa al-shariya*, in which he is

particularly insistent that religion cannot be practiced without state power.[51] He

believed that the ultimate purpose of political authority is both the material and

spiritual welfare of human beings, but their welfare is dependent on the state's and the

ruler's ability to "command the good and forbid the bad"; to rightly guide them through

their temporal existence. No government can achieve this without adhering to Islamic

law, while at the same time "commanding the good and forbidding the bad" cannot be

effective without some type of coercion.[52] So to Ibn Taymīyah religion and the State

are co-dependent on each other, which Ibn Khaldūn follows in *The Muqaddimah* as well,

[49] Ibid., xxi.
[50] See below, in "Literature Review".
[51] Black, 155.
[52] Ibid.

stating that *'asabīya* (including its ultimate goal, the State) and religious sentiment

necessarily share in a mutually beneficial relationship to ensure their success.[53]

Ibn Taymīyah's conception of the ideal state has been best characterized by the

great scholar Laoust as follows: "Since the aim assigned to *dawla* (state) and *shawka*

(force) is to approach God, and to put his religion into practice, therefore when state and

religion are wholly employed for this purpose, perfect spiritual and temporal prosperity

is ensured."[54] According to Ibn Taymīyah, this is how an Islamic state is most different

from a Christian or Jewish state, that the subjects' material and spiritual welfare are

ultimately inseparable under an Islamic regime. Though Ibn Khaldūn's theory of the

State is very similar to Ibn Taymīyah's, Ibn Khaldūn introduced the concept of *'asabīya*

to his theory, and places a great emphasis on its cohesive and complimentary

relationship with religion in the formation and sustenance of the State. Ibn Taymīyah

believes that a state without religion will not succeed, while Ibn Khaldūn argues that

though it is preferable for a state's *'asabīya* to be complimented and enhanced by

religion (Islam) because this state will ultimately be right-guided to the ultimate reward

in the spiritual realm, other states that have not been fortified by religion may still be

successful in their worldly political endeavors up to a certain point.

While Ibn Khaldūn's political theory is indeed highly original (as stated above),

he undoubtedly employed aspects of the political theories developed by the above-

mentioned figures in *The Muqaddimah*, especially those of Ibn Taymīyah. What Ibn

Khaldūn shares in common with these three figures is that their political theories, like

his, are primarily theocentric, and place the utmost value on the role of religion in the

---

[53] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 323.
[54] *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed., s.v. "Ibn Taymīyah" by Laoust.

State. What is unique to Ibn Khaldūn's political theory is that he fully explored the relationship between political organization and religion that those that came before him had begun to do. He achieved this by developing the concept of *'aṣabīya* as the basis for all political and social organization, and exploring the cohesive and complimentary relationship it has with religion, embodied in the life of a state. To quote Anthony Black: "This thesis (Ibn Taymīyah's) was to be explored empirically by Ibn Khaldūn, whose study of history explored in detail the relationship between religion and other social forces."[55]

Literature Review

There exists a great wealth of scholarly material that focuses on Ibn Khaldūn's political theory contained in *The Muqaddimah*, and it is necessary to briefly mention here the four major trends that many of these studies have followed. The first major trend is exhibited in the early works of Erwin Rosenthal and Kamil Ayyad, which are generally characterized by an overemphasis on Ibn Khaldūn's secular thinking. Kamil Ayyad in his writings, for example, believed that Ibn Khaldūn was attempting to "subordinate religion to his own scientific theories", while it was Rosenthal's view that because Ibn Khaldūn believed that kingship could be obtained without revealed religion was an indication that his political thought was "wholly independent, and free of all theological restraint."[56]

The second major trend was pioneered by H.A.R. Gibb in his groundbreaking work entitled "The Islamic Background of Ibn Khaldūn's Political Theory". Intended as a response to the earlier works of Erwin Rosenthal, Gibb concluded that Islam was deep

---

[55] Black, 156.
[56] Muḥammad Maḥmūd Rabī', *The Political Theory of Ibn Khaldūn* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), 24.

at the roots of Ibn Khaldūn's political theory, but proposed that many of the theories

presented in *The Muqaddimah* were entirely based on the work of earlier Sunni jurists,

specifically on the writings of Ibn Taymīyah.[57] While Gibb's work on Ibn Khaldūn's

Muqaddimah was certainly a step in the right direction to a better understanding of his

political theories, he underestimated the originality of his work. The next major trend is

best exhibited in Muhsin Mahdi's *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History*, in which Mahdi

presented Ibn Khaldūn as a direct descendant of the *falāsifa*, specifically Ibn Rushd, at

odds with the sciences of religion. While Mahdi's study is certainly noteworthy in

many respects, specifically his analysis of Ibn Khaldūn's classification of the types of

political authority (which will be employed in this thesis), he seems to have grossly

overestimated Ibn Khaldūn's secular thinking in connection with his political theories.

The fourth and final trend began with the later writings of Erwin Rosenthal

which agreed with Gibb's initial criticism of his earlier writings on Ibn Khaldūn's

political theory. Rosenthal acknowledged that Islam was indeed at the roots of his

political theory, while at the same time stating that his political thought "cannot be

easily fitted into the medieval order of things"[58], thus refuting Gibb's claim that much

of the theories presented in *The Muqaddimah* are based entirely on the works of earlier

Sunni Jurists. Subsequent works that have followed this fourth trend include writings

by Aziz al-Azmeh, Muḥammad Maḥmūd Rabī', Ignacio Saade, and Yves Lacoste. The

writings classified under this fourth trend all share the common view that religion and

---

[57] H.A.R Gibb, "The Islamic Background of Ibn Khaldūn's Political Theory," repr. in: *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, eds. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk, (Princeton: University Press, 1982), 167 – 174.
[58] Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, "Ibn Khaldūn: A North African Muslim Thinker of the Fourteenth Century," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* xxiv vol. 2 (1940): 307.

Islam specifically were at the root of Ibn Khaldūn's political theory, and while Ibn

Khaldūn did indeed employ rationalist methodology in his critique of history it was

nothing more than that, a method of analysis that enabled Khaldūn to formulate his new

'ilm al-'umrān. To quote Erwin Rosenthal: "Islam as a system of life and thought is the

perfect example of the Highest Good and ideally supplies a complete answer to his (Ibn

Khaldūn's) empirical inquiry into the laws and practice of human association"[59].

As already mentioned above, this study will rely on Arnold Toynbee's basic

assessment of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah* contained in his *A Study of History.* Though

Toynbee's scholarship on Ibn Khaldūn is difficult to classify, it mostly closely adheres

to the principles of the fourth trend. In order to further explore Ibn Khaldūn's

theoretical basis of the role of religion in the State, we will rely on various studies

including works by Erwin J. Rosenthal, Muḥammad Maḥmūd Rabī', Ignacio Saade and

Lenn Evan Goodman which all follow the fourth trend. While all of the works in the

above-mentioned trends are noteworthy and relevant to the thesis, those classified under

the fourth trend represent the soundest basis for a greater understanding of the emphasis

Ibn Khaldūn placed on the role of religion in the State, and provide us with the ideal

platform from which to carry out a re-interpretation of his political theory from a

theocentric viewpoint in general.

In addition to these secondary sources, due to the nature of this study we will

also rely primarily on the text of Franz Rosenthal's English translation of *The*

Muqaddimah throughout the thesis. In chapter one after exposing the true nature of

'aṣabīya, it will then be necessary to examine the cohesive and complimentary

---

[59] Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, "Ibn Jaldūn's Attitude to the Falasifa," *al-Andalus* 20 (October 1955): 75.

relationship Ibn Khaldūn develops between *'aṣabīya* and a strong religious sentiment, which serve as an indestructible foundation for his ideal political state. Once this relationship has been well established we will explore Ibn Khaldūn's classification of the models of *'aṣabīya* that theoretically take form in political authority, the basis of his classification being whether or not *'aṣabīya* is strengthened by religious sentiment. This will include an analysis of both the means and the ends of the types of *mulk ṭabī'ī*, and the two forms of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya*, which have a deficiency according to Ibn Khaldūn because they are based on an *'aṣabīya* that is not strengthened by religion, and *siyāsāt dīnīya* which has no deficiency because its *'aṣabīya* is strengthened by religion. Here particular attention will be paid to the nature of the laws of each type of political authority and their origins in the state's *'aṣabīya*, and the way in which they guide the state itself and its subjects through their temporal existence.

Finally in chapter three, after examining Ibn Khaldūn's theory of dynastic change which further exposes the natural deficiency of *'aṣabīya*, we will examine two cases of actual *'aṣabīya* in action, which provide concrete examples of his theocentric political theory. The first case is Ibn Khaldūn's historical account of the conquests of the Banū Hilāl in the Maghrib in the eleventh century, which according to him were a complete failure for one essential reason: though the Banū Hilāl was supported by a strong *'aṣabīya*, they lacked the necessary religious sentiment to eradicate their *'aṣabīya's* natural deficiencies.[60] The second case is the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn*, which according to Ibn Khaldūn was one of the few states historically that was able to successfully do away with the natural deficiencies of *'aṣabīya*. Thus the thesis

---

[60] Toynbee, *A Study of History* vol. 3, 474.

will conclude with a study of this ideal political state, whose laws were based on the

sharī'a, a state that was originally fortified by natural *'aṣabīya* and religion (Islam),

which were superceded by God's direct, divine intervention. As a result of the

combination of these conditions the early Muslims of the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā*

rāshidūn were successful in all their political endeavors and conquests, in contrast to the

failure of the Banū Hilāl. Ibn Khaldūn's interpretation of these two specific historical

events provides us with a concrete example of the important role of he assigned to

religion in his political theories, and specifically in his theory of the State. By analyzing

both Ibn Khaldūn's political theories and his account of these two historical events from

a theocentric stance, it will be possible to reveal the true nature of *'aṣabīya's*

relationship with religion and their role in the State, and the overall religious basis of his

political theory in general.

Chapter One

The true nature of *'aṣabīya*

'Aṣabīya is an Arabic word, originally meaning "spirit of kinship" (the *'aṣaba* are

male relations in the male line) in the family or tribe.[1] This term had already been used

in various *ḥadīth* texts, in which the Prophet Muḥammad condemns *'aṣabīya* as contrary

to the spirit of Islam, before Ibn Khaldūn was to elaborate on its meaning.[2] *'Aṣabīya*

has been translated in various ways, including "esprit de corps" by De Slane, "the motor

of the development of the state" by Erwin Rosenthal, and as "patriotism" and "national

awareness" by other various scholars.[3] While the above are certainly acceptable

interpretations, particularly Erwin Rosenthal's, (for indeed *'aṣabīya* does play a key role

in the development of the State to Ibn Khaldūn), we will rely on a more general

definition of *'aṣabīya* found in the introduction to Franz Rosenthal's translation of *The*

Muqaddimah, that is "group feeling", or "social solidarity".[4] According to Franz

Rosenthal, to Ibn Khaldūn the term appears to have been associated with the related

words *'iṣāba* and the Qur'ānic *'uṣbā*, both meaning "group" in a general sense.[5] For Ibn

Khaldūn, *'aṣabīya* is the fundamental basis for human society and the most basic

---

[1] H.A.R. Gibb, J.H. Kramers, E. Levi-Provencal, J. Schacht eds. *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), s.v. "'aṣabiyya" by F. Gabrieli
[2] Richard Walzer, "*Aspects of Islamic Political Thought*," *Oriens* 16 (1963):58.
[3] Lacoste, 84.
[4] Franz Rosenthal, lxxviii.

[5] Ibid.

motivating force of history.[6] It is a cohesive power, that when present among individuals can ultimately lead to a powerful group.

'Aṣabīya is mentioned throughout *The Muqaddimah* in various sections, though Ibn Khaldūn does not embark on a full treatment of the phenomenon until chapter two, section seven. In this section he states that: "It should be known that God put good and evil into the nature of man...evil is the quality that is closest to man when he fails to improve his customs..."[7] Because evil is natural to man, and in turn aggression, it is necessary that man must be put under control by an authoritative body, such as a ruler or a government.

> "The restraining influence among Bedouin tribes comes from their shaykhs and leaders...it results from the great respect and veneration they generally enjoy among the people...their defense and protection are successful only if they are a close-knit group of common descent...this strengthens their stamina and makes them feared, since everybody's affection for his family and his groups is more important than (anything else)."[8]

These *shaykhs* are able to act as authoritative figures because of the support from the group feeling that arises from people of common descent, which also increases the Bedouins' ability to protect themselves from attack. It is apparent that leadership and increased ability to defend one's group are products of 'aṣabīya, both of which will be dealt with later. What it is important to emphasize here is that Ibn Khaldūn believes that God put both good and evil in man, and that a restraining force is necessary to subdue his tendencies toward evil, such as an authoritative figure.[9] The ability of these shaykhs to rule is a product of the 'aṣabīya felt between people of a common descent.

---

[6] Barbara Stowasser, "Religion and Political Development: Some Comparative Ideas on Machiavelli and Ibn Khaldūn," *Occasional Paper Series, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies* (1983):9.

[7] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol 1, 263.

[8] Ibid., 262.

[9] Ignacio Saade, "La Religión como factor de civilización en los prolegómenos de Ibn Jaldūn," *al-Andalus* 31 (May 1966):141.

Ibn Khaldūn believes that *'aṣabīya* results not only from people who share a

blood relationship, but also from those that share a relationship similar to this. "Respect

for blood ties is something natural among men…one feels shame when one's relatives

are treated unjustly or attacked, and one wishes to intervene between them and

whatever peril or destruction threatens them."[10] He later goes on to state that: "Clients

and allies belong in the same category…the reason for it is that a client (-master)

relationship leads to close contact exactly, or approximately in the same way as

common descent."[11] In cases such as these, the members of the group that do not share

a common descent with the original members may still acquire "house" and nobility

through their masters, because

> "…only those who share in a group feeling have basic and true nobility…the clients and followers share in the group feeling of their masters and take it on as if it were their own group feeling. They have house and prestige by being firmly rooted in their client relationship with a particular dynasty and by being faithful to its followers. Their original descent disappears…it remains under cover and is not considered in connection with their importance and glory."[12]

Here it is made apparent to the reader that *'aṣabīya* is indeed a very powerful cohesive

force, one that is able to transcend the boundaries of common tribal descent, making it

possible for outsiders to be incorporated into the new group, and even potentially

ascending to a high rank of nobility.

'Aṣabīya, according to Ibn Khaldūn, also strives to achieve several goals due to

its inherent nature. The primary goal that *'Aṣabīya* naturally strives to achieve is

leadership or royal authority, because: "group feeling gives protection and makes

possible mutual defense…according to their nature, human beings need someone to act

as a restraining influence and mediator…that person must, by necessity, have

---

[10] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 264.
[11] Ibid., 264.
[12] Ibid., 276.

superiority over the others in the matter of group feeling."[13] '*Aṣabīya*, then, necessarily

moves toward leadership, towards one or more figures rising above their companions in

the group to lead because man by his very nature needs a restraining force present to

keep him from falling to his evil ways, which could lead to inner group conflict. To

quote Lenn Evan Goodman: "The aim and end of '*aṣabīya* is kingdom. It is for this

reason that nations are born; and for this reason they die, for '*aṣabīya* relaxes its grip on

men when it has reached its goal."[14] Just as the members of the group are reliant on the

authoritative figure to provide restraint, so too is the leader reliant on the group,

because it is '*aṣabīya* itself that gives the ruler the power necessary to reach a position

of leadership. To quote Ibn Khaldūn: "He cannot completely achieve his goal except

with the help of group feeling, which causes the others to obey him."[15]

Ibn Khaldūn in this section of *The Muqaddimah* also states that '*aṣabīya* can

exist in varying degrees of power. In one individual tribe, for example, there may be

several "houses" each with different, diverse group feelings.[16] Just as in the case of the

individual group where a leader will inevitably emerge, so too in a situation where there

are multiple groups will a dominant group emerge above the others. "Once group

feeling has established superiority over the people who share (in that particular group

feeling), it will, by its very nature, seek superiority over people of other group feelings

unrelated to the first".[17] This leads then to another natural goal of '*aṣabīya*, which is

conquest. "However, if the one group feeling overpowers the other and makes it

subservient to itself, the two group feelings enter into close contact, and the defeated

[13] Ibid., 283.
[14] Lenn Evan Goodman, "Ibn Khaldūn and Thucydides," *Journal of the AOS* 92 (June 1972):258.
[15] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 285.
[16] Stowasser, 7.
[17] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 285.

group feeling gives added power to the victorious group feeling, which, as a result, sets

its goal of superiority and domination higher than before."[18] We see then that as the

group achieves dominance over others, its members begin to feel proud and victorious,

which naturally leads them to desire more power.

The new and powerful group that has incorporated weaker groups into its power

structure will eventually, according to Ibn Khaldūn, come to challenge the pre-existing

dynasty that was in place before it. There are two ways in which this may occur. If the

existing dynasty that is in place has grown stagnant and weak, then the new group will

achieve dominance over it and become the new, more powerful, ruling dynasty.

However, if the existing dynasty has not yet reached the stage of stagnation, then the

existing dynasty in response to the threat from the new rising group will attempt to

incorporate it into its existing power structure, which will ultimately lead to the new

group achieving ultimate superiority. Ibn Khaldūn cites the example of the Turks under

the 'Abbāsid caliphate.[19]

Here it is necessary to elaborate slightly on Ibn Khaldūn's theory of dynastic

change, which we will elaborate upon later. According to Ibn Khaldūn, everything in

this world is subject to natural law, including dynasties, states and even 'aṣabīya itself.

All strength and all achievement, whether political, social, economic, or cultural, are

temporary.[20] They grow and develop to an optimal point and a natural limit beyond

which they cannot go, at which point decline and dissolution set in.[21] A dynasty or state,

then, just as a living organism inevitably goes through a natural process of growth and

---

[18] Ibid., 285.
[19] Ibid., 287.
[20] Stowasser, 9.
[21] Ibid., 9.

decay.[22] For example, after a ruler has achieved supreme royal authority, he will inevitably, according to Ibn Khaldūn, destroy those who share power with him, and use mercenaries to protect him who are not loyal to him as a person and not to an 'aṣabīya or a religious cause. Though the ruler may feel very secure at this point, the lack of 'aṣabīya makes the state's substance dwindle like "natural heat in a body that lacks nourishment…eventually it reaches its destined time."[23] The ruler and his subjects have a false sense of security because they believe they are well protected by these new mercenaries, when indeed it is most likely that these mercenaries owe their true allegiance to a new, rising 'aṣabīya. It is not only the hiring of mercenaries that can lead to the downfall of the dynasty or state, but also the very virtues of the men that initially aided the new group fortified by 'aṣabīya to increase its power and ability to wage war.[24] Once the members of the group have achieved certain objectives they may resist further demands from their ruler. They may, then, need an additional force to eliminate their shortcomings and to enhance their solidarity.

In summation, in the preliminary stages of the formation of a new social group which is fortified by 'aṣabīya, Ibn Khaldūn believes it is inevitable that an authoritative force will emerge to provide restraint to its members to subdue their inner tendencies toward evil and violence. With this restraint provided by the leader or *shaykh*, the group will be able to unite under a common cause and may grow very powerful, even to the point of challenging the existing dynasty, and eventually overcoming it in strength. There comes to be a point, however, in the natural life cycle of the group fortified by

---

[22] Erwin Rosenthal, "Ibn Khaldūn as a Political Thinker," *Maghreb Review* 4 (1979):8.
[23] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 2, 186.
[24] Hernández, 688.

'aṣabīya when an additional restraining force is necessary to further subdue its members' natural inclinations toward evil and disunity.[25] This new cohesive force that can complement and further strengthen *'aṣabīya* is religion, the subject of which we shall now turn to.

The cohesive and complimentary relationship between *'aṣabīya* and religion in the State

According to Barbara Stowasser, Ibn Khaldūn deals with religion throughout his works in two ways. Considering it in terms of essences and specifics, he sees religion (specifically Islam) as God-given Truth, Law and Justice.[26] He also considered religion in general and in terms of its function, and in this way he understood it as a cohesive force that complements and enhances *'aṣabīya*.[27] Arnold Toynbee devoted much of his work on Ibn Khaldūn's political theory to examine and expose the function of religion in Ibn Khaldūn's theory of the State, and its cohesive and complimentary relationship with *'aṣabīya*. He observed that while Ibn Khaldūn believes that *'aṣabīya* is the primary basis of any political state, it has a deficiency; by itself it can only ensure a state's survival and success up to a certain point.[28] To quote Toynbee: "... *'aṣabīya* is not the only kind of social protoplasm after all; an alternative – and superior – kind exists in the shape of religion".[29] We see Ibn Khaldūn's first treatment of religion as a cohesive and complimentary force to *'aṣabīya* in chapter two, section twenty-six of *The Muqaddimah*.

In this section of *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldūn argues that the Arabs or Bedouins can acquire royal authority only by "making use of some religious coloring,

---

[25] Saade, "La Religión como factor de civilización en los prolegómenos de Ibn Jaldūn", 131.
[26] Stowasser, 9.
[27] Ibid., 9.
[28] Toynbee, *A Study of History* vol. 3, 474
[29] Ibid.

such as prophethood, or sainthood, or some great religious event in general."[30] Ibn

Khaldūn states that this is because the Bedouins are the least willing to subordinate to

each other because of their innate savagery and haughtiness which causes dissension

among them in their social groups. Man's individual ambitions rarely coincide,

according to Ibn Khaldūn, so another uniting force in addition to 'aṣabīya is necessary

to maintain group stability.[31]

> "But when there is religion (among them) through prophethood or sainthood, then they have some
> restraining influence in themselves. The qualities of jealousy and haughtiness leave them...It causes
> rudeness and pride to disappear and exercises a restraining influence on their mutual envy and
> jealousy. When there is a prophet or saint among them, who calls upon them to fulfill the commands
> of God...and who prompts them to concentrate all their strength in order to make the truth prevail,
> the become fully united and acquire superiority and royal authority."[32]

Just as 'aṣabīya and leadership originally unite members of a group and quell their inner-

dissensions to the point that they are able to rival the existing dynasty in power, religion

is the next cohesive force that is layered on top of 'aṣabīya that enables the group to rise

to the position of royal authority. When men are united under a religious cause, their

hearts are purified, and their individual ambitions coincide; they are all working towards

the preservation and propagation of their new found faith.[33]

To prove his theory, Ibn Khaldūn gives as an example the early Arab Islamic

Dynasty's ascension to royal authority. While this specific case of the relationship

between 'aṣabīya and religion in action will be dealt with in greater detail, it is

necessary to briefly mention it here. The Arabs (or Bedouins) according to Ibn Khaldūn

are naturally the most remote people from royal leadership, because they are firmly

rooted in the ways of the desert and live a very tough life, and as a result of this are not

---

[30] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 309.
[31] Hernández, 694.
[32] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 306.
[33] Ignacio Saade, *El pensamiento religioso de Ibn Jaldūn,* (Madrid: Instituto de Filosofia
Luis Vives, 1973), 120.

likely to be subordinate to others. A leader of an Arab tribe, then, will have a difficult time subduing his subjects because they are quick to challenge his authority, and so the leader must be very careful not to upset them in any way. Ibn Khaldūn also mentions another aspect of the Bedouin way of life, that they rarely exercise any arbitration among themselves to punish a criminal, which in turn propagates increased misdeeds and criminal offense among them. To quote Ibn Khaldūn, "A nation dominated by the Arabs is in a state no different from anarchy...such a civilization cannot last and goes quickly to ruins, as would be the case in a state of anarchy, as we have mentioned before."[34]

However, though the Arabs are portrayed by Ibn Khaldūn as inherently vicious and having tendencies to live in a state of anarchy, he does present to the reader a condition under which they can achieve dynastic authority. "They attain it only once their nature has undergone a complete transformation under the influence of some religious coloring that wipes out all such qualities and causes the Arabs to have a restraining influence on themselves..."[35] So powerful is religion, then, that it can even cause the most savage of nations according to Ibn Khaldūn, the Arabs, to exert a restraining influence on themselves.[36] Ibn Khaldūn further elaborates on this point with specific examples of the time of the *khulafā rāshidūn*: "Religion cemented their leadership with the religious law and its ordinances, which, explicitly, are concerned

---

[34] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 307.
[35] Ibid., 307.
[36] Baali & Wardi, 110.

with what is good for civilization...As a result, the royal authority and government of the Arabs became great and strong."[37]

We see in this example that religion played a role in the establishment of the early Arab Islamic Dynasty by cementing its leadership with religious laws that made the dynasty strong.[38] Ibn Khaldūn also, however, states what happened to this dynasty when it neglected religion: "They became once again as savage as they had been before...most Arabs do not even know that they possessed royal authority in the past...when the Arabs forgot the religion, they no longer had any connection with political leadership..."[39] Ibn Khaldūn believes that if religion is neglected by the dynasty or state after they have come to achieve royal authority, it will lead to their downfall, just as in the case of the early Arab Islamic Dynasty.

In chapter three of *The Muqaddimah*, entitled "On dynasties, royal authority, the caliphate, government ranks, and all that goes with these things", Ibn Khaldūn begins to give a detailed description about how dynasties and states are formed, and their general characteristics. One section that is of particular importance is section four, which states that dynasties and states of wide power almost always have their origins in a religious movement of some kind. As stated above, according to Ibn Khaldūn royal authority is a natural result of *'aṣabīya*, and "only by God's help in establishing his religion do individual desires come together in agreement to press their claims, and hearts become united."[40] Otherwise, if the state or dynasty has worldly inclinations and goals, mutual jealousy and widespread differences will inevitably arise among the group. To once

---

[37] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 307.
[38] Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, "Ibn Khaldūn as a Political Thinker," 2.
[39] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 307.
[40] Ibid., 310.

again quote Ibn Khaldūn: "...when they are turned toward the truth and reject the world and whatever is false, and advance toward God, they become one in their outlook. Jealousy disappears."[41] In this sense, religion is for Ibn Khaldūn the ultimate uniting factor in the establishment of a state or dynasty, because it enables man to forget his worldly desires and unite himself with others towards a higher good, directed by God.[42]

In section five of chapter three Ibn Khaldūn explicitly states another important point, that religious propaganda gives a state or dynasty in its early and formative stages another power in addition to strengthening 'aṣabīya, specifically in its ability to wage war and conquest.[43]

> "When people (who have a religious coloring) come to have the (right) insight into their affairs, nothing can withstand them...They are willing to die for their objectives. On the other hand, the members of the dynasty they attack may be as many times as numerous as they. But their purposes differ, in as much as they are false purposes, and the people of the worldly dynasty come to abandon each other, since they are afraid of death."[44]

Regardless of the number of the forces that the opposing group (which has not been strengthened by religion) has, they will not be to defeat a group that has experienced a religious calling. The dynasty or tribe that is concerned with worldly affairs instead of religious values will be quickly overpowered because the luxury they have been living in has made them weak, and besides, their hearts are not united under the greater good of religion.

Here again in this section Ibn Khaldūn makes the point that the power of the ruling dynasty, if its "religious coloring" is wiped out, will inevitably lose its power and a new group strengthened by religious coloring will overcome it. "Superiority exists

---

[41] Ibid.
[42] Saade, El pensamiento religioso de Ibn Jaldūn, 161.
[43] Ibn Khaldūn, The Muqaddimah vol. 1, 321.
[44] Ibid., 320.

then merely in proportion to the existing group feeling, without the additional power of religion. As a result, the dynasty is overpowered by those groups (up to this time) under its control, that are equal or superior to it in strength."[45] When a state or dynasty abandons religion it will inevitably fall out of power because then it will only be fortified by *'aṣabīya*, which by itself, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is not sufficient for establishing a dynasty or state of wide power. The state that abandons religion will then be overpowered by a new, rising group that has taken on a "religious coloring".

It has been made clear that *'aṣabīya* is dependent on religion to subdue the natural tendencies of man and unite members of a group towards a higher good. What is necessary to point out is that Ibn Khaldūn believes also that religion is reliant on *'aṣabīya* in several ways. In section six of chapter three of *The Muqaddimah* entitled "Religious propaganda cannot materialize without group feeling" this point is made quite clear to the reader. *'Aṣabīya* is the basis of human social organization, and according to Ibn Khaldūn, no mass undertaking, political or otherwise, can succeed without its support.[46] Even prophets themselves are reliant on *'aṣabīya*, to quote Ibn Khaldūn: "God sent no prophet who did not enjoy the protection of his people...one cannot expect them to be able to work the wonder of achieving superiority without group feeling".[47] Here Ibn Khaldūn attempts to give concrete proof that religious movements and in turn prophets associated with them are reliant on *'aṣabīya*.

He cites the example of the Sufi *shaykh* Ibn Qasī, who attempted to begin a revolt in Spain under the Almoravid dynasty.

---

[45] Ibid., 321.
[46] Saade, "La Religión como factor de civilización en los prolegómenos de Ibn Jaldūn", 129.
[47] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 322.

"He rose in revolt in Spain and made propaganda for the truth shortly before the time when the propaganda of the Almohads started. His followers were called al-Murīdūn. Ibn Qasī had some success, because the Almoravids were preoccupied with their own difficulties with the Almohads. But there were no groups and tribes there to defend him. When the Almohads took over control of the Maghrib, he soon obeyed them and participated in their cause. He took the oath of allegiance to them at his stronghold, the fortress of Arcos de la Frontera."[48]

In this example we see that Ibn Qasī was unsuccessful in attempting to begin a religious revolt in Spain because he did not have the necessary *ʿaṣabīya* to support him that is required for such undertakings. He eventually yielded power to the Almohads because they were a stronger group, fortified by both *ʿaṣabīya* and religious calling.

In this chapter Ibn Khaldūn also mentions various revolutionaries throughout Islamic history that attempted to start religious revolts and failed because God had not destined them to do so.

"They call for a change in, and prohibition of, evil practices...They hope for a divine reward for what they do...but they risk being killed, and most of them actually do perish in consequence of their activities as sinners and unrewarded, because God had not destined them for such. He commands such activities to be undertaken only where there exists the power to bring them to a successful conclusion."[49]

What is truly necessary then for a political movement or revolt, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is *ʿaṣabīya* and religious calling, however this religious call must be true, and the command to propagate the message must come directly from God. If someone who does not have support of *ʿaṣabīya* attempts religious reforms, his "isolation would keep him from (gaining the support of) group feeling, and he would perish."[50] Similarly, if someone who does have the support of a strong and established *ʿaṣabīya* attempts religious reforms, and he is doing so only for political reasons, then he will also fall victim to obstacles and will fail. To quote Ibn Khaldūn: "Religious reforms are a divine

[48] Ibid., 323.
[49] Ibid., 324.
[50] Ibid.

master that materializes only with God's pleasure and support, through sincere devotion for Him and in view of good intentions towards the Muslims."[51]

In summation, we have demonstrated thus far that *'aṣabīya* is indeed a powerful and cohesive force among social groups that is the basis for all types of political and social organization. Moreover, according to Ibn Khaldūn, it is not only preferable for a social group or tribe to employ *'aṣabīya* in the process of political organization, rather it is a naturally occurring phenomenon that is necessary to achieve any type of political organization or system of authority. Just as *'aṣabīya* naturally materializes as a result of man's natural tendency toward disunity and dissension and provides man with a means for political organization so too does *'aṣabīya's* deficiency; it is only effective by itself up to a certain point in the life of a state or dynasty, at which time another factor is necessary to ensure the survival and success of the State. This factor must be a powerful enough force to pick up where *'aṣabīya* left off in the process of uniting members of a social group under a common vision, and Ibn Khaldūn states that this additional force must be a strong religious sentiment. To quote Lenn Evan Goodman:

> " *'Aṣabīya* (like the matter of the ancient physicist) has no birth, or rather its birth is with the birth of human civilization…The childhood of *'aṣabīya* is tribalism…but *'aṣabīya* is restless, with a motion of its own – for it is, after all, the stuff that human loyalties are made of. Childhood is easily left behind for adolescence: Religion is the adolescence of *'aṣabīya*, at once transforming and in a way creating *'aṣabīya* as a basis of society."[52]

Religion does not however completely do away the progress that *'aṣabīya* has made in the process of establishing a powerful state or dynasty, rather it is enjoined with *'aṣabīya* in a cohesive and complimentary relationship, wiping away its natural deficiencies and uniting the individuals of a group under a higher common goal that

---

[51] Ibid.
[52] Goodman, 259.

'aṣabīya initially provided. While political organization and its basis, *'aṣabīya*, are naturally occurring phenomenon, religion (Islam) has as its basis a divine source which transcends the normal ends and means of a state or dynasty.

Thus far we have exposed the true nature of *'aṣabīya* and its relationship with religion. It is now necessary to examine the various "models" of *'aṣabīya* as the basis for political authority, which will be accomplished by analyzing the role of *'aṣabīya* and religion (or its deficiency) in the means and ends of the three major types of political authority as classified by Ibn Khaldūn which include: *mulk ṭabī'ī*, the two types of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya*, and the *siyāsāt dīnīya*. By examing Ibn Khaldūn's theoretical classification of these three types of political authority and the role that *'aṣabīya* and religion play in both their means and ends, we will gain an even clearer understanding of the overall religious basis of his political thought, by further demonstrating that *'aṣabīya's* natural deficiency must be eradicated to ensure a state's survival.

Chapter Two

Throughout various sections of *The Muqaddimah* Ibn Khaldūn defines and

describes the inherent characteristics of the various type of political authority. He

defines them in terms of their means and their ends, both of which will be dealt with in

some depth. We will begin by examining the means of these types of political authority,

the essential defining factor for Ibn Khaldūn being whether or not their system of

governing (*mulk*) is based on natural solidarity alone (and subsequently *'aṣabīya*), or if

there is another factor that consolidates their political authority in addition to natural

solidarity. These types are three in number: (1) *mulk ṭabī'ī*, the rule based on natural

solidarity alone, (2) the two types of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya*, the rule based on reason in addition

to natural solidarity, and (3) *siyāsāt dīnīya*, the rule based on religious law in addition to

natural solidarity.[1] Natural solidarity that is a result of *'aṣabīya* is of course present in

all three types of *mulk*; as previously stated this is a necessary factor for any type of

political organization according to Ibn Khaldūn. What differentiates the three types is

the addition (or lack thereof) of a second means, whether it is human reason or revealed

religious law. An addition of these rational precepts or a religious law modifies the

state's original natural solidarity and ultimately the ends which they serve (which will

be dealt with later), though it is important to note that to Ibn Khaldūn it is not these

additional factors that the regime is based on, the original basis is always natural

solidarity which is a result of *'aṣabīya*. According to Ibn Khaldūn, as soon as man

progresses from "the community of necessity" and there is a surplus of goods or wealth

---

[1] Lambton, 162.

that surpass what is simply required for survival, some type of coercion is required to quell man's natural tendencies toward evil and disunity.[2] The most basic kind of coercion arises naturally out of *'aṣabīya*, and the exercise of coercion based on natural solidarity and *'aṣabīya* is not contrary to the precepts of human reason, nor to the prescription of religious law.[3]

The role of *'aṣabīya* and religion in the origins of the types of political authority

Mulk ṭabī'ī, which is natural rule or governance, is based on natural solidarity alone that is employed by the ruler to further his own desires and satisfy his own lower impulses (*shahwa*). Under a state of this type, the subjects of the ruler are oppressed and are employed primarily by him as tools to satisfy his own desires solely. The ruler has ended the naturally arising conflict among his subjects and has restrained their lower impulses for the sole purpose of giving free reign to his own lower impulses.[4] Ibn Khaldūn does not actually classify *mulk ṭabī'ī* as a "regime" as such, and he strongly condemns it as perverted and wrong, which is due to the lack of any principles of justice in *mulk ṭabī'ī*.[5] While the first type of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya*, in which the end is ultimately the interest of the ruler resembles *mulk ṭabī'ī*, there is an important difference between the two, namely that the ruler of the first type of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* does not give complete reign to his lower impulses, rather they are put in check by his adherence to rational precepts. While the rulers of both are considered to be tyrants by Ibn Khaldūn, the ruler of *mulk ṭabī'ī* will unable to preserve his rule for very long because his subjects will be forced by his unjust actions to rebel against him. *Mulk ṭabī'ī* according to Ibn Khaldūn

---

[2] Ibid., 264.
[3] Hernández, 694.
[4] Rabī', 142.
[5] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 385.

is ultimately a failure, and is a reprehensible and perverted form of political authority: "The conclusion is that it is a drawback in a political leader to be too clever and shrewd...In the case of all human qualities, the extremes are reprehensible, and the middle road is praiseworthy."[6]

The two types of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* come to exist through natural solidarity and *'aṣabīya* being modified by rational human precepts concerning the ways and means of attaining mundane ends. To quote Muhsin Mahdi: "What is added to solidarity and its power of restraint and domination in this case is an external bond. The subjects of the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* do not obey the ruler because of their belief in the goodness and the ultimate salutary effects of the law, but because of forceful compulsion, the fear of immediate punishment, and the hope for mundane rewards."[7] As a result of the means of the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya,* according to Ibn Khaldūn there are two main causes that lead to a decline of solidarity in this type of political authority: (1) the external compulsion applied by the ruler to his subjects, and (2) the gratification of the desires for mundane ends which the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* inherently pursues. Both of these characteristics which lead to the eventual downfall of the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* are not found in the third major type of political authority, the *siyāsāt dīnīya,* as a result of the inherent nature of religious law that when prescribed causes compulsion to arise from the subjects themselves and urges them to ultimately pursue non-mundane ends.

Under the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya,* the state is transformed from a political unit that is based on blood-relations to a civil and military bureaucracy which destroys natural solidarity and in its place imposes a type of rule based on force, the ultimate goal of

---

[6] Ibid., 385.
[7] Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University Press, 1957), 266.

which is to satisfy the mundane ends of the ruler and the ruled.[8] Ibn Khaldūn credits the

siyāsāt 'aqlīya with being able to create the means for the satisfaction of man's

mundane desires, providing freedom from toil and allowing man to engage in relaxation

and amusement, however he believes that under this system of rule men will ultimately

become weak and ineffective due to the excessive indulgence in these worldly

pleasures.[9] Rational human precepts are not as effective as religious law in educating

man in good character (*ta'dīb*), with out the moderating influence of religious law,

civilization leads to luxury and excess, and this excess ultimately leads to the

disintegration of the State. To quote Muhsin Mahdi: "The common pursuit of worldly

ends which substitutes for natural solidarity cannot preserve a state for long, and it leads

to its destruction by making men physically and spiritually impotent."[10]

The *siyāsāt dīnīya* is brought about by the introduction of religion and religious

sentiment that is enjoined with natural solidarity and subsequently *'asabīya* which leads

to a "miraculous transformation in social relations."[11] By the performance of awe-

inspiring miracles and other extraordinary acts, the prophet instills in his followers a

strong faith in the rewards and punishments of the next world, which completely

transforms their social life.[12] A prophet does away with man's natural lower impulses

which are the base causes of disunity, and unites them under a superior cause. To quote

Ibn Khaldūn:

> "...their individual aspirations rarely coincide. But when there is religion among them through
> prophecy or sainthood, then they have some restraining influence in themselves. The qualities of

[8] Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 95.
[9] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 260.
[10] Mahdi, 266.
[11] Mahdi, 267.
[12] Ibid.

haughtiness and jealousy leave them. It is, then, easy for them to subordinate and to unite. This is achieved by the common religion that they now have. It causes rudeness and pride to disappear and exercises a restraining influence on their mutual envy and jealousy. When there is a prophet among them, who calls upon them to fulfill the commands of God and rids them of blameworthy qualities and causes them to adopt praiseworthy ones, and who has them concentrate all their strength in order to make the truth prevail, they become fully united and obtain superiority and royal authority."[13]

Because their hopes and desires are now turned to non-mundane ends such as immortality and the next world to come, the subjects of the *siyāsāt dīniya* are able to moderate their desires for worldly pleasures and goals. Since the restraint and compulsion of the subjects under the *siyāsāt dīniya* comes from their inner faith and personal desire to act in accordance with the divinely revealed religious law, they do not need to be forced to comply with the laws of the state in the same way that subjects under *mulk tabī'ī* and *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* need to be.[14] The subjects under the *siyāsāt dīniya* obey the prescribed religious law and are willing to die for it, for the sake of God, in the hope that they will be rewarded in the world to come.[15]

As a result, the *siyāsāt dīniya* is a strong, united and virtuous group which is able to conquer and rule nations that are stronger than itself in all aspects save that the subjects of the state they are conquering do not have instilled in their hearts the powerful inner faith that those under the *siyāsāt dīniya* do. However, according to Ibn Khaldūn this religious impulse is generally of a short duration, as the prophet dies and succeeding generations do not have the same kind of personal contact with the religious sentiment as those who were its founding members, the impact of the initial religious zeal begins to fade.[16] To quote Muhsin Mahdi: "Once the inner faith of the subjects of the *siyāsāt dīniya* begins to decline there is nothing that can preserve the state; the

---

[13] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 305 – 306.
[14] Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, 98.
[15] Lambton, 163.
[16] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 278.

religious law may remain, but once the inner impulse vanishes and the law as a moving force in the hearts of men ceases to exist, the *siyāsāt dīnīya* as a dynamic reality ceases to exist."[17] Thus even the *siyāsāt dīnīya* is vulnerable to Ibn Khaldūn's theory of dynastic change; while it may enjoy more permanence than *mulk ṭabī'ī* and *siyāsāt 'aqlīya*, it too will eventually disintegrate when it reaches its natural life-span. However, the exemplary *siyāsāt dīnīya*, the ideal khilāfa of the khulafā rāshidūn, was able to supercede this cycle for longer than is customary according to Ibn Khaldūn.

In summation, according to Ibn Khaldūn the two types of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* and the *siyāsāt dīnīya* generally have a longer life-span than *mulk ṭabī'ī*. This is of course due to the modification and enhancement of natural solidarity and *'aṣabīya* by either rational human precepts of divinely revealed religious law.[18] In the two types of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya*, *'aṣabīya* is strengthened by self-interest and the goal of achieving mundane ends, and in the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya*, *'aṣabīya* is strengthened by the inner faith and belief of the subjects of the state who have adopted religion. Thus it is apparent that just as Toynbee asserted in his *A Study of History*, that Ibn Khaldūn believes that though *'aṣabīya* is the primary basis of any political state, it has a deficiency; by itself it can only ensure a state's survival and success up to a certain point is indeed true.[19] While rational human precepts are satisfactory for a state to survive up to a certain point, they do not completely transform and interact with *'aṣabīya* as effectively as religious sentiment does. This point is made even more apparent when one analyzes Ibn Khaldūn's classification of the ends of these three types of political regimes.

[17] Mahdi, 268.
[18] Majid Fakhry, "The Devolution of the Perfect State: Plato, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun," *Arab Civilization, Challenges and Responses...* ed. George N. Atiyeh & Ibrahim M. Oweiss (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 92.
[19] Toynbee, *A Study of History* vol. 3, 474.

The role of *'aṣabīya* and religion in the ends of the types of political authority

Ibn Khaldūn goes in to great detail to classify and define the ends of the various types of political regimes. As defined by their ends, they are again three in number: (1) *mulk ṭabī'ī*, which pursues the mundane ends of the ruler only, (2) the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* (of which there are two types), which may or may not pursue the good of the ruled, but which ultimately pursues only mundane goods, and (3) the *siyāsāt dīnīya*, which pursues mundane (*dunyawī*) and other-worldly (*ukhrawī*) goods, the end of which is the good of the ruled in both this world (*dunyā*) and the next (*ākhira*).

As *mulk ṭabī'ī* has been discussed in some length above, there is very little that is necessary to mention concerning its ends. Because *mulk ṭabī'ī* is based on natural solidarity and *'aṣabīya* alone, without a external force to complement it such as rational human precepts or divinely revealed religious law, according to Ibn Khaldūn it is a reprehensible type of political authority, and is ultimately a failure.[20] Its ends are those solely of the ruler, who pays no attention to the demands or needs of his subjects, and while the ruler may be able to achieve his desires for a short time, his rule will inevitably implode due to the dismal state of affairs among his subjects. What is necessary to mention is why Ibn Khaldūn deems *mulk ṭabī'ī* as an utter failure; the reason being that there is no other force besides *'aṣabīya* to keep the ruler's lower impulses in check.

While *mulk ṭabī'ī* is imposed on the ruled by a ruler without any thought of their desires or needs, the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* is imposed upon men by a ruler who ideally is prudent or wise, one who legislates certain rules that are accepted by "all who follow

---

[20] Rabī', 142.

them for the acquisition of mundane ends."[21] Since according to Ibn Khaldūn every state is comprised of the ruler and the ruled, and the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* may be designed to ultimately serve the interests of one or the other, thus there are two types of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya.*

The first type of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* is that whose end is the common good, in which authority is exercised to further the common good. To quote Ibn Khaldūn: "The first type of rational politics may concern itself with the (public) interest in general, and with the ruler's interest in connection with the administration of his realm, in particular. This was the politics of the Persians."[22] Every office in the first type of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* is a tool (*āla*) that aids the ruler in carrying out his policies and his functions. The ends of this type of regime is the pursuit of the mundane common good of the ruled, the principle of justice upon which it rests stipulates that the ruler should not pursue his own interests exclusively, but rather the collective interests of his subjects. Ibn Khaldūn again states that the Persians exhibited this characteristic in their form of political authority:

> "The Persians made no one king except members of the royal house. Further, they chose him from among those who possessed virtue, religion, education, liberality, bravery and nobility. Then, they stipulated in addition that he should be just. Also, he was not to take a farm, as this would harm his neighbors. He was not to engage in trade, as this would of necessity raise the prices of all goods. And he was not to use slaves as servants, since they would not give good and beneficial advice."[23]

According to Ibn Khaldūn, the Persians used to stipulate that their ruler should be just, and not perform unjust acts such as the confiscation of property or use slaves as his servants, because these actions would not lead to the common good, and the character of

---

[21] Mahdi, 249.

[22] Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 342.

[23] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 2, 95.

the ruler in every state must be in line with the ends of the state and the functions the ruler performed to achieve these ends.

If all these requirements of the character of the ruler and his relation to his subjects are met, a *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* is just, however this is a qualified justice, and its deficiencies arise from the limited nature of the end which the regime pursues.[24] Because mundane ends and the pursuit of worldly goods do not exhaust the "true ends" of man, and because the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* is limited to these pursuits, its just character is limited. The *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* does not ultimately provide for its subjects what is good for them in both this world and the next, and even the qualified justice of this regime is by no means assured because according to Ibn Khaldūn's natural law of political development, as a culture becomes more civilized and the ruler gains more power, corruption in the regime is likely to arise.[25] He may eventually become a tyrant who follows his own interests rather than those of his subjects, to quote Ibn Khaldūn: "Government decisions are as a rule unjust, because pure justice is found only in the legal caliphate that lasted only for a short while."[26]

In the second type of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya*, the end of the regime is the selfish interests of the ruler only, rather than those of his subjects. According to Ibn Khaldūn, this principle upon which this regime rests is: "attending to the interest of the ruler and the way in which his absolute power can be assured through suppression and contention. The common good has a subordinate position in this regime."[27] Much like *mulk ṭabī'ī*, Ibn Khaldūn considers this regime to be a reprehensible form of political authority, and

[24] Mahdi, 250.
[25] Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, 101.
[26] *Ibn Khaldūn, The Muqaddimah* vol. 2, 285.
[27] Ibid., 138 – 139.

one that will be an utter failure. While the end of the ruler in this type of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* is of course a mundane end, it is more specifically his satisfaction of his lower desires and impulses, hence it is ultimately a rule according to appetite. However it differs from *mulk ṭabī'ī* in that the appetite of the ruler is not given free and unchecked reign, because rational human precepts do play a minimum role in this type of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya*. Reason is perverted in this type of regime and merely functions as a tool to promote the selfish interests of the ruler; it suggests which policies he should pursue to maintain his tyrannical rule, and in that sense rational human precepts do check his lower impulses to some extent. It helps the tyrant in attaining his own selfish ends more efficiently, and rather than serve the common good, it serves the ends of the ruler to increase his own power and suppress, enslave and exploit his subjects.[28] Ultimately this type of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* is an unjust regime that is doomed to utter failure much like *mulk ṭabī'ī*.

Thus far we have seen how Ibn Khaldūn categorizes and defines *mulk ṭabī'ī* and the two types of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* by their ends, and it has been made apparent that these types of political regimes have a deficiency. Just as *'aṣabīya* itself has a natural deficiency in uniting members of a group under a common cause, and in turn maintaining a state, so too do the above-mentioned types of political authority because they do not adopt a secondary factor that is powerful enough to completely do away with *'aṣabīya's* deficiencies. Only religion, that compliments and enhances *'aṣabīya*, will ultimately ensure the success of a state and bring its ends in line with what Ibn Khaldūn deems as just and right. This type of political authority, as mentioned above, is the *siyāsāt dīnīya*. The *siyāsāt dīnīya* has a divine origin, it is a political regime

---

[28] Mahdi, 251.

prescribed by God, through the prophet who declares and legislates it.[29] To quote Ibn Khaldūn:

> "If these norms are ordained by the intelligent and best minds of the dynasty, the result will be a political institution on a rational basis. If they are ordained by God through a lawgiver (prophet) who establishes them as religious laws, the result will be a political institution on a religious basis, which will be useful for life in this and the other world. This is because the purpose of human beings is not only their worldly welfare. This entire world is trifling and futile. It ends in death and annihilation…therefore religious laws have as their purpose to cause human beings to follow such a course in all their dealings with God and their fellow men."[30]

A prophet who is acting as a legislator, unlike a purely mundane ruler who is acting as a legislator, truly knows the common good that men should strive to achieve during their time on this earth, and it is clearly not solely the pursuit of mundane goals.[31] There are three main characteristics which sets the *siyāsāt dīnīya* apart from the other types of political authority: (1) the belief in God and the trustworthiness of the prophet and the truth of his teachings, which leads to the bond of the ruler and the ruled based on inner compulsion brought about by faith, rather than on the hope of attaining mundane goals, (2) their belief in the rewards and punishments of the world to come which is clearly defined in the divinely revealed religious law upon which the state is based, sets them apart from *mulk ṭabī'i* and *siyāsāt 'aqlīya*, for under these two types of political authority, man is not certain of life after death, and finally, (3) the ruler of the *siyāsāt dīnīya* (which may be the prophet, or his successor the caliph), does not rule with the goal of promoting his or his subjects mundane goals, but rather the attainment of the eternal reward in the next world to come.[32]

Particular attention must be paid to the nature of the laws and the way that they are imposed under the *siyāsāt dīnīya*, which is the defining reason why according to Ibn

---

[29] Goodman, 261.
[30] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 386.
[31] Lambton, 164.
[32] Mahdi, 237.

Khaldūn this type of political regime is so successful at modifying *'aṣabīya* to ensure

state survival and permanence. The belief of the rewards and punishments of the world

to come creates in the community an inner compulsion which explains the success of

legal obligation (*wujūb*) under the *siyāsāt dīnīya*.[33] The religious law under the *siyāsāt*

dīnīya is obligatory because its subjects believe in its prescription without further

examination, the divine source of the law provides a sense of certainty in their truth for

the believers, and belief in their effects. So powerful a force is religion in the *siyāsāt*

dīnīya its subjects submit to the religious law without any hesitation whatsoever, and

are always ready to sacrifice anything to implement the law, even the mundane goods

and goals that are normally associated with political authority.[34]

What is important to point out is that Ibn Khaldūn does not believe that the

siyāsāt dīnīya eliminates or suppresses man's natural desires in anyway, since of course

man's natural desires (and *'aṣabīya*) and the basis of all types of political authority.

Under the *siyāsāt dīnīya*, what occurs is a unique transformation, *'aṣabīya* and in turn

man's natural desires are controlled and directed by religion, to serve man's true end.[35]

So while religion does away with the bad qualities that are associated with *'aṣabīya*, at

the same time it elevates and heightens its good qualities, channeling the byproducts of

'aṣabīya to serve the newly found higher, common good, which is the attainment of

eternal happiness in the world to come. To quote Ibn Khaldūn:

> "Know that for the legislator this world and its ways are all a vehicle for the world to come, and he
> who loses the vehicle cannot arrive at his destination. In what he forbids or condemns of evil deeds,
> or what he urges to be left alone, he does not intend to that it be altogether neglected, or be torn up

---

[33] Saade, *El pensamiento religioso de Ibn Jaldūn*, 131.

[34] Hernández, 694.

[35] Harun Khan Shirvani, *Studies in Muslim Political Thought and Administration* (Hyderabad: Government Central Press, 1942), 187.

by the roots, and to render completely ineffective the powers upon which it grew. Rather, his intention is to direct them, as far as possible, towards true objectives."[36]

Under the *siyāsāt dīnīya*, the prophet and his successors attempt to preserve and protect

the well-being of man in this world and the world to come, and as a result they govern in

both domains:

> "As to religion he governs in accordance with the obligations of the religious law which he is ordered to convey and make people practice. As to governance in the affairs of this world, he rules with a view to attending to their common good in human culture. We have mentioned that this culture is necessary for men and so is attending to their common good. For, if this is ignored, culture would disintegrate. We have also mentioned that kingship and its power are sufficient for the realization of the common good. Yes, it would be more perfect if it were in accordance with the commands of the Law, since the Law knows best what this common good is."[37]

According to Ibn Khaldūn, the *siyāsāt dīnīya* includes the principles of the *siyāsāt*

'aqlīya, and covers all of man's actions and social and political relations, whether they

are mundane or religious.[38] In the *siyāsāt dīnīya*, mundane and other-worldly ends are

not coordinated with each other and do not co-exist side by side, but rather *'asabīya*,

natural leadership and the mundane ends associated with them are subordinated to

man's ends in the world to come. The *siyāsāt dīnīya* is superior to the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya*

because it widens the horizons of man's ends; and at the same time is more effective

than the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* in providing man a means to attain mundane ends because it

knows best what these mundane ends should. To Ibn Khaldūn, the *siyāsāt dīnīya* is the

most superior form of political authority, clearly because it is based both on *'asabīya*

and religion, which is the most perfect basis for any political regime.

Ibn Khaldūn's true definition of *siyāsāt dīnīya*

While it has been clearly established that Ibn Khaldūn placed the utmost value

on the necessity of religion in addition to *'asabīya* as the basis of the ideal political state

---

[36] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 414.
[37] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 447.
[38] Mahdi, 239.

(the *siyāsāt dīnīya*) it is important to mention that when he described the role of religion

in politics he was speaking specifically about Islam. Ibn Khaldūn was certainly a devout

Muslim, and his strong belief in Islam is ultimately at the core of all his political and

historical theories. When Ibn Khaldūn describes the *siyāsāt dīnīya* as the ideal form of

political authority, he is referring to the Islamic Caliphate, under which the relationship

between the two types of human authority, both political and religious, are not separate

and are a single entity (the caliph) and the various administrative offices associated with

the caliphate is defined by their concern with the well-being of man in both the hereafter

and his well-being in the world to come.[39] According to Ibn Khaldūn, this relationship

is not fully realized in all religious communities created by divinely inspired prophets.

While under the Islamic *siyāsāt dīnīya,* this has been fully realized, in other religious

communities the two authorities and two sets of offices may be separate.[40] To prove his

point, Ibn Khaldūn discusses the problems of the relations between the two authorities

in the Jewish and Christian communities. Concerning the Jews, Ibn Khaldūn states that:

"This is why the Israelites after Moses and Joshua remained unconcerned with royal

authority for about four hundred years. Their only concern was to establish their

religion...Eventually, their power was destroyed. The Romans defeated them, and the

Jews came under Roman domination...After that, they had no royal authority, because

they had lost their group feeling."[41] According to Ibn Khaldūn, the two types of

authority were separate after Moses and Joshua, and eventually only the religious

authority continued to exist in the Jewish community because they were under Roman

---

[39] Ibid., 244.
[40] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 448.
[41] Ibid., 475 – 476.

rule. In the Christian community the two authorities were never united, and as the two

developed under the Franks, the Pope became the supreme authority in matters

concerning man's well-being in the world to come, while the Emperor enjoyed political

authority based on natural solidarity alone.[42]

According to Ibn Khaldūn the crucial difference between a religion like Islam in

which the *siyāsāt dīnīya* has to subordinate both types of authority to the revealed

religious law, and religions like Judaism and Christianity in which the two authorities

can be separate is that in Islam there is a combination of a universal message of

salvation (which is present in both Judaism and Christianity) and in addition a

legislation concerning holy war to make all pagans follow that religion.[43] Because Islam

legislates the institution of holy way to spread its message, the religious leader of the

Islamic community must be concerned with political power and all that goes along with

it, because it is a means to wage war.[44] It is for this reason why the Prophet originated

both a religion and a state, because if one of the central characteristics of Islam is that it

uses political power as a means of propagating itself, the leader of the Islamic

community must be an administrator and the head of the army (*amīr al-mu'minīn*), and

the leader of public prayer (*imām*).[45] Thus the ultimate and supreme administrative

office in the Islamic community is the Great Imāmate (*al-imāma al-kubrā*), which is an

all-inclusive administrative body that controls all aspects of the state, both religious and

mundane. To quote Ibn Khaldūn:

[42] Ibid.
[43] Mahdi, 245. As Mahdi points out in his work, it is important to mention that Islam differentiates between pagans and those who have adopted a divinely revealed religion, either Judaism or Christianity. Ibn Khaldūn seems to believe that while an offensive *and* defensive holy war is acceptable to be carried out by the Caliphate against pagans, only a defensive war is to be carried out against Jews and Christians.
[44] Baali & Wardi, 83.
[45] Mahdi, 246.

"The leaders of (military) missions used to be called '*amīrs*,' a *faʿīl* (formation) connected with *imārah* (commandership). Before becoming Muslims, people used to call the Prophet 'Amir of Mecca' and 'Amir of the Ḥijāz.' The men around Muḥammad also used to call Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ 'Commander (*amīr*) of the Muslims,' because he commanded the army at al-Qādisīyah... Now, it so happened that one of the men around Muḥammad address 'Umar as 'Commander of the Faithful' (amīr al-mu'minīn). People liked (this form of address) and approved it."[46]

The fact that Islam uses political power to propagate itself is the religious principle

behind the historical fact that the Prophet and his true successors as leaders of the

Islamic community attempted to have both political and religious authority, while the

leaders of other religious communities did not did not concern themselves with political

authority.[47] According to Islamic doctrine it is essential that religion should not merely

have an external concern with worldly affairs, or distinguish between affairs of the spirit

and the affairs of the world. This is not sufficient, and according to Ibn Khaldūn,

religion itself must be politicized. To quote Muhsin Mahdi: "This is the historical basis

which led Muslim philosophers and Ibn Khaldūn especially to reflect upon Islam and the

Islamic community as a political regime."[48]

It is important to make clear that Ibn Khaldūn in *The Muqaddimah* does not

specifically evaluate the merits of Islam, Christianity and Judaism as they function as a

political system. As already stated above, to Ibn Khaldūn the most perfect and most

just state that can exist is the *siyāsāt dīnīya*, and it is apparent that only when *ʿaṣabīya*

is fused with the true religion, namely Islam, can the *siyāsāt dīnīya* become fully

realized. Thus, we can ascertain from this that Ibn Khaldūn would classify Jewish and

Christian states as a kind of modified *siyāsāt ʿaqlīya*, while there is some religious basis

to the state, it rests primarily on human rational precepts because the ruler of the these

---

[46] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 465.
[47] Baali & Wardi, 83.
[48] Mahdi, 247.

states does not have dominion in both the political and the religious functions of the state. From this we can now clearly define how Ibn Khaldūn would classify the *siyāsāt dīnīya*, namely that it is a state that is based on and originally fortified by *'aṣabīya*, and layered on top of *'aṣabīya* is the rightly-revealed religion of Islam, which is the only religion that can truly actualize the *siyāsāt dīnīya*.

In conclusion, it is apparent that Ibn Khaldūn's classification of the types of political authority further expose the inextricable link that he developed between *'aṣabīya* and religion as the ideal basis for the ideal state, the *siyāsāt dīnīya*. To once again quote Toynbee: "He supplies an answer to his riddle by introducing (in the last chapters of section 2 and the first chapters of section 3 Book I) the suggestion that *'aṣabīya* is not the only kind of social protoplasm after all; an alternative – and superior – kind exists in the shape of religion."[49] It is Ibn Khaldūn's classification of the types of political authority and his historical accounts of the failed conquests of the Banū Hilāl as compared to the successes of ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* (which will be discussed in chapter three) which led Toynbee to classify Ibn Khaldūn's political theory as "theocentric". While every type of social and political organization according to Ibn Khaldūn is based first and foremost on *'aṣabīya*, if the members of this social group are to be successful in their endeavors and enjoy relative permanence they must eventually base their political authority on an additional principle to do away with the natural deficiencies associated with *'aṣabīya*. This is made quite clear when one examines Ibn Khaldūn's classification of *mulk ṭabī'ī*; political authority based on *'aṣabīya* alone is a reprehensible state of affairs and will ultimately be a complete failure. However, it is

[49] Toynbee, *A Study of History* vol. 3, 474.

also not sufficient if this additional force that is to compliment *'asabīya* is the adoption of rational human precepts in the ways of governance. Though Ibn Khaldūn does credit the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* whose ends are that of fulfilling the mundane ends of both the ruler and the ruled with enjoying relative permanence and achieving relative success in fulfilling mundane ends, exemplified by the *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* of the Persians, however a state of this type will also ultimately be a failure because rational human precepts do not sufficiently eradicate *'asabīya's* natural deficiencies. The *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* will eventually fall into ruin and disarray as man's natural tendencies towards disunity and conflict begin to materialize as the short-lived restraint from the adoption of rational human precepts begin to diminish.

Thus, according to Ibn Khaldūn it is only the adoption of religion in addition to the pre-existing naturally occurring *'asabīya* that can ensure that a state will be just and enjoy relative permanence and success, exemplified in the *siyāsāt dīnīya*. However, as stated above, only the rightly-revealed and true religion of Islam can ensure this success; states who have as their basis Judaism or Christianity cannot fully realize the political authority of the *siyāsāt dīnīya* because the latter two, unlike Islam, do not legislate the act of holy war to propagate themselves. As a result of this, states that have as their basis Judaism or Christianity do not have a need for a single, universal type of political authority such as the Islamic Caliphate that equally and unanimously administers both religious and political affairs. The fact that Islam legislates the act of holy war as a means of propagating itself leads us to another important conclusion in connection with Ibn Khaldūn's political theories and specifically with the relationship between *'asabīya* and religion that he develops throughout his work. As stated in chapter one, one of the

natural by-products of *'aṣabīya* is that it drives and propels the members of a social

group to achieve dominance over others and engage in acts of warfare and conquest.

Thus, because according to Ibn Khaldūn Islam propagates itself by means of conducting

holy war against pagans, when a social group that was originally fortified by *'aṣabīya*

embraces the true religion of Islam, they will be unstoppable in their conquests and will

inevitably achieve complete dominance over others. Furthermore, because the subjects

of the *siyāsāt dīnīya* are under the direction of the Caliphate and have a strong faith in

the rightly-revealed religion of Islam, they are willing to die for the greater good and the

ultimate end of the *siyāsāt dīnīya*, for they believe that they will receive their ultimate

reward in the world to come. To quote Ignacio Saade: "In this fashion, the hearts of

these men were convinced of the superiority of this pious cause over themselves, uniting

their strengths, allowing them to engage in the great conquests that extended the

dominion of Islam to the reaches of North Africa and al-Andalus."[50] While we have

mentioned above that the fusion of *'aṣabīya* and Islam produces many positive effects

for a state, such as inner faith and compulsion in the hearts of the state's subjects to

adhere to the religious law in hopes of attaining the ultimate reward in the world to

come, we see that another important effect is the ability to be successful in matters of

conquest and warfare, which every state naturally strives to achieve, which ensures state

survival.

Not every state, however, which is based primarily on *'aṣabīya* and adopts or

employs Islam as a secondary means will automatically be successful in this way. To

Ibn Khaldūn, the ideal *siyāsāt dīnīya* is exemplified best in the historical time period of

---

[50] Saade, *El pensamiento religioso de Ibn Jaldūn*, 132. (my translation)

the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn,* while he presents the conquests of the Banū

Hilāl in the 11th century Maghrib as an example of a failed political endeavor. While Ibn

Khaldūn believes that all states and forms of political authority are ultimately subject to

his cyclical theory of dynastic change, the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* was able

to supercede this cycle for a short time, representing one of the most miraculous and

stupendous historical events in human history. It is the subject of Ibn Khaldūn's

account of the above mentioned historical events which we will now turn to.

Chapter Three

Before we turn to Ibn Khaldūn's historical account of the failed conquests of the

Banū Hilāl and the relative permanence enjoyed by the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā*

rāshidūn, it is first necessary to elaborate on Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical theory of dynastic

change, and specifically its relationship with *'asabīya*. We have stated in the preceding

chapters that the growth, success and decline of any political entity is intertwined with

the natural life-span of *'asabīya* and its shortcomings. A state that does not successfully

eradicate *'asabīya's* natural deficiencies is doomed to fail, and even when *'asabīya* is

enhanced and complimented by religion, ultimately the permanence and success of the

state will begin to dwindle as the natural cycle of history begins to take its course.

While according to Ibn Khaldūn the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* was able to

halt the natural cycle of decay for a short time, it too eventually was effected by the

cycle and began to decline. This does not, however, discredit their successes and

triumphs in any way; Ibn Khaldūn believed it was the only political state in history to be

able to escape this cycle for a short time, and as a result he deems it to be the ideal form

of political authority. An analysis of his cyclical theory of dynastic change, its

relationship with *'asabīya*, and the course it took in the political life of both the Banū

Hilāl and the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* will further elucidate the theocentric

basis of Ibn Khaldūn's political theory.

Natural limitations of *'asabīya*: Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical theory of dynastic change

Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical theory of dynastic change is at the core of his political

theories, and is the ultimate explanation of *'asabīya's* natural limitations. The

existence of the historical unit of the state is in most cases 120 years long; the state has

a natural life span, just as men have life spans, though the latter vary more than that of

the state.[1] The optimal life span of a man according to the astrologers is 120 years, but

this is in fact an optimal maximum;[2] the life span of a state corresponds to that of three

median human life span which, together, amount to a Great Lunar Year of 120 years, or

the equivalent of one-eighth of time lapse between the Grand Conjunctions of Jupiter

and Saturn.[3] During this time period the state passes through five distinct stages;[4] one

may assume that any variations on the number of stages that a state passes through is

the result of the forcible annihilation of the state or some other unforeseen event, as Ibn

Khaldūn does not give any explanation for why a state would not pass though these five

stages.[5]

The first stage that a state passes through is one of establishment and growth.

During this period, the byproduct of 'aṣabīya which is solidarity is based on familial ties

or religion, and solidarity continues to be necessary for the preservation of the state.[6] In

this period the ruled are required to build the institutions necessary for a civilized

culture, or if such a culture is already in place then they must submit to the new ruling

class. Thus, there are new activities that need to be carried out, and new political

relationships that need to be created. These cannot be accomplished except through a

kind of solidarity that generates enough power to urge the state's subjects to accept the

---

[1] Aziz al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn: An Essay in Reinterpretation* (London: Third World Centre for Research and Publishing, 1981), 36.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 343.
[4] Ibid., 352.
[5] al-Azmeh, 36.
[6] Mahdi, 205.

new ruler as their master and obey his commands.[7] As we have previously mentioned, when '*aṣabīya* is enjoined with religious sentiment, natural solidarity is more effective in establishing the state, because the subjects are more likely to obey the ordinances of the ruler in pursuit of the higher good. During this first stage, the ruler owes his position to his ancestry and the respect of his fellow tribesmen; his rule is dependent on their number, power and assistance.[8] He must accommodate their desires, and share his power with them.[9] This is also true of religion, the ruler who is establishing a state with the aid of a religious message cannot act as a king, since religion means the obedience of all to God and the revealed religious law.[10] According to Ibn Khaldūn, the state in this stage is still in a period of transition, and the primitive people that established it still retain their primitive attitudes to authority. It is these very attitudes that may stunt the development of civilization and the centralization of authority necessary for the state's development.[11] Thus, it is the initial forces that created the state, which are '*aṣabīya* and its natural product of solidarity that may become a hindrance to its growth, unless of course a strong religious sentiment is adopted such as in the time period of the *khulafā rāshidūn* that can speed up the process. In this scenario, '*aṣabīya* when complimented by religion is not a hindrance, but rather a spur to the growth of the state.[12]

---

[7] Nassif Nassar, *El pensamiento realista de Ibn Jaldūn* (México City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1979), 199.

[8] Sohail Inayatullah, "The Strengthening and Weakening of Asabiya," *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians...*ed. John Galtung & Sohail Inayatullah (London: Praeger Press, 1997):28.

[9] Khuda Bukhsh, "Ibn Khaldun and His History of Islamic Civilization," *Medieval Muslim Historiography,* ed. Muhammad Taher (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1997), 586.

[10] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 417.

[11] Nassar, 200.

[12] Bukhsh, 587.

In the second stage, the ruler begins to monopolize power and becomes an

absolute ruler. To Ibn Khaldūn, a well-ordered state should consist of a hierarchy of

powers with an absolute commander at the top whose rule is not shared or disputed by

anyone.[13] Man has a natural lust for power and the desire for dominance over others is

innate in man's animal nature; once a man is in a position where dominance and mastery

are in his grasp he will inevitably attempt to become an absolute ruler.[14] To quote Ibn

Khaldūn:

> "We have mentioned before that according to their nature, human beings need someone to act as a
> restraining influence and mediator in every social organization, in order to keep the members from
> fighting with each other. That person must, by necessity, have superiority over the others in the
> matter of group feeling…When a person sharing in the group feeling has reached the rank of chieftain
> and commands obedience, and when he then finds the way open toward superiority and the use of
> force, he follows that way, because it is something desirable."[15]

At this point, the ruler is in a position to satisfy his lust for power and in turn to build a

well-structured political state. This is achieved by the destruction or subordination of

those who initially shared power with him, at first by playing them against each other,

and then eventually using paid mercenaries who are loyal to him.[16] Thus, the second

stage in the development of a state is the period of consolidating the ruler's power and

creating absolute kingship.[17] Both 'aṣabīya and religion (if it has been adopted by the

newly-founded political state) are put in check by the ruler in terms of the sharing of

their power, and are used at the discretion of the absolute ruler.[18] 'Aṣabīya becomes

increasingly powerful during this stage, and the ruled begin to completely submit to

their new ruler and the laws of the state. Various administrative bodies are established,

---

[13] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 335.
[14] Baali & Wardi, 109.
[15] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 244.
[16] Ibid., 337.
[17] Inayatullah, 28.
[18] Nassar, 201.

and the army, the treasury, and later a "group of learned men" become the instruments

of preserving the state."[19] As previously mentioned, if a true religious calling is

enjoined with 'aṣabīya, then 'aṣabīya will become even more powerful, and the

administrative bodies of the state will be rightly guided in pursuit of the higher good.

Because this second stage is so important for the consolidation of a ruler's power and

the establishment of the functionaries of a state, it is imperative that a true religious

calling is adopted to ensure the state has a strong basis.

In the third stage of development of a state, the ruler's lust for power is satisfied

because he has effectively concentrated authority, and he begins to employ 'aṣabīya

(and possibly religion) for the satisfaction of other desires; he begins to collect the fruits

of authority.[20] This is a stage of luxury and leisure, and the ruler directs his energies

towards increasing the wealth of the state and its income.[21] To quote Ibn Khaldūn:

> "When royal authority is obtained, it is accompanied by a life of ease and increased opportunities.
> Sedentary culture is merely a diversification of luxury and a refined knowledge of the crafts employed
> for the diverse aspects and ways of luxury. This concerns, for instance, food, and clothing...These
> crafts increase in number with the growing variety of pleasures and amusements and ways and means
> to enjoy the life of luxury the soul desires, and with the growing number of different things to which
> people get used to."[22]

By this point, the state has reached a stage where it is able to satisfy man's desires for

luxuries; according to Ibn Khaldūn it is generally a period of rest and self-indulgence

when men enjoy the comforts and pleasures of the world.[23]

Thus, the first three stages of a state's development constitute the first of two

broad phases in its life span, where it has come from a primitive existence and has

---

[19] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 2, 23.

[20] Bukhsh, 586.

[21] Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, 89.

[22] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 347.

[23] Ibid., 354.

reached the end for which it was established.[24] As stated in chapter two, this end may

be the satisfaction of the ruler's lower impulses, the acquisition of worldly goods, or the

pursuit of the ultimate reward in the world to come under the direction of the *siyāsāt*

dīnīya. During all three of the first stages the state will attempt to expand its power

base and wage war and conquest, which *'aṣabīya* (and possibly religion) aid in

accomplishing. Throughout this first phase the state grows and develops until it

reaches a zenith and decline and decay begin to set in. The natural life span of *'aṣabīya*

begins to run its course, its effectiveness begins to dwindle, and the luxury that the state

began to enjoy in the third stage makes it weak and senile. However, in the case of the

ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* this was not the case as will be demonstrated

below, it is at this point in the cycle that this miraculous and ideal state was able to

escape the natural process of decay and decline for a short time, due to its true religious

calling and the strong conviction of its subjects as believers of the truth and veracity of

Islam. Though the conquests of the Banū Hilāl were also initially based on both

'aṣabīya and religion, they were not true to the religious message of Islam, and followed

the natural course of decay which will be outlined below.

After a state has reached its zenith, it reaches the fourth stage of its life span, in

which the ruler and the ruled become content and complacent with their position of

wealth.[25] The initial zeal and force of *'aṣabīya*, or *'aṣabīya* enhanced by religion begins

to dwindle, and the members of the state begin to believe that their ease of life will

never diminish. To quote Muhsin Mahdi: "Luxury, comfort, and the gratification of

their desires become a habit within them. They are completely dependent upon the

---

[24] Nassar, 203.
[25] Inayatullah, 29.

continuous existence of what their predecessors had achieved and are powerless before forces that may lead to the disruption of their prosperity."[26] According to Ibn Khaldūn, the length of this fourth stage depends upon the power and the extent of the achievements of the founders of the state, and the principles that the state has been founded upon.[27] We may assume then that a state based solely on 'aṣabīya will go through a relatively short fourth stage before it descends into complete disintegration and ruin, while a state that has adopted religion in addition to 'aṣabīya, such as the siyāsāt dīnīya will exist for a longer duration in this stage. However, regardless of the basis of the state, its 'aṣabīya will inevitably begin to dwindle, and will pass into the fifth and final stage of its natural life span.

The fifth stage in the life of a state is one of complete disintegration and decline; the state is doomed to a slow or violent death. In this stage, either 'aṣabīya or 'aṣabīya enhanced by religion which were in the first stage its basis are here responsible for its decline. The success enjoyed by these forces in the first three stages of the state's life by this point have made the ruler and the subjects of the state lazy and ineffective; they have lost the initial zeal that either 'aṣabīya or the adoption of a new religion had given them earlier on, and they are doomed to fail.[28] The rulers of the state who previously may have been virtuous have destroyed the pride and loyalty of their subjects who have lost their drive to wage war for the state. To quote Ibn Khaldūn:

> "First, as we have stated, royal authority, by its very nature, must claim all glory for itself. As long as glory was the common property of the group, and all members of the group made an identical effort to obtain glory, their aspirations to gain the upper hand over others and to defend their own possessions were expressed in exemplary unruliness and lack of restraint...Therefore, the considered death encountered in the pursuit of glory, sweet, and they preferred annihilation to the loss of glory.

---

[26] Mahdi, 207.
[27] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 279.
[28] Bukhsh, 587.

Now, however, when one of them claims all glory for himself, he treats the others severely and holds them in check...People, thus, become too lazy to care for fame. They become dispirited and come to love humbleness and servitude."[29]

Thus, it would seem that Ibn Khaldūn makes the connection between the inability to wage war and the disintegration of a state. As we have previously stated, both 'aṣabīya and religion originally provide an incentive and a means to carry out conquest, but at this stage it is the spoils of war that lead to a state's decline. The ruler inevitably becomes greedy and senile, claiming everything for himself, thus disenchanting his subjects upon which he is ultimately reliant for survival of his rule and the state. Again, this was not the case in the time period of the ideal khilāfa of the khulafā rāshidūn, as we will demonstrate below.

Normally, however, the comforts and luxury that were initially generated by 'aṣabīya and religion at this stage bring about weakness and lack of morals among the subjects of the state. The state becomes powerless to defend itself against an outside invasion by a newer and stronger state that has not yet reached its natural occurring period of decline, and this new group may conquer the state, putting it out of its misery.[30] If the state is not overcome by an outside group then it will continue to decline, and may attempt a last-ditch effort to revitalize itself, though eventually it will wither away. To quote Ibn Khaldūn: "At the end of a dynasty, there often also appears some show of power that gives the impression that the senility of the dynasty has been made to disappear. It lights up brilliantly just before it is extinguished, like a burning

---

[29] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 339.
[30] Fakhry, 95.

wick the flame of which leaps up brilliantly a moment before it goes out, giving the impression it is just starting to burn, when in fact it is going out."[31]

These are the five stages of Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical theory of dynastic change, and in essence constitute the natural life-span of both any political state and *'aṣabīya* in general. Depending primarily on the type of *'aṣabīya* that is the basis of a state this cycle may vary slightly in duration and various states may enjoy more permanence than others throughout the various stages, though as mentioned before, this process is inevitable and all forms of political authority are subject to natural law. The addition of religion to *'aṣabīya* may give a state the means to achieve more success and exist longer than it normally would, though we have demonstrated that eventually *'aṣabīya* and religion are the two most important factors that lead to a state's decline, just as they are also the most important in its establishment. Furthermore, because a state has adopted religion to increase the potency of its natural *'aṣabīya,* it does not necessarily mean that it will be successful, which is apparent when one compares Ibn Khaldūn's historical account of the failed conquests of the Banū Hilāl and the relative permanence enjoyed by the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn.*

Failed *'aṣabīya* due to a deficiency of a true religious calling

The Banū Hilāl was a tribe that existed in pre-Islamic Arabia, and originally played a part (along with others) in the *Ayyām al-'Arab* (the pre-Islamic tribal struggles) and in other affairs connected with the beginning of Islam in general.[32] During the first half of the 8th century, some of the Banū Hilāl were invited to emigrate

---

[31] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 2, 118.
[32] H.A.R. Gibb, J.H. Kramers, E. Levi-Provencal, J. Schacht eds. *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), s.v. "'Banū Hilāl" by H.R. Idris.

to Egypt where they became quite numerous.[33] As they continued to grow in number,

they caused a great deal of trouble in Egypt, and in 1047 al-Yāzūrī, the Fāṭimid minister

to the recognized 'Abbāsid Caliph, gave them free reign to do as they would in Ifrīqiya

as revenge for a prior political dispute with the Zīrid al-Muʿizz b. Bādīs.[34] The Banū

Hilāl (and along with them the Banū Sulaym) set out from Egypt in 1051, and in 1052,

the Zīrid armies attempted to stop them at Ḥaydarān, but failed in doing so even though

they did indeed outnumber the Banū Hilāl considerably, which marks the first of several

successful conquests. In November of 1057, Qayrawān was sacked and destroyed by the

Banū Hilāl, from which it never recovered.[35] As a result of the anarchy and destruction

that they brought with them to Ifrīqiya, certain chiefs of the Banū Hilāl were able to

establish themselves as rulers, though this sovereignty was short-lived. Though the

conquest of Ifrīqiya by the Normans in had almost no impact on the position of their

political authority, they were eventually overthrown by the Almohads in a series of

battles which culminated in the year 1160.[36]

The historical significance of the invasions and conquests of the Banū Hilāl (and

to some extent the Banū Sulaym) in the 11th century and Ibn Khaldūn's interpretation of

these events has been the subject of much debate. According to C.A. Julien, a famous

specialist in the history of North Africa, the "Hilalian invasion" was "the most

important event of the entire medieval period in the Maghreb."[37] The Hilalian invasion

has been compared to being as irresistible and destructive as the invasions led by

---

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] C.A. Julien, *History of North Africa. From the Arab Conquest to 1830* trans. by J. Petrie, C. Stewart, (London: University Press, 1970), 73.

Tamerlane and Genghis Khan, though recent historians of North Africa, such as Yves

Lacoste have refuted this claim. To quote Yves Lacoste:

> "The Arab nomads were not the destructive conquerors of legend. There are no grounds for
> describing their arrival as a flood. There were relatively few of them: about fifty thousand, according
> to the most reliable estimates. Although they did cause considerable destruction in the southern part
> of Ifrīqiya, the only area they actually conquered, in other areas their movements bore no resemblance
> to a conquest. Except in southern Ifrīkiya, they created no states and did not overthrow any
> established governments."[38]

Concerning Ibn Khaldūn's historical interpretation of the invasions of the Banū

Hilāl, authors such as C.A. Julien have stressed that Ibn Khaldūn placed the utmost

significance on these events as the major underlying cause for the ruin of North Africa

in the 11th – 14th centuries.[39] Though Ibn Khaldūn does stress that the effects of the

invasions of the Banū Hilāl were indeed still felt in the 14th century, more recent

interpretations of his work have refuted the claim that he assigned to this event such a

significance as C.A. Julien states in his work. To once again quote Yves Lacoste:

> The Hilalian invasion is not the main theme of *The Muqaddimah*. Ibn Khaldūn refers to it simply as
> one of the causes of the turmoil...Ibn Khaldūn was not studying a major localized event such as an
> invasion and its aftermath; he makes no systematic distinction between the character of the Maghreb
> before and after the crisis. But he does make a methodical analysis of the permanent political and
> social structures that characterized North Africa. And according to Ibn Khaldūn, the arrival of the
> Hilalian tribes did not alter those structures to any great extent."[40]

Thus, we may conclude that Ibn Khaldūn did not attach such significance to the

conquests and invasions of the Banū Hilāl in the 11th century that they were the main

cause for the political turmoil and ruin in the Maghrib that he witnessed first-hand, but

rather they were one of many factors which led to the ruinous state of affairs in North

Africa at that time. However, one must account for the fact that he Ibn Khaldūn does

devote several sections of *The Muqaddimah* to the historical account and interpretation

of their invasions; along with the specifics of the *khulafā rāshidūn*, the conquests of the

---

[38] Lacoste, 71.
[39] Julien, 73.
[40] Lacoste, 71 – 72.

Banū Hilāl are among the most detailed historical events recorded in *The Muqaddimah*.

He goes into considerable detail concerning the conquests of both the 7th century Arab

Islamic armies and then that of the Banū Hilāl and the Banū Sulaym in the 11th

century.[41] While the first did little or no damage to the pre-existing society in the

Maghrib, but rather strengthened it, the second wreaked havoc in North Africa and had

no positive effect whatsoever.[42] While the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* is to Ibn

Khaldūn the ideal political state due to the extremely devout religious basis of its rule,

and consequently is dealt with extensively in *The Muqaddimah*, then one may account

for the extensive treatment of the invasions of the Banū Hilāl as an attempt to compare

their disruptive and failed conquests with the successes of the *khulafā rāshidūn*. To Ibn

Khaldūn, the Banū Hilāl, and their followers, the Banū Sulaym, represent a perverted

and corrupt form of *siyāsāt dīnīya*, an example of a failed political state that has as its

basis both *'aṣabīya* and religion.

Ibn Khaldūn mentions the conquests of the Banū Hilāl and the Banū Sulaym

throughout various sections of *The Muqaddimah*. In Volume One he tells of their

beginnings as conquerors of the Maghrib, and does not present them in a negative way,

but rather as a strong Bedouin tribal group whose beginnings were not very different

from the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn*.

> "The same was the case also with the Banū Ṭayy, the Banū 'Āmir b. Ṣa'ṣa'ah, and the Banū Sulaym
> b. Manṣūr later on. They remained longer in the desert than the other Muḍar and Yemenite tribes,
> and did not have any of their wealth. The desert habits preserved the power of their group feeling,
> and the habits of luxury did not wear it out. They thus eventually became the most powerful group
> among the Arabs. Thus, wherever an Arab tribe leads a life o luxury and abundance, while another
> does not, the one holding fast to desert life the longer will be superior to and more powerful than the
> other, if both parties are otherwise equal in strength and number."[43]

---

[41] Robert Irwin, "Toynbee and Ibn Khaldūn," *Middle Eastern Studies* 33 (July 1997):467.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 283.

In this passage from *The Muqaddimah* we see the Banū Sulaym (and by extension the Banū Hilāl) are accounted among other tribes as an example of the superiority of nomadic groups over sedentary civilizations who have begun to decline, and thus will inevitably be overtaken by a new and powerful nomadic group. This fits in perfectly with Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical theory of dynastic change, as he stresses that a state that was previously of a nomadic background eventually becomes more sedentary and thus senile and ineffective, and is likely to be conquered by a newly formed nomadic social group that is strengthened by *'aṣabīya* or religion.[44] This was also the case in the beginnings of the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn*, who were originally a nomadic Bedouin social group who achieved dominance over the Persians and Byzantines who had become sedentary and thus in a state of decay, as their original *'aṣabīya* began to dwindle.

However, Ibn Khaldūn changes his tone quite a bit in later sections of *The Muqaddimah* in which he mentions the conquests and invasions of the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym. In Volume Two of *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldūn describes the conditions that existed in the Maghrib and in Ifrīqiya in general before the invasions of the Banū Hilāl.

"Ifrīqiyah and the Maghrib had no great royal authority before Islam...No dynasty was close to the people of the Maghrib. When God brought Islam and the Arabs took possession of Ifrīqiyah and the Maghrib, the Arab rule lasted for only a short while at the beginning of Islam. At that time the Arabs were in the stage of Bedouin life. Those who stayed in Ifrīqiyah and the Maghrib did not find there any old tradition of sedentary culture, because the original population of Ifrīqiyah and the Maghrib had been Berbers immersed in Bedouin life. Very soon, the Berbers of Morocco revolted...and never again reverted to Arab rule."[45]

[44] Walzer, 58.
[45] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 2, 288.

This passage is particularly revealing of Ibn Khaldūn's position on the Banū Hilāl and the *khulafā rāshidūn* for several reasons. He describes Ifrīqiya and the Maghrib as not having any kind of royal authority before the arrival of Islam and the Arabs, and presumably he is referring to the early conquests of the *khulafā rāshidūn*. As Ibn Khaldūn states in the above passage, these early conquerors brought Islam to the Maghrib from God, and the Arabs that did this were not yet in the mode of sedentary life; they had retained their nomadic character despite their success in conquest and empire-building. As a result of this the Berbers who existed in the Maghrib prior to the arrival of the early Arab forces adopted their nomadic-Bedouin character, and thus were able to resist the temptations and pitfalls of sedentary civilization.

However, as the power and effectiveness of the *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* began to decline, for as we have stated previously even this ideal state was not able to escape Ibn Khaldūn's natural cycle theory of dynastic change indefinitely, sedentary civilization began to develop, and the subjects of the Maghrib never reverted to Arab rule. We may assume that Ibn Khaldūn meant by "Arab rule" the true and rightly-guided rule of the *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn*. The passage continues:

> "Ifrīqiyah remained in the possession of the Aghlabids and the Arabs who were with them. They had some sedentary culture as the result of the luxury and prosperity of the royal authority and the large civilization of al-Qayrawān that were theirs...But all that was brief and lasted less than four hundred years. Their dynasty ended, and the coloring of sedentary culture that existed there changed, as it had not been firmly established. The Hilāl, who were Arab Bedouins, gained power over the country and ruined it."[46]

Here we see that Ibn Khaldūn believed that the Maghrib was never the same after the decline of the rule of the first Arab conquerors. After a period of four hundred years, during which time the Maghrib was ruled by various dynasties including the Aghlabids,

---

[46] Ibid., 288.

the sedentary culture that was established there after the decline of the *khilāfa* of the

khulafā rāshidūn led to the ruin of the dynasties that existed there. Fitting in with Ibn

Khaldūn's cyclical theory of dynastic change, a nomadic group, namely the Banū Hilāl

attempted to take possession of the Maghrib and Ifrīqiya after the decline of the

dynasties that were entrenched in sedentary culture. However, he does not describe the

conquests of the Banū Hilāl as rightly-guided, nor does he state that they had any

positive effect on the Maghrib whatsoever. Though he admits that they gained power

over the Maghrib, in the same sentence he also states that they ruined it. This is in stark

contrast to the manner in which he characterizes the early Arab conquests of the

Maghrib; he describes them as a noble and nomadic group who brought Islam to the

region directly from God.

This of course raises the question of why Ibn Khaldūn portrays these two groups'

effects on the Maghrib in such a different way; one can assume that the Banū Hilāl must

have lacked an essential characteristic that the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn*

exemplified. The answer to this conundrum is made quite apparent when one examines

a later passage of *The Muqaddimah*:

> "At times, a few individuals have aimed at re-establishing the Sunnah and changing reprehensible
> ways. Such individuals occupy themselves with this and gain many followers...However, the
> religious coloring cannot be firmly established in the Arabs...Therefore, those who follow the new
> religious propaganda and live, as they think, by the Sunnah, are not deeply immersed in the different
> ways of seeking and following religious models. Their religion is merely abstinence from robbery and
> injustice...Beyond that, they continue most eagerly to search for worldly goods and for ways of
> making a living. There is great difference between looking for religious ethics and searching for
> worldly goods. It is impossible that the two things could go together. No religious coloring can
> establish a hold over such people, and they cannot completely keep away from worthlessness...This
> happened in the seventh (thirteenth) century in Ifrīqiyah to a man of the Banū Ka'b of the
> Sulaym...After that, there appeared other people to make such religious propaganda. They adopted
> similarly deceptive ideas. They followed the Sunnah in name only, but did not live by it, except for a
> very few. Neither they not any of their successors had any success."[47]

---

[47] Ibid., 199 – 200.

Few passages contained in *The Muqaddimah* are as revealing as this one of the significance of Ibn Khaldūn's position on the failures of the Banū Hilāl and successes and relative permanence enjoyed by the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn*, and on the religious and theocentric basis of his political thought in general. Here Ibn Khaldūn makes it quite clear that groups such as the Banū Hilāl who use religious propaganda solely for political gain but do not concern themselves with the overall important message of Islam will not succeed in their political endeavors; in other words the adoption of Islam in this fashion does not eradicate the natural deficiencies of their naturally occurring *'asabīya*. Rather, it leads to their downfall and ruin, making their political authority more reprehensible and perverse than it originally was because they are concerned primarily with the acquisition of worldly goods. According to Ibn Khaldūn based on the passage above, the desire for worldly goods is not compatible with religious ethics; indeed the two are polar opposite. It is for this reason that he deems the conquests of the Banū Hilāl who attempted to achieve political authority under the banner of Islam in a deceptive and perverted way an utter failure.

Ideal *'asabīya* strengthened by a true religious calling

In sharp contrast to this one may examine his historical account of the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn*. The institution of the Islamic Caliphate was the new system of rule established after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad in 632 A.D.[48] The Companions of the Prophet who rules after him were called the *khulafā* (successors to God's messenger), and the system of the Caliphate originated in Medina which was the

---

[48] Rabī', 81.

spiritual and political center of Islam.[49] Though there was initially a conflict between

the Companions of the Prophet over who would succeed him, eventually Abū Bakr was

approved as the first caliph. Before his death, Abū Bakr appointed 'Umar as the second

Caliph who ruled from 634-634 A.D. Previous to the death of 'Umar, who was

murdered by a Persian convert, he had named six dignitaries and entrusted to them the

task of choosing a Caliph among themselves after he died.[50] After much debate 'Uthmān

who was one of the Prophet's sons-in-law and Companions was chosen as the third

Caliph, ruling from 644–656 A.D. He was criticized by many as being ineffective in the

face of the mounting political and social problems of the time, and in addition was

viewed as acting favorably to his kinsmen of the old Meccan aristocracy over others.[51]

As a result of these factors and several others he was assassinated, and 'Alī, the

Prophet's cousin and son-in-law was chosen as the fourth Caliph, his rule lasting from

656–661 A.D.

While the term *khulafā rāshidūn* (Rightly-Guided Caliphs) refers to the rule of

these first four caliphs only, several authors have pointed out that Ibn Khaldūn believes

that the true *siyāsāt dīnīya* of the early Islamic period endured through the reins of

Mu'āwiyah (661-80 A.D.) and his immediate successors and the first group of 'Abbāsid

Caliphs until the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (786-809 A.D.).[52] However, Ibn Khaldūn

draws a distinction between the reign of the *khulafā rāshidūn* and that of Mu'āwiyah

and his successors. To quote Ibn Khaldūn:

> "It has thus been shows how the form of government came to be royal authority. However, there
> remained the traits that are characteristic of the Caliphate, namely, preference for Islam and

[49] Ibid.
[50] Hodgson, 207.
[51] Ibid., 213.
[52] Fakhry, 92.

adherence to the path of truth. A change became apparent only in the restraining influence that had been Islam and now came to be group feeling and the sword. That was the situation in the time of Muʿāwiyah…and the first ʿAbbāsid Caliphs down to al-Rashīd and some of his sons. Then, the caliphate disappeared, and only it name remained. The form of government came to be royal authority pure and simple. Superiority attained the limits of its nature and was employed for particular worthless purposes, such as the use of force and the arbitrary gratification of desires and for pleasures."[53]

Thus, while Ibn Khaldūn believes that Muʿāwiyah and his successors after the death of

ʿAlī were able to retain some important characteristics of the *khulafā rāshidūn*,

specifically the adherence to the true principles of Islam, the strong religious sentiment

that acted as a restraining factor was not present during this time as it was during the

khulafā rāshidūn. Instead, their restraint reverted to being a product of *ʿaṣabīya* and

natural domination; the restraining influence came not from within the Muslims

themselves as a result of their strong religious belief as it did during the *khulafā*

rāshidūn. As a result we may conclude that Ibn Khaldūn deemed only the period of the

khulafā rāshidūn specifically as the true and exemplary *siyāsāt dīnīya*, and that the reign

of Muʿāwiyah and his successors represents a period of decline of this *siyāsāt dīnīya*,

where only a portion of the traits of the *khulafā rāshidūn* were present.

Ibn Khaldūn characterizes the rise of Islam and the time of the *khulafā rāshidūn*

in general as a unique and incomparable sequence of historical events. According to

Barbara Stowasser, he considered this to be a particularly exceptional period in Islamic

political history because "natural *ʿaṣabīya* was not only simply complemented and

enhanced by religion, but rather the political affairs of men were eclipsed and

superceded by the experience of direct, divine intervention".[54] As we have established

above, a natural product of *ʿaṣabīya* is conquest, and religion can strengthen a group or

---

[53] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 427.
[54] Stowasser, 15.

dynasty's ability to wage war. Religion unites the hearts of man under a common goal,

and a group that has experienced a religious calling does not fear death, which according

to Ibn Khaldūn can render them invincible. During the time of the *khulafā rāshidūn*

great wars were waged by the early Muslims and their new found faith in Islam greatly

aided them in their numerous conquests.[55] As a specific example Ibn Khaldūn cites the

case of the battle of al-Qādisīyah.

> "When people who have a religious coloring come to have the right insight into their affairs, nothing
> can withstand them, because their outlook is one and their object one of common ground. They are
> willing to die for their objectives. On the other hand, the members of the dynasty they attack may be
> many times as numerous as they. But their purposes differ, in as much as they are false purposes, and
> the people of the worldly dynasty come to abandon each other, since they are afraid of death...They
> are overpowered by them and quickly wiped out, as a result of the luxury and humbleness existing
> among them...This happened to the Arabs at the beginning of Islam during the Muslim conquests.
> The armies of the Muslims at al-Qādisīyah numbered some 30,000, while the Persian troops
> numbered 120,000...they were not able to withstand the Arabs."[56]

As the early Muslims continued to conquer they inevitably acquired bounty and riches

as a result of their endeavors. As we have stated previously, Ibn Khaldūn believes that

the wealth and worldly possessions gained by a dynasty as a result of conquest

inevitably weaken *'aṣabīya* and lead to a state's downfall. However, in the early period

of the *khulafā rāshidūn* this was not the case.[57] Ibn Khaldūn states that the desert Arabs

originally lived simple lives and had no desire to amass wide fortunes or many worldly

possessions. However, once their *'aṣabīya* was strengthened by Islam they began to

acquire land and in turn wealth.

> "Finally, the group feeling of the Arabs was consolidated in Islam through the prophecy of
> Muhammad with which God honored them. They then advanced against the Persians and Byzantines,
> and they looked for the land that God had truthfully promised and destined them. They took away
> the royal authority of the Persians and Byzantines and confiscated their worldly possessions. They
> amassed enormous fortunes."[58]

---

[55] Saade, *El pensamiento religioso de Ibn Jaldūn*, 132.
[56] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 320.
[57] Stowasser, 17.
[58] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 419.

Ibn Khaldūn then goes on in some detail to describe the reported numbers and figures

associated with their new found wealth.

> "Yet, the gains the made were greater than any ever made by other human beings...al-Masʿūdī says: 'In the days of ʿUthmān, the men around Muḥammad acquired estates and money. On the day ʿUthmān was killed, 150,000 dinars and 1,000,000 dirhams were in the hands of his treasurers. The value of his estates...was 200,000 dinars. He also left camels and many horses...He also left 1,000 horses and 1,000 female servants...al-Zubayr built himself a residence in al-Baṣrah and other residences in Egypt and in al-Kūfah and Alexandria.'"[59]

According to Khaldūn, regardless of the amount of wealth the early Muslims acquired as

a result of their conquest, they still kept to their simple way of life.

> "Such were the gains the people made. Their religion did not blame them for amassing so much, because, as booty, it was lawful property. They did not employ their property wastefully...Amassing worldly property is reprehensible, but it did not reflect upon them...Since their expenditures followed a plan and served the truth in its ways, the amassing of so much property helped them along on the path of truth and served the purpose of attaining the other world."[60]

Even though the early Muslims acquired such a large fortune, their ʿaṣabīya did not at

first deteriorate because the religious calling they had experienced kept them on the

correct and truthful path, and the wealth they acquired was done so in a lawful manner.

Thus, during the early period of the khulafā rāshidūn, the acquisition of worldly

possessions was not assigned the same importance as religion, bur rather it was a

secondary and less significant end of their political authority. As stated above, Ibn

Khaldūn believes that the desire for worldly possessions cannot exist alongside religion

because the state's ʿaṣabīya will become corrupt and weak, leading to the ruin and

failure of the state which is exemplified by the failed conquests of the Banū Hilāl.

However this was not the case during the khulafā rāshidūn, he emphatically states that

religion and the propagation of their new found faith was their main concern in matters

---

[59] Ibid., 419 – 420. Franz Rosenthal makes the point that though Ibn Khaldūn's quotation of al-Masʿūdī is accurate it is not literal. Regardless of the actual figures, his citation of al-Masʿūdī is significant in that he is attempting to prove that regardless of the fortunes the khulafā rāshidūn acquired in their conquests, their ʿaṣabīya was not weakened as a result of their strong religious convictions.

[60] Ibid., 419.

of conquest and political authority. Ibn Khaldūn even goes so far as give examples of

the early caliphs themselves rejecting this great wealth.

"The amounts they got were enormous. Still, they kept to their rude way of life. 'Umar used to patch his sole garment with pieces of leather. 'Alī used to say: 'Gold and silver! Go and lure others, not me!' Abū Mūsā refrained from eating chicken, because chickens were very rare among the Arabs of that time and not generally known to them. Sieves were altogether non-existent among the Arabs, and they ate wheat kernels with the bran. Yet, the gains they made were greater than any ever made by other human beings."[61]

Due to the strong religious conviction of the early Muslims, the riches they acquired did

not weaken their *'aṣabīya*, and did not undermine state stability as would normally be

the case.

Because of the strong religious sentiment that was present during the time of the

khulafā rāshidūn, the early Muslims were also able to establish what Ibn Khaldūn would

characterize as "good royal authority", which we may define as the ideal *siyāsāt dīnīya*.

As we have previously stated, Ibn Khaldūn distinguishes between both good and bad

'aṣabīya, and in turn between good and bad royal authority. Ibn Khaldūn believes that

even though the Prophet Muḥammad is reported as having spoken out against royal

authority, it was only certain types that he disapproved of.

"When Muḥammad censures royal authority, he does not censure it for gaining superiority through truth, for forcing the masses to accept the faith, nor for looking after the public interests. He censures royal authority for achieving superiority through worthless means and for employing human beings for indulgence in selfish purposes and desires, as we have stated. If royal authority would sincerely exercise its superiority over men to worship God and to wage war against His enemies, there would not be anything reprehensible in it."[62]

Royal authority which aims to propagate religion instead of the acquisition of worldly

goods is deemed as acceptable by Ibn Khaldūn, by way of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Because Ibn Khaldūn believes that the Prophet would have censured a perverse type of

political authority such as that of the Banū Hilāl, we may conclude that Ibn Khaldūn

---

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 430.

established a state's adherence to the true tenants of the Islamic faith as his criteria for

judging its worth and success. Though the early caliphs tried to distance themselves

from the worldly goals associated with royal authority and reject the material interests

that are inherent to it, there was a small element of royal authority present in the

caliphate for practical purposes only, specifically during the time of 'Umar.[63] And this,

according to Ibn Khaldūn, was completely acceptable, because the overlying purpose of

all their actions was to serve and obey God and the rightly revealed laws of Islam.

Particular attention must be paid here to the nature of the religious laws that

were guiding the early Muslims, which Ibn Khaldūn believes is the root cause of their

success. Under normal political circumstances, according to Khaldūn, man's reliance on

laws imposed by the ruler of the state can destroy a group's fortitude.

> "If, however, the domination with its laws is one of brute force and intimidation, it breaks their
> fortitude and deprives them of their power of resistance as a result of the inertness that develops on
> the souls of the oppressed...when laws are enforced by means of punishment, they completely destroy
> fortitude, because the use of punishment against someone who cannot defend himself generates in
> that person a feeling of humiliation that, no doubt, must break his fortitude...when laws are intended
> to serve the purposes of education and instruction and are applied from childhood on, they have to
> some degree the same effect, because people then grow up in fear and docility and consequently do
> not rely on their own fortitude."[64]

While this is the case under *mulk tabī'ī*, the two types of the two types of *siyāsat*

'aqlīya, and the corrupt version of the *siyāsāt dīnīya*, this was not the case during the

time of the *khulafā rāshidūn*. In this early period of Islamic history, the laws that were

imposed on the early Muslims had the opposite effect of what normally would occur;

they were actually strengthened by them, making them truly invincible.

---

[63] Ibid., 429.
[64] Ibid., 259.

Ibn Khaldūn gives us two reasons for how and why these laws had the effect on the early Muslims the way that they did.[65] The religion of Islam and its revealed laws were of absolute truth, which has already been established as a necessary criteria to Ibn Khaldūn for a political movement based on a religious calling to be successful. Secondly, the subjects of the *khulafā rāshidūn* had experienced the religion's appearance firsthand, which caused them to observe its laws in absolute obedience and submission. To quote Ibn Khaldūn: "The laws were the laws and precepts of the religion, which they received orally and which their firmly rooted belief in the truth of the articles of faith caused them to observe. Their fortitude remained unabated, and it was not corroded by education or authority".[66] Thus the laws propagated by the early Islamic state caused the restraining influence necessary for group survival to emerge from within the early Muslims themselves, and as a result they possessed the greatest possible fortitude. As a result of this unique combination of factors, all ultimately directed by God, they were able to build a strong and unified state; that was completely invincible before its inevitable decline began to set in.

---

[65] Stowasser, 18.
[66] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 259.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been established that Ibn Khaldūn's political theory

contained in *The Muqaddimah* bears several striking characteristics that lead to it being

classified as theocentric in nature. This has been accomplished primarily by analyzing

the concept of *'aṣabīya* which is the basis of his political theory, and the relationship

between *'aṣabīya* and religion in their function and role in the State. In chapter one, it

was established that while *'aṣabīya* is the primary basis of any type of political authority

and state it has naturally occurring deficiencies that must be eradicated if a state is to

endure and achieve success in its political endeavors. Thus a state must adopt as a basis

for its political authority a second force in addition to *'aṣabīya* as a means to strengthen

its solidarity, and according to Ibn Khaldūn this second force should ideally be religion.

However, not all states choose to adhere to religion, and others simply do not receive a

true religious calling. To Ibn Khaldūn, religion is not necessary for the establishment of

political authority, for *'aṣabīya* is able to achieve this by itself; rather the adoption of

religion is the ideal course for a state to follow in order for it to be righteous, successful

and enduring.[1]

This important point was elucidated in chapter two, in which Ibn Khaldūn's

classification of the types of political authority was treated in some depth. There it was

established that it was ultimately the degree of religious sentiment adopted by a state

that was the basis for his classification of the types of political authority. This

argument was again placed in the larger context of the role of *'aṣabīya* in the State,

---

[1] Saade, *El pensamiento religioso de Ibn Jaldūn*, 132.

specifically concerning the important question of which secondary force is adopted by the political authorities in order to eradicate *'asabīya's* naturally occurring deficiencies. Again, while Ibn Khaldūn does not believe religion to be necessary for state survival, it is preferred. Both *mulk ṭabī'ī* and the two types of *siyāsāt 'aqlīya* do not enjoin religion with their pre-existing *'asabīya,* though they may function as forms of political authority, and are able to achieve success relative to the righteousness of their rule. According to Ibn Khaldūn it is only the *siyāsāt dīnīya* which adopts religion and enjoins it with its *'asabīya* that may be successful in completely eradicating *'asabīya's* deficiencies. However Ibn Khaldūn draws another important distinction, namely that the adopted religion should ideally be Islam due to its inherent nature of combining both political and religious authority under one single administrative entity, the Islamic Caliphate.

Not all states that are Islamic in nature and claim to have adopted the true principles of Islam as the basis for their political authority will necessarily be successful, for Ibn Khaldūn distinguishes between good and bad forms of the *siyāsāt dīnīya,* just as he does between political authority in general. The conquests of the Banū Hilāl and the Banū Sulaym in the 11th century Maghrib represent a perverted and corrupt form of *siyāsāt dīnīya* due to the fact that these tribes were more concerned with the acquisition of worldly goods then the adherence to and propagation of the Islamic faith. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the desire for mundane goods and true religious sentiment cannot co-exist in the *siyāsāt dīnīya,* they are simply incompatible and any state that does this will be an utter failure. In fact, it seems that Ibn Khaldūn deems the perverted *siyāsāt dīnīya*

as ineffective and reprehensible as *mulk ṭabīʿī*, under which no secondary force is adopted to eradicate the deficiencies of *ʿaṣabīya*.

In contrast to the Banū Hilāl, we see Ibn Khaldūn's presentation of the *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn*. The *khulafā rāshidūn* is undoubtedly viewed by Ibn Khaldūn as the ideal form of political authority for several important reasons. It represents the ultimate example of the cohesive and complimentary relationship between *ʿaṣabīya* and religion in a state, and the positive effect that this relationship can have on political authority. The naturally occurring *ʿaṣabīya* of the Bedouin Arabs that existed before the appearance of Islam was to begin with of the strongest possible form, due to the fact that the pre-Islamic Arabs were not familiar with sedentary culture, but rather were nomadic and as a result their *ʿaṣabīya* had not been corrupted or subdued. With the arrival of Islam to the Arabian Peninsula, these early Arabs who already possessed a strong sentiment of natural solidarity due to the great strength of their *ʿaṣabīya* witnessed the beginnings of Islam first-hand and were in direct contact with the Prophet Muḥammad, and as a result their belief in Islam became firmly rooted in their hearts. Thus, the restraining influence that is necessary for any state to survive, for otherwise man will succumb to his natural tendencies towards disunity and inner-conflict, came from within the early Muslims themselves out of their desire to propagate their new found faith and live justly according to its principles. The incentive for this submission to the political authority of the *khulafā rāshidūn* was not the acquisition of worldly goods or mundane pleasures, but rather the ultimate spiritual reward in the world to come, the gift of everlasting paradise.

To Ibn Khaldūn, so perfect is the true *siyāsāt dīnīya* that it is able to rectify the issue of man's natural desire for mundane possessions and the conflict that this inherently has with Islam. The ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* was able to provide for its subjects worldly pleasures to the extent that the desire or gain of which did not have an averse effect on their religion. As the early Muslims continued to be successful in their conquests, which itself was a by-product of their *'aṣabīya* that had been enjoined with the true religion of Islam, they inevitably acquired booty but it did not weaken their *'aṣabīya* as would normally be the case. Moreover, according to Ibn Khaldūn, the *khulafā rāshidūn* were able to escape the natural cyclical theory of dynastic change for a short time, transcending the normal boundaries that are naturally imposed upon political authority. At the point where normally a state would being to decline, at the height of the third stage in his cyclical theory of dynastic change, Ibn Khaldūn believes that God himself intervened in the affairs of the *khulafā rāshidūn,* which enabled them to enjoy an extraordinary level of permanence that had never been present in any form of political authority until that point, and had not happened again at the time of Ibn Khaldūn's completion of *The Muqaddimah.* Indeed, we may assume that Ibn Khaldūn believes that the extraordinary political situation surrounding the *khulafā rāshidūn* will never happen again, for if Islam is the one true religion that is capable of producing the ideal *siyāsāt dīnīya,* and the *khulafā rāshidūn* is a product of the miraculous events that occurred at the beginning of Islam, history in this case will not repeat itself.[2] Thus, while Ibn Khaldūn believes that human history in general is cyclical and similar patterns occur during the duration of every state, the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* is not subject

---

[2] Saade, *El pensamiento religioso de Ibn Jaldūn,* 133.

to this; to Ibn Khaldūn it transcended the normal course of political affairs and thus, for a time, was unable to be classified in terms of his cyclical theory of dynastic change. The prevailing reason that he gives for why this happened the way that it did is of course the veracity of the religious sentiment present in the *khulafā rāshidūn*, before its inevitable decline began to set in.

In summation, we have demonstrated that Ibn Khaldūn's political theory may be classified as theocentric; that is that religion is at the core of his political theory and is one of the most important factors in the development and survival of the State in three ways: (1) in terms of the relationship between *'aṣabīya*, (which for Ibn Khaldūn was the natural basis for all types of political and social organization), and religion, in which it has been demonstrated that religion is the ideal force to eradicate *'aṣabīya's* naturally occurring deficiencies, (2) by way of examining his classification of the types of political authority, and demonstrating that he ultimately deemed the worth and value of a state in terms of the secondary force that its political authority adopts to eradicate *'aṣabīya's* natural deficiencies, in which religion was the ideal, (3) by way of analyzing his cyclical theory of dynastic change, in terms of its relationship to *'aṣabīya* and religion, and (4) by examining Ibn Khaldūn's historical interpretation of two cases of *'aṣabīya* and religion in action which are the failed conquests of the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym in the 11th century Maghrib, and the time period of the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn*. While these four points are sufficient in proving the theocentric nature of Ibn Khaldūm's political theory, there remains one issue which must be rectified.

While the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* was able to transcend the normal boundaries imposed on political authority for a short time, it did eventually fail and enter a period of decline. Both Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical theory of dynastic change and the fact that he himself admits that his ideal state eventually failed and succumbed to this cycle has led various scholars to classify his political theory and general outlook as pessimistic and fatalistic.[3] If Ibn Khaldūn's political theory and scholastic outlook in general are indeed theocentric, which implies a sense of hope and faith in God, then how does one account for his cyclical theory of dynastic change in which all achievement in the temporal world is short-lived and seemingly futile? Furthermore, how can one explain why he believes that the ideal *siyāsāt dīnīya* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* ultimately failed if its strong and true religious sentiment was the basis of its extraordinary success and its means to temporarily transcend the normal cycle of political authority? The answer to these questions is best expressed by Lenn Evan Goodman: "Only a cyclical theory of history offers the possibility of a theodicy of history without historicism, an opportunity to exonerate God and being at large from charges of injustice without acceptance of the odious and manifestly false doctrine that whatever is is right."[4] Thus, we may view Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical theory of dynastic change not as pessimistic, but rather as a means to exonerate God and demonstrate that he is indeed just, regardless of the failures and injustices of man in the temporal realm, specifically in connection with man's activities in the sphere of political authority. Following the work of Hayden V. White, we ultimately may classify Ibn Khaldūn's true scholastic outlook as one of

---

[3] Busch, 328.
[4] Goodman, 269.

dualism, specifically of speculative theorist and practicing Muslim.[5] While at first glance a reader of *The Muqaddimah* may be given the impression that the endless historical and political cyclical pattern implies a pessimistic attitude, this is false, primarily because Ibn Khaldūn refuses to concern himself with the ultimate origins and ends of this cyclical pattern.[6] While he does present the origins and ends of political authority due to the fact that they are almost exclusively the affairs of man, (in which God may or may not intervene depending on the circumstances), he does not explain his cyclical theory of dynastic change in terms of its purpose.

Rather, he explains this cyclical pattern in relation to what he has observed in the course of human history and in terms of the nature of *'aṣabīya* which is a naturally occurring force inherent in human relations. Ibn Khaldūn does not presume to know the origins and ends of the cycle because they are not in the realm of human knowledge; the cyclical pattern is the design of God alone and he does not dare to provide reasons for why it exists as it does. For Ibn Khaldūn, it is only necessary to say that matters such as this come from God and serve his purpose which has been made clear: "He guides them to the straight path."[7] While he does not provide the origins and ends of this cyclical pattern, one thing that he does establish for certain in *The Muqaddimah* is the existence of Hell and Paradise which are clearly defined in the Qur'ān, and it is the belief in the existence of Paradise in the world to come which provides the members of the ideal *siyāsāt dīnīya* with an incentive to perform good and just deeds in accordance with the tenants of the Islamic faith. While man may not know why the cycle exists as it does,

[5] Hayden V. White, "Divine Intervention in *The Muqaddimah*," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* II (1959 – 1960):328.
[6] Miya Syrier, "Ibn Khaldūn and Islamic Mysticism," *Islamic Culture* (July 1947):268.
[7] Busch, 328.

he may trust in the fact that ultimately his actions in this world will be judged by God; it is for this reason that a just and pure form of political authority such as the *siyāsāt dīnīya* can come into existence.

Thus the ultimate proof of the theocentric nature of Ibn Khaldūn's political theory and his general outlook is that if the cyclical process itself was the ultimate end a man aware of this would not be compelled to participate in human affairs, but rather only observe the process unfold as it does.[8] It is perhaps for this reason that Ibn Khaldūn himself engaged in the political affairs of the Islamic world at times, specifically when he assumed the role of *qādī* in Egypt and attempted to reform its legal system which was met with opposition. Though he must have known that he lacked the necessary *'aṣabīya* to achieve his reforms, he nevertheless attempted to do this in pursuit of the higher good of true religious adherence. Ibn Khaldūn believes that man's activities in this world, political or otherwise are not ultimately futile; although the mundane world is bound by the cycle, man's actions in this world determine what he will receive in the next and man's true hope lies in the world to come. Thus, the final reason for why Ibn Khaldūn's political theory may be classified as theocentric is that his cyclical theory of dynastic change is not pessimistic as some scholars have noted, but rather it is optimistic in the sense that only the mundane world is bound by this cycle, and in the world to come man will receive what he is entitled to, based on his actions in this world. To quote Briton Cooper Busch: "Pessimism may be the lot of man, but as Ibn Khaldūn might conclude, 'God governs all affairs.'"[9] While the ideal *khilāfa* of the *khulafā rāshidūn* did indeed fail and was affected by the cycle after it transcended it for

---

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 329.

a short time by the grace of God, Ibn Khaldūn still characterizes it as his ideal state

because it represents the most just form of political authority that man may produce due

to its true Islamic basis.

General Bibliography

Abdesselem, Ahmed. *Ibn Jaldūn y sus lectores.* Translated by Carlota Vallée Lazo. México City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987.

Alam, Manzoor. "Ibn Khaldūn on the Origin, Growth and Decay of Cities." *Medieval Muslim Historiography.* Edited by Muhammad Taher. New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1997.

al-Azmeh, Aziz. *Ibn Khaldūn in Modern Scholarship: a Study in Orientalism.* London : Third World Centre for Research and Publishing, 1981.

_____. *Ibn Khaldūn: An Essay in Reinterpretation.* London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1982.

Baali, Fuad and Wardi, Ali. *Ibn Khaldūn and Islamic Thought-Styles: A Social Perspective.* Boston: G.K. Hill, 1981.

Baali, Fuad. *Society, State, and Urbanism : Ibn Khaldūn's Sociological Thought.* Albany : State University of New York Press, 1988.

Black, Anthony. The *History of Islamic Political Thought.* New York: Routledge, 2001.

Brunschvig, R. *Etudes sur l'Islam classique et l'Afrique du Nord.* Edited by Abdel-Magid Turki. London: Variorum Reprints, 1986.

Bukhsh, Khuda. "Ibn Khaldūn and His History of Islamic Civilization." *Medieval Muslim Historiography.* Edited by Muhammad Taher. New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1997.

Busch, Briton Cooper. "Divine Intervention in the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldūn." *History of Religions* 7 (May 1968).

Calvert, John C.M. *Ibn Khaldūn and the Orientalist Historiography of the Maghrib.* McGill Institute of Islamic Studies, 1984.

Casewit, Stephen. "The Mystical Side of the Muqaddimah: Ibn Khaldūn's view of Ṣūfism." *Islamic Quarterly* 29 (June 1985).

Fakhry, Majid. "The Devolution of the Perfect State: Plato, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldūn." *Arab Civilization, Challenges and Responses.* Edited by George N. Atiyeh and Ibrahim M. Oweiss. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.

Gabrieli, Francesco. "Il concetto della 'aṣabiyya nel pensievo storico di Ibn Haldūn." *Atti, R. Academia delle Science di Torino* LXV (1930).

Gibb, H.A.R. "The Islamic Background of Ibn Khaldūn's Political Theory." Reprinted in: *Studies on the Civilization of Islam,* eds. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk. Princeton: University Press, 1982.

_____. "Some Considerations on the Sunni Theory of the Caliphate." Reprinted in: *Studies on the Civilization of Islam,* eds. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk. Princeton: University Press, 1982.

_____. "al-Māwardī's Theory of the Khilafah." Reprinted in: *Studies on the Civilization of Islam,* eds. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk. Princeton: University Press, 1982.

_____. "The Structure of Religious Thought in Islam." Reprinted in: *Studies on the Civilization of Islam,* eds. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk. Princeton: University Press, 1982.

_____. "An Interpretation of Islamic History." Reprinted in: *Studies on the Civilization of Islam,* eds. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk. Princeton: University Press, 1982.

Gibb, H.A.R., Kramers, J.H., Levi-Provencal, E., and Schacht, J. eds. *The Encyclopedia of Islam.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960. S.v. "'aṣabiyya" by F. Gabrieli.

_____ eds. *The Encyclopedia of Islam.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960. S.v. "'Ibn Khaldūn" by A. Ben Abdesselem.

_____ eds. *The Encyclopedia of Islam.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960. S.v. "al-Māwardī" by C. Brockelmann.

_____ eds. *The Encyclopedia of Islam.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960. S.v. "al-Turṭūshī" by A. Ben Abdesselem.

_____ eds. *The Encyclopedia of Islam.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960. S.v. *"Banū Hilāl"* by H.R. Idris.

_____ eds. *The Encyclopedia of Islam.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960. S.v. "Ibn Taymiyyah" by Laoust.

Goodman, Lenn Evan. "Ibn Khaldūn and Thucydides." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92 (June 1972).

Hernández, Miguel Cruz. *Historia del pensamiento en el mundo islámico* vol. 3. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1996.

Hodgson, Marshall. *The Venture of Islam* vol. 1. Chicago: University Press, 1974.

Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History.* Translated by Franz Rosenthal. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.

Inayatullah, Sohail. "The Strengthening and Weakening of '*aṣabīya*." *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians, Perspectives on Individual, Social and Civilizational Change.* Edited by Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah. London: Praeger Press, 1997.

Irwin, Robert. "Toynbee and Ibn Khaldūn." *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 33, No. 3, July 1997.

Issawi, Charles. *An Arab Philosophy of History: Selections from the Prolegomena of Ibn Khaldūn of Tunis.* London: Wisdom of the East Series, 1950.

Julien, C.A. *History of North Africa. From the Arab Conquest to 1830.* Translated by J. Petrie, C. Stewart. London: University Press, 1970.

Katsiaficas, George. "Ibn Khaldūn: A Dialectical Philosopher for the New Millennium." *Explorations in African Political Thought.* Edited by Teodros Kiros. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Khalidi, Tarif. *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period.* Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Lacoste, Yves. *Ibn Khaldūn: The Birth of History and the Past of the Third World.* London: Verso Editions, 1984.

Lambton, Ann K. *State and Government in Medieval Islam: an Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

MacDonald, D.B. *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory.* Lahore: University Press, 1960.

Mahdi, Muhsin. *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.

Māwardī, 'Alī b. Muḥammad. *Aḥkam al-sulṭānīyah wa-al-wilāyāt al-dīnīyah.* Translated (english) by Asadullah Yate. London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996.

Mojuetan, B.A. "Ibn Khaldūn and his Cycle of Fatalism: a Critique." *Studia Islamica* 53 (1982).

Nafis, Muḥammad. *The Concept of Imamate in the Works of al-Māwardī.* McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 1993.

Nassar, Nassif. "El pensamiento realista de Ibn Jaldūn". Translated by Solon Zabre. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1980.

Rabī', Muḥammad Maḥmūd. *The Political Theory of Ibn Khaldūn.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967.

Rosenthal, Erwin I.J. "Ibn Khaldūn: A North African Muslim Thinker of the Fourteenth Century." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* XXIV, No. 2 (1940).

_____. "Some Aspects of Islamic Political Thought." *Islamic Culture* XXII, No. 1 (January 1948).

_____. "Ibn Jaldūn's Attitude to the Falāsifa." *Al-Andalus* 20 (October 1955).

_____. *Political Thought in Medieval Islam.* London: Cambridge University Press, 1958.

_____. *Islam in the Modern National State.* Cambridge: University Press, 1965.

_____. "Politics in Islam." *The Muslim World* LVIII, No. 1 (January 1967).

_____. "The Role of the State in Islam: Theory and Medieval Practice." *Der Islam* 50 (1973).

_____. "Ibn Khaldūn as a Political Thinker." *Maghreb Review* 4 (1979).

Saade, Ignacio. "La Religión como factor de civilización en los prolegómenos de Ibn Jaldūn." *Al-Andalus* 31 (May 1966).

_____. *El pensamiento religioso de Ibn Jaldūn.* Madrid: Instituto de Filosofia Luis Vives, 1973.

Schmidt, Nathaniel. Ibn *Khaldūn: Historian, Sociologist and Philosopher.* New York, 1930.

Sharīf, M.M., ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy* 2 vols. Wiesbaden, 1966.

Shaykh, Sayid M. "Ibn Khaldūn." *Iqbal* 9 (July 1960).

Shirvani, Harun Khan. *Studies in Muslim Political Thought and Administration.* Hyderabad: Government Central Press, 1942.

Stowasser, Barbara. "Religion and Political Development: Some Comparative Ideas on Ibn Khaldūn and Machiavelli." Occasional Paper Series, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1983.

Syrier, Miya. "Ibn Khaldūn and Islamic Mysticism." *Islamic Culture* 21 (December 1947).

Toynbee, Arnold. *A Study of History.* Vols. I, III, IX, X. London: Oxford University Press, 1954.

al-Turṭūshī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Walīd. *Lámpara de los príncipes [Sirāj al-mulūk. Spanish].* Translated by Maximiliano Alarcón. Madrid: Instituto de Valencia de D. Juan, 1930.

Walzer, Richard. "Aspects of Islamic Political Thought: al-Fārābī and Ibn Khaldūn." *Oriens* 16 (1963).

Watt, William M. *Islamic Political Thought, The Basic Concepts.* Edinburgh: University Press, 1968.

White, Hayden W. "Ibn Khaldūn in World Philosophy of History." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* II (1959 – 1960).

The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān. Translated and Edited by 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī. Beltsville: Amana Publications, 1997.