

Ibn-Khaldun as a Modern Thinker

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The soul of the vanquished considers the victor perfect, either because it is impressed by the respect it has for him, or because it erroneously assumes that its own subservience to him is not due to the nature of defeat but to the perfection of the victor (Ibn-Khaldun 1377 A.D.)

—Source: Ibn-Khaldun 1967: p.116.

Abstract

Ibn-Khaldun, a 14th century Afro-Muslim thinker and philosopher, wrote extensively on matters pertaining to what is called today modernity. And yet, with few notable exceptions, the mainstream discourse on modernity has generally disregarded Ibn-Khaldun's ideas altogether. When Ibn-Khaldun's ideas do come to attention, they are often dismissed, implicitly or explicitly, as pre-modern. I take issue with this view, and the assumption on which it is based. I try to dissect and examine the predominant master-narratives on modernity and point to what appear to be internal contradictions and inconsistencies within them. After making the case that Ibn-Khaldun can be regarded as a modern thinker, I suggest that 'modern' thinkers, great as they are in their own rights, should even feel indebted to Ibn-Khaldun since he had anticipated or suggested many of the major issues which were later to preoccupy them. I also endeavors to lay bare some of the overlap between the ideas of Ibn-Khaldun and those of select 'modern' thinkers, but without purporting to conclusively establish whether the overlap itself is coincidental or not. A sample of such ideas from Ibn-Khaldun is then applied to select issues facing humanity in the 21st century.

1. Introduction

Robert W. Cox, the noted critical observer and analyst of International Relations, is one of the few Westerners who have been inspired to write about Ibn-Khaldun. In a work published several years ago, Cox (1992) singles out at least four reasons why the ideas of Ibn-Khaldun should be of any interest to us today. He makes a compelling case, but it is also challenging. Through Ibn-Khaldun, Cox pointed out, we can comprehend Islamic civilization which occupies one of the central places in contemporary political and academic discourses about future world order (or disorder). Secondly, there are broad similarities between Ibn-Khaldun's time and our own. He lived in a twilight world of transition between the rise and fall of dynasties which he sought to understand, or as Pasha (1997: 57) put it, "Ibn Khakldun confronted a shifting ontological terrain similar to our own, when his fourteenth-century world was being overturned." Lessons can thus be extracted from his ideas on alternative conceptualization of historical change in our time. Thirdly, Ibn-Khaldun's philosophy of history is post-hegemonic in the sense that he sought to systematically deconstruct the prevailing

views. In the words of Katsiaficas (1997: 8), “[i]n the middle of the fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldun rejected all previous attempts to reconcile the natural order of worldly events and the divine character of the cosmos.” And such a post-hegemonic approach is also called for for our own turbulent time.

Needless to say, Ibn-Khaldun’s view of world order was historically conditioned (even as he clearly sought to transcend his time) just as our own perception of contemporary world system is contingent upon the historical/cultural space and time we occupy in it. And here is where, according to Cox, the fourth benefit of studying Ibn-Khaldun lies. One way of understanding the relationship between historical contingency and discursive practice is to examine the thoughts of someone who had gone through a similar experience. We can understand more about ourselves by studying the thought process of a philosopher-historian who had grappled with a similar issue, albeit in a different historical and cultural setting.

Robert Cox’s articulation of the relevancy of Ibn-Khaldun to our times, mentioned above, should not nevertheless delude us by any means into believing such a view is widely shared in the West. This is simply not the case. Consider, for example, a recent first-hand observation of one educator in the United States: “When I talk of Ibn-Khaldun, people usually ask: Who is he? Another ‘terrorist’? Any links to Usama bin Laden? Or is he an oil shaykh or an Arab minister?” The educator added: “Even the scholars who have heard of Ibn-Khaldun may well ask: How is Ibn-Khaldun, the Arab in question, relevant to our problems in the 21st century?” (Akbar 2002: 9) It is no exaggeration, in short, to say that Ibn-Khaldun and his works are unknown in the West beyond the narrow circle of a few area studies specialists.

Some claim that contemporary discourse on modernity transposes European history onto the world and that, in so doing, erases the contribution of non-Europeans. This is a defensible claim. But one cannot also ignore the fact that Ibn-Khaldun’s omission from the discourse on modernity has in part to do with the complexity of his work and/or the unfamiliarity of the West with the linguistic and cultural medium through which his work was made available. Nathaniel Schmidt (1967: 16) had thus hypothesized that Ibn-Khaldun’s philosophy of history would have been recognized as epoch-making, had not “the civilization he described been unknown to the young nations destined to carry out the work...” Was Ibn-Khaldun also a victim of willful amnesia? If one uses a wider framework and more inclusive trans-cultural approach to historical thought probably the same can be said about more philosophers in other parts of the non-Western areas of the world.

Of the challenging issues outlined by Cox, this essay touches upon some, at times only obliquely, and explains the general relevancy of Ibn-Khaldun today by drawing attention to the broad hypotheses advanced by this Afro-Muslim thinker and demonstrating the modernity of his ideas—despite the remoteness of his time from what is generally known as the beginning of modernity. More specifically, the approach used in this paper to accomplish the tasks set forth above is to show the parallels between Ibn-Khaldun’s philosophical and historical analyses on the one hand, and ‘modern’ political theory on the other. In part two a brief account is given of Ibn-Khaldun’s life and time. Part three attempts to situate Ibn-Khaldun’s philosophy in the mainstream paradigm of

thought about modernity. Part four is a descriptive and comparative review of the reflections of the ideas of Ibn-Khaldun in the works of select 'modern' political theorists. In the fifth and sixth parts, methodological and substantive features of the ideas of Ibn-Khaldun are juxtaposed against our understanding of some contemporary issues. A brief concluding remark would then follow in the last section.

2. Ibn-Khaldun: His Life and Times

Ibn-Khaldun was born in Tunis on May 27, 1332 from a learned and prominent family who had migrated from al-Andalus, a region in Southern Spain. Islamic conquerors from North Africa and Arabia, the Moors, had conquered Spain in the year 711 and made the region their home for eight centuries. It was in fact the Islamic conquerors who first called the region al-Andalus, after the name of European barbarian tribes, the Vandals, who presumably had in earlier centuries raided deep into North Africa. In the 15th century Christians re-established their control over al-Andalus, or Andalusia, as it was later renamed. The region still retains its historic name, Andalucia.

There are conflicting accounts about the ancestral home of Ibn-Khaldun. His autobiography was not also of much help in settling the issue. Some contemporary writers claimed that Ibn-Khaldun descended from the oldest Arab Yemenite tribes, while Ibn-Khaldun's own writing indicates that he was genealogically linked to the Berbers of North Africa (Enan 1975: 3-4). Ibn-Khaldun lost his parents (as well as all of his professors) when he was 18 as a result of the Great Plague of 1349 and began his public life at a time when North Africa was unstable, when new principalities were emerging and old ones decaying, and when conquest and counter-conquest, and the rise and fall of dynasties and kingdoms were commonplace.

Ibn-Khaldun was not an ivory-tower theorist. He had been in contact with the reality on the ground, playing active role in public service in many places and positions of high honor, even taking part in combats accompanying kings and other men of prominence. As Arnold Toynbee (1934: 324) put it, rather than "sitting down to put [his] burgeoning thoughts into order," it appeared for Ibn-Khaldun "a more pressing task was putting some rudiments of order into the struggling, chaotic social life of contemporary Ifriqiyah." Ibn-Khaldun's insights were sharpened thus from practical experience as much as from the fertility of his imaginative mind. That his historical works were in part based on personal, direct observation makes him somewhat akin to the ancient Greek thinker, Thucydides, who chronicled the Peloponnesian war. As is well known, the latter's account of the war became the bible of the realist theory of international relations.

Ibn-Khaldun began to write his historical work in 1374 after his return to North Africa following many years of political adventure in Al Andalus. He completed the work in 1377, left Tunis in 1382 and sailed eastwards. At the age of 52 he arrived in Cairo, where he settled and later died in 1406 at the age 74.

3. Ibn-Khaldun and the Idea of Modernity

As an attempt to situate Ibn-Khaldun's ideas in the terrain of 'modern' political theory, the analysis in this paper is interpretive in nature. But the interpretation presented here is, of course, just that—one man's interpretation, and can therefore be contested. For this reason, I think it is necessary to let the informed reader be part of the interpretive process and judge the persuasiveness of my interpretation, since multiple and competing interpretations of a text can co-exist and it is the juxtaposition of these interpretations in a dialectical manner which pushes the frontiers of knowledge in the fields of interpretive human sciences. I depart from the not so uncommon practice of imputing a meaning to a text without presenting to the reader what the author under discussion has actually said, as reflected in the rather generous quotation taken from the English translation of Ibn-Khaldun's abridged original work, *al Muqaddimah*. (To reduce repetitiveness only page number of Ibn-Khaldun's work, *al Muqaddimah*, is supplied in bracket whenever direct or indirect quotation is used.)

While the content of modernity is often contested, the timing of modernity rarely is. There is a general consensus that it began in or after the 17th century. Within this broad framework, the exact point in time varies depending on what is taken to constitute the phenomenon of modernity, or at least most essential elements thereof. A few such variations can be identified. To the politically-oriented, the birth of nation-state in 1648 marked the point of departure. To the scientifically-oriented, it is the Newtonian revolution in the 1680s which heralded the beginning of modernity. Furthermore, there are those who link the commencement of modernity to the French Revolution in the 18th century or the Industrial Revolution between the 17th and 19th centuries. I focus in this essay on the first two chronological marks of modernity's initiation by organizing the discussion primarily around a cursory reading of the ideas of some of the most well-know European political theorists of the 'post-enlightenment' period, beginning with those with whom the birth of the scientific method is usually associated.

But, first, let us confront one recurring question in the interpretation of Ibn-Khaldun: Was Ibn-Khaldun a religious or secular thinker? In general, Ibn-Khaldun writes as a religious thinker, but, as I argue below, his ideas are nonetheless scientific. True, there are times when Ibn-Khaldun uses the term science in the broadest sense, even referring to Qur'anic interpretations as a science (pp. 343-344). In spite of this fact, it is still possible to interpret Ibn-Khaldun's historical approach as scientific. That Ibn-Khaldun is a devout Muslim is readily clear from his writings, but he was no more religious or no less secular than many of the 18th and 19th century European philosophers. What sets Ibn-Khaldun apart from his 'modern' European counterparts is that he was a follower of Islam and not of Christianity. But whatever the extent of the devotion of Ibn-Khaldun to his faith, his systematic analysis and philosophy are well-reasoned, coherent and therefore scientific. When science comes into conflict with 'Islam', Ibn-Khaldun does indeed suggest at places that the former be discarded. This is what he had to say, for instance, on the science of logic: "As far as we know, this science has only a single advantage, namely, it sharpens the mind in the orderly presentation of

proofs and arguments, so that the habit of excellent and correct arguing is obtained.” He then added, “[T]he student should beware of its pernicious aspects as much as he can” (p. 405).

On the other hand, at places Ibn-Khaldun does not hesitate to subtly challenge the teaching of Islam itself. In the *Muqaddimah* there is substantial discussion of not only how ‘royal authority’ emerges, but also, and more crucially, about why it is necessary and desirable, given the nature of human beings (see for e. g., p. 256). Even as he rationalizes ‘royal authority’ in these terms, he also mentions in passing that “Muhammad censured royal authority and its representatives” (p. 160). In an apparent response to those who customarily associate the healing power of different medicines with the alleged fact that the Prophet had said so, Ibn-Khaldun (p. 387) reminded them: “Muhammad was sent to teach us the religious law. He was not sent to teach us medicine...” The fact that Ibn-Khaldun was not a dogmatic believer in his faith also becomes clear from his discussion of the role of what he called religious propaganda in the process of consolidating the power of the ruling dynasty (p. 126). Despite its religious overtones in many places, Ibn-Khaldun’s work is in the final analysis more a work of science than of theology. Nathaniel Schmidt (1967: 24) also observed:

[in *Muqaddimah*], there is no hint of a divine purpose gradually unfolding in the course of history. The facts are observed, correlated, and explained without any effort to fit them into a theistic interpretation, to justify the ways of God to man.

Ibn-Khaldun elaborates in parts of Chapter six of his *Muqaddimah* what may be called the components of the scientific process and its various stages, though his discussion is framed within the subject of ‘literary composition’. The language he used as well as the ideas articulated, such as empirical observation, the cumulative nature of the growth of scientific knowledge, its provisionalism and the need for its transmissibility (pp. 411-414) all read like a modern textbook of social science research methods.

The great British philosopher, Bertrand Russell (2001: 9) had an occasion to assert that “scientific method, as we understand it, comes into the world full-fledged with Galileo” (1564-1642). Science as an important force, if what is meant by important force is its material contribution to society, may well be less than four hundred years old, as Russell claimed. But as an incipient idea and method, it can be traced back at least seven hundred years or so to the works of Ibn-Khaldun. Although scientific method pervades Ibn-Khaldun’s work, his attempt to reconcile it with what he called ‘religious sciences’ could indeed complicate the task of reading his text. Galileo’s science was in direct contrast to the religious teachings of his time-for which he paid in his life. The marked difference between Ibn-Khaldun and Galileo in regard to their respective religious orientation (or disorientation) is thus obvious. But the difference seems largely inconsequential to their intellectual ambitions and accomplishments.

Ibn-Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah* could be considered as a pioneering work of science, specially of the epistemology of science of history, yet for another reason which Nathaniel Schmidt (1967: 20) relates as follows:

Because [Ibn-Khaldun] is confident that there is an intelligible sequence, a causal connection, an ascertainable order of development, a course of human events following observable tendencies, in accordance with definite law, he also believes that in proportion as history becomes what in its nature it is, it will be able to predict the future.

Few great thinkers and scholars had described Ibn-Khaldun's scientific works in similar terms. In one often-quoted passage on Ibn-Khaldun, Arnold Toynbee (1934: 322) had noted: "...Ibn-Khaldun has conceived and formulated a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in any time or place." Another great historian, Philip Hitti (1953: 568) observed:

As one who endeavored to formulate laws of national progress and decay, Ibn-Khaldun may be considered the discoverer—as he himself claimed—of the true scope and nature of history or at least the real founder of the science of sociology. No Arab writer, indeed no European, had ever taken a view of history at once so comprehensive and philosophic.

When one takes into account the specific historical feature of Ibn-Khaldun's own time, the greatness of his scientific contribution becomes even more apparent. After pointing out the comparability of Ibn-Khaldun's work with those of Thucydides and Machiavelli in this vein, Toynbee (1934: 321) noted:

Ibn-Khaldun's star shines the more brightly by contrast with foil of darkness against which it flashes out; for while Thucydides and Machiavelli and Clarendon are all brilliant representatives of brilliant times and places, Ibn-Khaldun is the sole point of light in his quarter of the firmament.

After a long catalogue of the seminal contributions to human knowledge by Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Tacitus, Hipparchus, Galen, Paul, Eusebius, Augustine and Dante, Nathaniel Schmidt (1967: 17-19) likewise concluded:

If it is proper thus to extend the scope of history, and if history is a science, the great Tunisian who laid down and defended these propositions seems, in this respect, to have had no predecessor, and it may well be claimed that he was the discoverer. Herein lies, no doubt, his most original contribution, though his keen mind broke new paths in many directions.

With few exceptions such as the above, however, the master-narratives about modernity barely mention Ibn-Khaldun as having anything to do with the conception of history as a science. In fact as recently as a few years ago, Peter Burke (2002: 23) would remark that:

The relation between Western historiography and Western science, [especially from the time of Descartes onwards] has been both a close and a difficult one. Some historians have tried to imitate natural scientists and apply mathematics to the past. Thus in the seventeenth century, John Craig imitated Newton by producing a list of historical principles and axioms. The Cambridge historian J. B. Bury once declared that 'history is a science, no less and no more.' Other historians from Vico to Collingwood have defined themselves by contrast to the 'scientists.' In both cases, the debate with Western science has given Western historiography a distinctive stamp.

On the other hand, Hegel was perhaps one of the first great European philosophers to acknowledge the contribution of non-Westerners to the so called 'modern' ideas. Hegel observed:

Philosophy, like the arts and sciences, when through the rule of the Barbarians of Germany, they became dumb and lifeless, took refuge with the Arabians, and there attained a wonderful development; they were the first source from which the West obtained assistance (Quoted in Katsiaficas 1996: 6).

In the above passage, Hegel does not of course mention specific individual contributors, but there is no doubt that Ibn-Khaldun belongs to the group Hegel referred to as 'the Arabians'. What I am suggesting here is that at least a passing mention of Ibn-Khaldun would be only appropriate in any discussion of the history of science or scientific method, or even of philosophy, in addition to the science of history. But this is not generally the case. Here is one example of the standard account of the history of science:

Three men stand out as facilitators of the scientific revolution: Francis Bacon, Galileo Galieli and Rene Descartes. All three wrote their most influential works around the time of the Thirty Years War; all shared the doubts of the age; all asked how it is possible for man to gain, reliable truthful and usable knowledge; all rejected the method advocated by the academic tradition of the universities founded in the Middle Ages. All of them provided alternative methods of knowledge acquisition (Knutsen 1992: 95).

But the fact is that, in his own way and for his own time, Ibn-Khaldun had accomplished all of these formidable tasks, and much more. On this score, Nathaniel Schmidt (1967: 14) again represents the voice of a tiny minority in the West, but it is a clear and penetrating voice indeed:

It would not have been unfair altogether to compare [ibn-Khaldun] as a universal historian with a Didorus of Sicily, Nicolaus of Damascus, or Trogius Pomeius about the beginning of our era, or authors like J. C. Gatterer and A. L. Schlozer in the eighteenth century, though there can be little question that he was their superior both in the use of older sources and in original

contributions.

What should be borne in mind is that major Western texts on the subject thus attribute the beginning of modern ideas, be that of philosophy, history, or sociology, to one or another European post-enlightenment thinker (see for e.g., Randall 1962). To be sure, modern ideas were produced and reproduced after Europe's enlightenment in greater quality and quantity which had never been seen before, but it cannot also be denied that these ideas were in many ways the result of a cumulative human effort spanning over many centuries. It would have been more appropriate, therefore, to acknowledge also that some of the enlightenment ideas have historical precedents and links to extra-European past, even if such links might be coincidental rather than intentional. For instance, Katsiaficas (1996: 2) points out:

Five centuries before Darwin discovered the specific features of evolution, Ibn-Khaldun wrote that humans developed from 'the world of the monkeys' through a widening process in which 'species become more numerous.' Nearly half a millennium before Karl Marx sketched the systematic implication of the labor theory of value, Ibn-Khaldun wrote that 'labor is the real basis of profit.' Four hundred years before August Comte's invention of sociology, Ibn-Khaldun unveiled his 'science of culture'.

Even when the intellectual contributions of individuals from the non-Western world are recognized, the mainstream discourse seems to be willing to give sometimes only over-qualified and conditional credit to the contributors. Bertrand Russell, for example, was aware that the 'pre-modern' world had generally contributed to modern science, but he was quick to find faults with its methodology:

The Arabs were more experimental than the Greeks, specially in chemistry... Throughout the Dark Ages it was mainly by the Arabs that the tradition of civilization was carried on, and it was largely from them that Christians such as Roger Bacon acquired whatever scientific knowledge the latter Middle Ages possessed. The Arabs, however, had a defect which was the opposite of the Greeks: they sought detached facts rather than general principles (2001: 8).

If the Arabs profoundly distrusted deductivism, as Russell claimed, then so did Europe's post-enlightenment thinkers. International Relations scholar T. Knutsen (1992: 94) notes: "Bacon, Galileo and Descartes argued that deductive method was incapable of producing new knowledge... Truth is not something one can postulate at the beginning of an exploration, they argued. It is something one discovers after a process of investigation." As indicated above, Ibn-Khaldun himself had philosophically elaborated what he called the experimental knowledge and how it could be acquired, a positivist methodology which has a striking resemblance to what is called inductive method or scientific method (see specially Chapter six of Muqaddimah). It may be noted that this methodology

flourished in the 18th and 19th century Europe. Throughout Chapter six, Ibn-Khaldun attempts to weave together the inductive method of science, or the experimental intellect as he called it (p. 334), and the deductive method, the latter being the natural outcome of his belief in the oneness of God. With the above as a general background, in the following section we look more closely into what appears to be residues of Ibn-Khaldun's ideas in aspects of the philosophies of specific individuals in post-enlightenment Europe.

4. Ibn-Khaldun and Post-Enlightenment Thinkers

One relevant theme in the early post-enlightenment discourse pertained to the intellectually-focused attention which had been paid to human understanding and related philosophical issues. Ibn-Khaldun's emphasis on man's/woman's ability to think as one of the characteristics distinguishing him/her from other creatures (p. 333) and his detailed discussion of the subject, also elaborated in detail in Chapter six of the *Muqaddimah*, is a theme echoed by many noted Western philosophers at least since Rene Descartes (1596-1650). The 17th century French philosopher Descartes is remembered, among other things, for his cryptic remark that "I think, therefore I am" (Descartes 1637/ 1956: 21). It would not be a gross distortion to say that what Descartes said sounds like a concise paraphrase of what Ibn-Khaldun (p. 335) had said about 400 years earlier, that "The ability to think is the quality of man by which human beings are distinguished from other living beings."

John Locke, a 17th century English thinker, who also wrote extensively on human understanding, explained the process involved in ways very similar to Ibn-Khaldun. The way Ibn-Khaldun saw it: "By thinking about ... things, man achieves perfection in his reality and becomes pure intellect and perceptive soul. This is the meaning of human reality" (p. 334). Putting it slightly differently, he also argued in the language of empiricists as follows:

Man is distinguished from the animals by his ability to perceive universals, which are things abstracted from the *sensibilia*. Man is enabled to do this by virtue of the fact that his imagination obtains, from individual objects perceived by the senses and which agree with each other, a picture conforming to all these individual objects (p. 382).

Ibn-Khaldun (p. 334) divided human intellect into three types: discerning intellect, experimental intellect and speculative intellect, respectively giving us, he pointed out, sensory knowledge, experimental knowledge (which resembles the type of knowledge acquired through the inductive method) and speculative or philosophical knowledge, "which provides the knowledge, of an object beyond sense perception, without any practical activity (going with it)." The latter can be perhaps related to what John Locke (1997: 120-122) had called *reflection*, a form of knowledge acquired through the inner senses. In general, based on the foregoing argument and on further points to be made later in the paper, this author shares Schmidt's (1967: 24) conclusion: "If there is a positive philosophy, based on the ascertainable facts of science, Ibn-Khaldun is, in spite of his Muslim

orthodoxy, a philosopher as much as August Comte, Thomas Buckle, or Herbert Spencer.” Ibn-Khaldun might, of course, not have been the first to be fascinated with human understanding and philosophy, but he was undoubtedly one of the first to systematically elaborate the concept with a great degree of abstraction. Let us further inspect some indications of a clear overlap, or at least relationship, between the ideas of Ibn-Khaldun and Europe’s modern political thinkers randomly selected by this author.

Those who philosophize about society often start from an implicit or explicit assumption about human nature. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), as one of the central intellectual figures in modern political philosophy, was no exception in this regard. He saw men as requiring an external restraint, for “getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent to the natural passions of men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe, and tye them by feare of punishment to the performance of their Covenants...”(1909: 128). Without external restraint, Ibn-Khaldun’s man, too, is brutish like the Hobbesian man in the state of nature. Similarly, Ibn-Khaldun, like Hobbes, insisted that for this reason a political organization becomes necessary. In Ibn-Khaldun’s (p. 47) formulation: “...people need someone to exercise a restraining influence and keep them apart, for aggressiveness and injustice are in the animal nature of man.”

For Hobbes, the means for overcoming the aforementioned problem lay in the establishment of a ‘leviathan’. The equivalent institution for Ibn-Khaldun is a ‘royal authority,’ which is “needed for the defense of the aggressiveness of human beings toward each other...The person who exercises a restraining influence, therefore, must be one of themselves. He must dominate them and have power and authority over them, so that no one of them will be able to attack another. This is the meaning of royal authority” (p. 152). Like Hobbes’s leviathan, Ibn-Khaldun’s royal authority has at its center, therefore, a person who is absolutely powerful, “a forceful ruler, one who exercises authority” (p. 152). Yet the ruler is also required to be even-handed and enlightened: “The [good] qualities of leadership, which (persons qualified for royal authority) have obtained and which have made them deserving of being the leaders of the people under their control, or to be leaders in general” (p. 113).

The Bedouin society, which is devoid of royal authority, represented for Ibn-Khaldun the real-world equivalent of ‘the state of nature’. He wrote: “Under the rule of Bedouins, their subjects live as in a state of anarchy, without law... Furthermore, every Bedouin is eager to be the leader” (p. 119). Even if the Bedouin society was Ibn-Khaldun’s ‘state of nature’, however, it was so only in a figurative sense. In this respect, Ibn-Khaldun and Hobbes part company in two important ways. In the first place the society which Ibn-Khaldun philosophized about is not a hypothetical one. Ibn-Khaldun does not also fully share the Hobbesian conception of human nature and society. Hobbes saw only the animal instinct in human nature. In contrast, for Ibn-Khaldun, human nature is neither good nor bad for, “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 and when religion is not used as the model to improve him” (p. 97). Ibn-Khaldun goes on writing: “In view of his natural disposition and his power of logical reasoning, man is more inclined toward good qualities than toward bad qualities...” (p. 111).

I can perhaps interject here that as recently as a decade ago the distinguished American

statesman and thinker, George F. Kennan, described human nature in a language strikingly similar to Ibn-Khaldun's. Kennan (1993: 17-18) wrote:

[Man's] nature is the scene of a never-ending and never quite resolvable conflict between two very profound impulses. One of these... is something he shares with the animals... The other is the need—a need underlying the entire historical development of civilization—to redeem human life, at least partially, of its essentially animalistic origins...

Employing a broader perspective, Ibn-Khaldun also offers his own theory of state formation. He relates as follows how 'the royal authority', an institution which approximates contemporary state, came into being:

...group feeling gives protection and makes possible mutual defence, the pressing of claims, and every other kind of social activity. By dint of their nature, human beings need some one to act as a restraining influence and mediator in every social organization, in order to keep its members (from) fighting with each other... The royal authority means superiority and the power to rule by force (pp. 107-108).

One of the defining features of the state, according to Ibn-Khaldun, is therefore its power to enforce its rules. This may be understood as representing Ibn-Khaldunian version of the Weberian notion of the monopoly of the legitimate use of force. The royal element in Ibn-Khaldun's theory injects the idea of the divine right of kings which was also to become a common theme in the 17th and 18th centuries among the post-enlightenment European philosophers who had come forward in defense of the idea of absolute state. David Hume, the 18th century Scottish philosopher, shared Hobbes's idea which is also consistent with Ibn-Khaldun's view on the necessity of social and political organization. Hume (1998: 28-29; 274-291) wrote in this regard:

The same creature [that is, man], in his further progress, is engaged to establish political society, in order to administer justice, without which there can be no peace among them, nor safety, nor mutual intercourse....Men must, therefore, endeavor to palate what they cannot cure.

But Ibn-Khaldun's theory of state does not stop there. In a passage which reads very much like a discussion of the birth of modern, territorial state, Ibn-Khaldun makes it clear that:

Each dynasty has a certain amount of provinces and lands...The reason for this is that the group to which a given dynasty belongs and the people who support and establish it, must of necessity be distributed over the provinces and border regions which they reach and make into possession. Only thus is it possible to protect them against enemies and to enforce the laws of the dynasty relative to the collection of taxes, restrictions, and other things (p. 128).

What Ibn-Khaldun seemed to be suggesting in the above passage is that the state has to have what the 17th century German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was to clarify in his conceptualization of major constituent elements of sovereignty of state: territorial viability, majestic ruler and internal and external sovereignty (see Knutsen, 1992, Chapter 4). With its group feeling, its territory and its basic functions, Ibn-Khaldun's dynasty thus parallels the modern nation-state. Perhaps appropriately, one scholar has identified the two 'modern' paradigms of thought about state formation as being conflict theory and integration theory, attributing the origin of the former to Ibn-Khaldun (see Tainter 1988: 33). But still the master-narrative on modernity teaches that it was after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 that the idea as well as the institution of modern, territorial state came into being.

In a related way, Ibn-Khaldun also describes the formation of state, or royal authority, in contractual terms in a manner anticipatory of the 18th and 19th century theories of social contract (popularized by great European philosophers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau) for whom a body politic is created by the 'general will'. Ibn-Khaldun pointed out:

It should be known that the baya'ah (oath of allegiance) is a contract to render obedience. It is as though the person who renders the oath of allegiance made a contract with his emir, to the effect that he surrenders his supervision of his own affairs and those of the Muslims to him and that he will not contest his authority and that he will obey him by (executing) all the duties with which he might be charged, whether agreeable or disagreeable....A person must know [the baya'ah], because it imposes upon him certain duties towards his ruler and imam. His actions will thus not be frivolous or gratuitous (pp. 166-167).

Another prominent name in the history of 'modern' ideas is Karl Marx (1818-1883) whose idea of history is comparable to that of Ibn-Khaldun. Ibn-Khaldun (p. 29) defines history in its most basic sense, as: "events that are peculiar to a particular age or race. Discussions of the general conditions of regions, races, and periods constitute the historian's foundation." This is, incidentally, also not unlike E. H. Carr's (1990:55) definition that history is "both the inquiry conducted by the historian and the facts of the past into which he inquires." Ibn-Khaldun's view of history is non-linear, that is to say that he does not believe social change proceeds in a progressive manner towards a pre-destined end. This is where Ibn-Khaldun's historical analysis departs from that of Karl Marx; for the latter society moves from a lower to higher stages of development until it reaches the ultimate classless society. Ibn-Khaldun saw society as embarking upon an endless and hence cyclical process of rise and fall, of progress and retrogression. He even asserted: "...the lifespan of a dynasty corresponds to the life span of an individual; it grows up and passes into an age of stagnation and thence into retrogression" (p. 136).

It may be useful to note here that the Ibn-Khaldunian understanding of historical dialectics seems to have been borrowed by the great English historian, Arnold Toynbee, who further develops it and adapts to his study of various civilizations. Toynbee, like Ibn-Khaldun, saw history as cyclical

in a dialectical way, and classified the historical stages of a civilization, again like Ibn-Khaldun, into three:

In a growing civilization a challenge meets with a successful response which proceeds to generate another and a different challenge which meets with another successful response. There is no endgame to this process of growth unless and until challenge arises which the civilization in question fails to meet—a tragic event which means a cessation of growth...a breakdown” (Gardiner 1959: 202).

Moreover some scholars (such as Tainter 1988: 65) have noted a general similarity between the theory of history formulated by Ibn-Khaldun in the 14th century and Vico in the early 18th century. Despite the aforementioned issue on which Karl Max and Ibn-Khaldun were at variance, other areas also exist in which Karl Marx seemed to be echoing Ibn-Khaldun. Explaining the reason why customs sometimes change when dynasties and institutions change, Ibn-Khaldun (p. 25) said that this was so because “the customs of each race [or dynasty] depended on the customs of its ruler” (p. 25). This thesis corresponds to the Marxian thesis that the ideas of the dominant class become the economically dominant ideas of that particular epoch. Ibn-Khaldun reiterates a similar notion elsewhere in his *Muqaddimah*:

...in this way [a dialectical process] goes on until the power of that particular group feeling equals the power of the ruling dynasty. Then, when the ruling dynasty grows senile and no defender arises from among its friends who share in its group feeling, the (new group feeling) takes over and deprives the ruling dynasty of its power, and, thus, obtains complete royal authority (p. 108).

Another major area of linkage between Ibn-Khaldun and Marx relates to the notion of ‘class struggle’. Marx’s revolutionary ideology is premised on the assumption that class struggle is the agent of social transformation. As he put it in his *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” (Quoted in Padover 1980: 128). The proletariat cannot assume control of state power without class struggle, Marx argued. Although Ibn-Khaldun’s major focus was on what has been rather than what would be, on the present rather than on the future, he had also observed that social struggle was the vehicle of transition from one ‘royal authority’ to another: “...there is, as a rule, a great competition for [royal authority]. It rarely is handed over (voluntarily), but it may be taken away” (p. 123).

The idea that religion is opium of the masses is associated with Karl Marx. But centuries earlier, the same idea was suggested in Ibn-Khaldun’s work, which is even all the more intriguing because of the deep religiosity of the author. Ibn-Khaldun wrote: “religious propaganda gives a dynasty at its beginning another power in addition to that of the group feeling it possessed as the result of the number of its supporters” (p. 126). Ibn-Khaldun and Marx are also in agreement, as

indicated above, on their conception of history based on dialectical reasoning despite the teleological nature of progress of the former as opposed to the cyclical conception of the latter. Both share the view that society passes through different stages in a process of dialectical transformation. For Ibn-Khaldun: "A dynasty goes through different stages and encounters new conditions. Through the conditions that are peculiar to a particular stage, the supporters of the dynasty acquire in that stage traits of character such as do not exist in any other stage" (p. 141). Was Marx familiar with Ibn-Khaldun's work? The answer is unclear although there are some scholars, such as H. Simon, who speculate that "Marx and Engles may even have seen the French translation of Ibn-Khaldun's *Prolegomena*" [which first appeared in 1806] (Katsiaficas 1996: 6).

The origin of the climatic theory of social behavior is sometimes attributed to 'the ancients'. And the 'modern' thinker whose name invariably comes up in connection with this theory is Montesquieu (1689-1775). Ibn-Khaldun and Montesquieu hold a similar view about the relationship between climate and human behavior. (For instance, compare Ibn-Khaldun p. 55 and Richter 1977: 257-263.) Like Montesquieu, Ibn-Khaldun explains the origin of civilizations mainly in climatic terms. It is perhaps observations such as this which led some Europeans in the 19th century to refer to Ibn-Khaldun as the "Montesquieu of the Arabs" (Katsiaficas 1996: 6). True, Montesquieu articulation of his version of the climatic theory coincided with a growing popularity of the idea in Europe. Yet, the idea itself had been already most systematically articulated centuries earlier by Ibn-Khaldun. And if such a theory had not been popular when Ibn-Khaldun advanced it, he deserves credit all the same because of this fact, or in spite of it.

As indicated above, Ibn-Khaldun advanced the idea which was later to be expanded and developed by the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) under the rubric of the 'general will'. This theme is discussed by Ibn-Khaldun in relation to his two inter-related concepts: royal authority and group feeling:

Even if an individual tribe has different 'houses' and many diverse group feelings, still, there must exist a group feeling that is stronger than all the other group feelings combined, that is superior to them all and makes them subservient, and in which case all the diverse group feelings coalesce, as it were, to become one greater group feeling (p. 108).

Rousseau seemed to be referring to the same thing as Ibn-Khaldun when he wrote in the context of clarifying his concept of the general will: "In fact, each individual can have, as a man, a private will that is contrary or different from the general will he has a citizen" (Quoted in Rogers 1968: 323). Ibn-Khaldun had also said earlier: "There must be a major group feeling uniting all the group feelings subordinate to it. This (major group feeling) is the family and tribal group feeling peculiar to the ruler" (p. 246). Was Rousseau familiar with Ibn-Khaldun or with Ibn-Khaldun's works? Again, the evidence is far from sufficient, but it is said (Katsiaficas 1997: 6) that "[t]he first European biography of Ibn Khaldun was published in 1697 in French, and excerpts from the *Muqaddimah* were first translated in 1806."

Along with Thucydides and Hobbes, Nicolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) is another foremost prominent figures often mentioned in the realist theory of international relations. There are similarities between Ibn-Khaldun and Machiavelli. Once again, it is unclear if Machiavelli was knowledgeable of Ibn-Khaldun, or if Machiavelli was familiar with the latter's works. Yet it must be noted that the political situation in Europe, and specifically in Italy, during Machiavelli's own time in many ways resembles the condition of North Africa in Ibn-Khaldun's time. The personalities of Machiavelli's *Prince* also look like that of Ibn-Khaldun himself, because as Enan (1973: 21) observed, "Ibn-Khaldun was an opportunist; he seized opportunities using all sorts of means and methods, and to him the end justified the means. He did not hesitate to return evil for good." After chronicling Ibn-Khaldun's political opportunism and how he rationalized it, Enan (1973: 39) thus concluded:

In all his plans and actions Ibn-Khaldun exhibited deep despise of sentiment and of moral principles; he was moved by that strong spirit which Machiavelli later admired and imagined in his ideal prince—that audacious stubborn spirit which overcomes every human weakness and leads directly to the coveted end by all means.

Machiavelli (1995: 26) had also argued that "men do you harm [among other things, by disobeying you] either because they fear you or because they hate you." The reverse of this can be formulated as follows: men obey you because either they like you or they respect you. From the Ibn-Khaldunian perspective, on the other hand, men obey you for either one or any combination of three reasons: benefit, fear, reciprocity (p. 113). In addition to the above randomly selected European thinkers and philosophers, there were others for sure who had advanced ideas analytically comparable to those of Ibn-Khaldun.

As indicated earlier, Ibn-Khaldun's philosophy had won admiration from some of the more recent eminent Western scholars, such as from Arnold Toynbee, the renowned historian, and Robert Cox, the noted scholar of international relations. In fact Cox (1992: 156: ft 43) even claimed: "Toynbee certainly borrowed from [Ibn-Khaldun] some of his leading ideas, including the principle that physical environments must not be either too hard or too lush in order that they stimulate the development of civilization." In any case, one can go on and document other such parallelisms. But suffice it to say that without a doubt Ibn-Khaldun's philosophical themes and ideas substantially overlap with those advanced by the post-enlightenment thinkers of Europe.

5. The Poststructuralism of Ibn-Khaldun

Not unlike many of his 'modern' counterparts, Ibn-Khaldun is an excessively eclectic thinker who grappled with various issues of wide-ranging nature. Accordingly, he has been described as a sociologist, a philosopher, an economist, a historian and a lawyer. One can also add, even after reading the *Muqaddimah* alone, that Ibn-Khaldun was a mathematician, a nutrition expert, an astronomer, a military strategist and so forth. And he was all of these at the same time. But even a

more fascinating quality of this versatile thinker must perhaps relate to the methodological affinity between his perspective and those of today's most innovative scholars. But apart from their approaches, the substantive issues considered worth tackling by them exhibit some similarity. Coming across the following excerpt as isolated passage, for instance, it would not be out of bounds to think that it was taken from a text authored in the past few years on the structure-agency debate:

As a rule, man is able only to comprehend the causes that are natural and obvious and that present themselves to our perception in an orderly and well-arranged manner.....the way in which causes exercise their influence upon the majority of things caused is unknown (p. 349).

The perspective represents one of the most abstract, and yet crucial, meta-theoretical issues in contemporary International Relations. Friedman and Starr, two scholars of International Relations, called this issue the epistemological agent-structure problem (1997 64-81). The same scholars also seem to favor, like Ibn-Khaldun, the argument that nomothetic explanation of social phenomena is by its nature probabilistic (Friedman and Starr 1997: 74-75). On this, Ibn-Khaldun elaborates his position as follows: "If [a man] ventures to swim in the ocean of speculation and of research, (seeking) each one of the causes that cause them and the influence they exercise, I can guarantee him that he will return unsuccessful" (p. 350).

In a similarly poststructuralist tone, Ibn-Khaldun went on to argue:

Man should not trust the suggestion his mind makes, that it is able to comprehend all existing things and their causes, and to know all the details of existence. Such a suggestion of the mind should be dismissed as stupid. One knows that a deaf person feels that the whole of existence is comprised in the perceptions of his four senses and his intellect. The whole group of audible things constitutes no part of existence for him... (p. 350).

Post-structuralism is anti-essentialist. So is Ibn-Khaldun's paradigm, as the following passage from Muqaddimah further illustrates:

There are certain intelligent representatives of the human species who think that the essences and conditions of the whole of existence, both the part of it perceivable by the senses and that beyond sensual perception, as well as the reasons and the causes of (those essences and conditions), can be perceived by mental speculation and intellectual reasoning." (p. 399)

Similarly, Ibn-Khaldun shuns the intellectual tendency of essentializing contingencies, and asserts: "No action resulting from choice is a natural one" (p. 412).

Ibn-Khaldun's dialectical mind comes to the fore first in the Introduction to his Proglemana (pp.

11-32) where he divulges the contradictions and inconsistencies in contemporary history, and carefully dissects and deconstructs ancient texts and the knowledge transmitted by them through generations. If the Introduction was authored by Ibn-Khaldun the Dialectician, Chapter six must have been written by Ibn-Khaldun the historian (of 'intellectual sciences'). What is also noteworthy about the Introduction is that, in it, Ibn-Khaldun critically takes on both Muslim and non-Muslim authors, referring to the narratives of some of them as 'fictitious fables' (p. 18). He then proceeds to show where and why he thought they went astray. After 'falsifying' a few such narratives in order to illustrate his methodology, Ibn-Khaldun (p. 17) recommended: "...all such information should be investigated and checked with sound norms. The result will be that it will most beautifully be demolished." Then, he offered the ultimate advice:

...the scholar in this field (of history) needs to know the principles of politics, the nature of things, and the differences among nations, places and periods with regard to ways of life, character qualities, customs, sects, schools and everything else. He further needs a comprehensive knowledge of present conditions in all these aspects. He must compare similarities or differences between present and past conditions. He must know the causes of the similarities in certain cases and of the differences in others. He must be aware of the differing origins and beginnings of dynasties and religious groups, as well as of the reasons and incentives that brought them into being and the circumstances and history of the persons who supported them. His goal must be to have complete knowledge of the reasons for every happening, and to be acquainted with the origin of every event. Then, he must check transmitted information with the basic principles he knows. If it fulfils their requirements, it is sound. Otherwise, the historian must consider it as spurious and dispense with it. It was for this reason alone that historiography was highly esteemed by the ancients....Most scholars, however, forgot this, the secret of historiography, with the result that it became a stupid occupation (p. 24).

Here Ibn-Khaldun shines not just as a modern thinker. One can even say that his brilliant insight has a twist of postmodernism to it, postmodernism defined in this instance simply as "incredulity towards meta-narratives" (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). Later on in his book, Ibn-Khaldun notes: "It is a remarkable fact that, with few exceptions, most Muslim scholars both in the religious and the intellectual sciences have been non-Arabs. When a scholar is of Arab origin, he is non-Arab in language and upbringing and has non-Arab teachers. This is so in spite of the fact that Islam is an Arab religion, and its founder was an Arab" (p. 428). But Ibn-Khaldun's critique was not directed solely at his intellectual predecessors and contemporaries. He was equally severely critical, if not more so, of the way of life of the Arab society of which he was a part. Perhaps it was observations such as these which prompted Toynbee (p. 324, ft3) to remark that "...Ibn-Khaldun's indictment [of Arabs] is the more remarkable when we consider that the particular nomads at whose expense Ibn-Khaldun makes his *argumentum ad hominum* shared the name of Arab with the author himself; but perhaps it is this ostensible kinship which inspires Ibn-Khaldun with his animus..." Schmidt (1967:

12) also makes the point that: “[Ibn-Khaldun’s] objectivity in dealing with the Christian peoples and his freedom from national prejudice in pointing out the serious limitations of the Arabs are quite beyond praise.” In a similar vein, Robert Cox (1992: 156) also observes: “Ibn-Khaldun could remain a devout Muslim while being pessimistic about the prospects of the Islamic world.” In addition, Katsiaficas (1997: 18) notes: “It is to Ibn Khaldun’s credit that, unlike Hegel and so many other philosophers, he did not elevate his own group above others and thereby succumb to ethnocentrism.”

In its eloquence, its substance as well as its style of presentation, Ibn-Khaldun’s Introduction is comparable to E.H. Carr’s *What is History?* (1990) except of course for the difference in their respective time frames. Furthermore, if it was not for the excessive abstraction in it, Jacques Derrida’s philosophical treatise, specially as articulated in his *Writing and Difference* (1978) is not without some similarities with Ibn-Khaldun’s philosophy. In fact, Derrida (1978: 351), who is regarded as a prominent author of the deconstructionist school of thought, begins a substantive discussion in one of the chapters in the aforementioned book with the following epigraph from Montaigne: “We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things.” Ibn-Khaldun was in part engaged in doing exactly that: interpreting the interpretation of others. Ibn-Khaldun (p. 26) also argued:

Often, someone who has learned a good deal of past history remains unaware of the changes that conditions have undergone. Without a moment’s hesitation, he applies his knowledge (of the present) to historical information, and measures such information by the things he has observed with his own eyes, although the difference between the two is great. Consequently, he falls into an abyss of error.

The error Ibn-Khaldun referred to above is one which is often committed specially by those who read old texts into new developments. One can challenge likewise, as some have done, the attempt for instance to link current theory to some classical texts. It may be said that contemporary political realists sometimes commit this form of error when they try to bring up Thucydides or Machiavelli or Hobbes as their intellectual predecessors in spite of the fact that the circumstances relating to the ideas of these early writers were markedly different from the conditions prevailing at present. Often times it is because of the quest for legitimating current understanding of a phenomenon by suggesting a continuous tradition, more than a compelling similarity between earlier texts and more recent meta- narratives, that the former are invoked. No wonder then there are contending interpretations about the existence or absence of affinity between these texts.

6. Ibn-Khaldun and the Postmodern Condition

Ibn-Khaldun’s major contributions to posterity include his anticipation of some of the issues which were to attract the attention of great philosophers of Europe many centuries later. He has also bequeathed us a chronicle of the historical time and space he had occupied, with all its complexities.

But that is not all. In Chapter six (esp. pp. 371-395), Ibn-Khaldun discusses the early history and nature of what he called ‘intellectual sciences,’ dividing them into 1) logic 2) physics 3) metaphysics, and 4) mathematics. The extraordinary depth and breadth of his knowledge is apparent from the way he describes the nature as well as the (early) history of each. In substantial portion of this chapter, his genealogical account of the history of ‘intellectual sciences’ bears, in its style and even substance, more than a passing resemblance to what Michel Foucault’s (1970) did in his *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, except that the latter deals with the ‘modern’ times. It can even be said, with important caveat, that Ibn-Khaldun had done for the ‘ancients’ (from the time of the Greek philosophers to his own time) what Foucault did for the period extending from the 17th to the 19th centuries. A more substantive contribution which Ibn-Khaldun had made perhaps lies in the relevance to contemporary history of some of the burning issues of his time and the way he had problematized them. Three examples to be considered here relate, respectively, to the issue of nationalism, the idea of the rise and fall of great powers and the conceptualization of conflict and cooperation among groups. Even though Western historiography traces the birth of nationalism to the modern times, it is not totally incorrect to say that there is significant analytic overlap between the group feeling Ibn-Khaldun (p. 28) describes in his work and the notion of nationalism as widely understood today. For instance, referring to the situation among the Berbers (Muslims) in Spain, following the weakening of the Islamic Empire, Ibn-Khaldun writes:

The group feeling has been lost in their country for many years, as the result of the annihilation of the Arab dynasty in Spain and the emancipation of the Spaniards from the control of Berber group feeling. Arab descent has been remembered, but the ability to gain power, but the ability to gain power through group feeling and mutual cooperation has been lost (p. 28).

The Ibn-Khaldunian concept of *asabiyah*, which, as I elaborate below, can be loosely translated as nationalism or nationalist feeling, has deservedly captured in recent years the interest of some scholars who are familiar with Ibn-Khaldun’s works. Despite the centrality of this concept in the *Muqaddimah*, however, Ibn-Khaldun does not clearly define it in one installment. Instead the idea is broadly discussed. The door was therefore left wide open for scholars to attach different meanings to the concept. Some analysts thus see it as ideology based less on kinship than on social purpose; others, including this author, see *asabiyah* as a kin-based primordial feeling, something akin to the notion of modern ethnic nationalism. More specifically, Toynbee’s rendition of *asabiyah* is a sense of social solidarity (1934: 324). Robert Cox (1992: 153) understood *asabiyah* as a “form of intersubjectivity that pertains to the founding of a state.” On the other hand, Ahmed (2002: 6) argues, “Emile Durkheim’s concept of ‘mechanical’ and ‘organic’ solidarity reflects Ibn-Khaldun’s notion of *asabiyah* or ‘social cohesion’”. It must be stated, also, that there are times when Ibn-Khaldun uses the concept in a sense which approximates Rousseau’s ‘general will’ and, at other times, Marx’s class consciousness. Despite the absence of a concise definition of the concept in *Muqaddimah*, Ibn-Khaldun does nevertheless come closer at one point to offering just such a

definition. He writes in the opening lines of Chapter three: “Royal authority and large-scale dynastic power are attained only through group feeling which means affection and willingness to fight and die for each other” (p. 123). Here there is sufficient hint as to what he meant and did not mean by *asabiyah*. And therefore, the validity of the various interpretations of *asabiyah* ought to be evaluated against this one as well. The reason why interpreting *asabiyah* as ideological unity seems (to me) less persuasive is that, as a rule, if a social system is based on ideological value, the more established the system, the greater should be the depth of the common feelings based on it and, under the circumstances, those feelings ought to consolidate, not weaken, as the society firmly establish itself. But Ibn-Khaldun argued that: “when a dynasty is firmly established, it can dispense with group feeling” (p. 123). Hence my inclination to interpret *asabiyah* as a primordial rather than mechanical unity (such as that discussed by Durkheim). Such interpretation is justified also in light of Ibn-Khaldun’s observation that:

...when the religious law censures group feeling and says: ‘Neither your blood relatives nor your children will be of use to you (on the Day of Resurrection), such a statement is directed against a group feeling that is used for worthless purposes, as was the case in pre-Islamic times (p. 161).

Although what Ibn-Khaldun discusses in some detail under the rubric of ‘group feeling’ is in tune with the concept of ‘ethnic nationalism,’ Ibn-Khaldun makes it clear that *asabiyah* is, instrumentally, a positive and constructive force: “Group feeling produces the ability to defend oneself, and to press one’s claims. Whoever loses it is too weak to do any of these things” (p. 111). Ibn-Khaldun also advanced an argument, based on direct observation, which strikes one as having resemblance to the idea of ‘the imperial overstretch’ which became popular in some circles following the publication of Paul Kennedy’s *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* in the second half of the 1980s. Ibn-Khaldun explained the rise and fall of great dynasties in these terms:

If the dynasty undertakes to expand beyond its holdings, its widening territory remains without military protection and is laid open to any chance attack by enemy or neighbor. When [a dynasty] has reached its farthest expansion, it becomes too weak and incapable to go any further. This may be compared to light rays that spread from their centers, or to circles that widen over the surface of the water when something strikes it. When the dynasty becomes senile and weak, it begins to crumble... (pp. 128-129).

As alluded to earlier, Ibn-Khaldun’s theory is also rather specific about the maximum duration of a dynasty. He said: “...as a rule no dynasty lasts beyond the lifespan of three generations” (p. 136). Ibn-Khaldun explained with great clarity why it was exactly three generations, and not more or not less than that, and what takes place in each generation to this effect (pp. 137-138). In general, according to Ibn-Khaldun, dynasties fall in one of two ways; first they could fall prematurely as a

result of imperial overstretch; second, they could collapse when they complete their life cycle, which is utmost equivalent to three generations. Whether or not empirical evidence supports such a hypothesis, the issue has remained centrally relevant to thinking about contemporary international politics. Ibn-Khaldun's discussion of how certain social 'identities' are invented also brings to mind the school of thought known today as social constructivism. Ibn-Khaldun elaborates this notion in the context of a discussion about the meaning of what he called 'group feeling':

Many leaders of tribes or groups are eager to acquire certain pedigrees. They desire them because persons of that particular descent possessed some special virtue, such as bravery, or nobility, or fame, however this may have come about. They go after such a family and involve themselves in claims to belong to a branch of it....These pedigrees are invented by people to get into the good graces of rulers, through (sycophantic) behavior and through the opinions they express. Their (fabrications) eventually become so well known as to be irrefutable... (p. 101).

Ibn-Khaldun's position on the issue of cooperation and conflict is pragmatic. But he underscores the obvious, first and foremost, that there needs to be contact between two or more sides for conflict or cooperation to take place. As he put it:

Dealing with other people, where there is oneness of purpose, may lead to mutual affection, and when purposes differ, they may lead to strife and altercation. Thus, mutual dislike and mutual affection, friendship and hostility, originate. This leads to war and peace among nations and tribes (p. 336).

However, Ibn-Khaldun does not say why sometimes common purpose between groups is in short supply, a situation which ultimately leads to conflict. But he seemed to suggest, not unlike today's social constructivists and critical theorists, that enmity or friendship between groups is not fixed in any way. Rather, it is the function of a changing intersubjectivity and social practice.

7. Conclusion and Summary

For all its profundity and originality, Ibn-Khaldun's works were also influenced by his knowledge of the Greek philosophers, most notably Aristotle. On several occasions, Ibn-Khaldun mentions Aristotle's definition of man as a political animal (for e.g., p. 45, p. 336) and analyses it further. Apparently, suspecting questions could arise, Ibn-Khaldun (p. 41) was even more explicit on this when he wrote the following about the relationship between his work and Aristotle's: "In the Book on Politics that is ascribed to Aristotle and has wide circulation, we find a good deal about our subject. The treatment, however, is not exhaustive, nor is the topic provided with all the arguments it deserves, and it is mixed with other things." In addition, Ibn-Khaldun's writing indicates that he was familiar with the works of other Greek philosophers too, including those of Plato and Alexander.

Then, would it be the case that what Ibn-Khaldun wrote in his *Muqaddimah* was not original but merely a re-writing of what others, specially the Greeks, had already articulated? This is most unlikely not least because Ibn-Khaldun's arguments are coherent and self-contained; it is clear also that he considers plagiarism to be a distasteful exercise. As he put it: "For instance, (someone may try) to ascribe the work of an earlier author to himself with the aid of certain tricks, such as changing the wording and the arrangement of the contents...All this shows ignorance and impudence" (p. 414).

Ibn-Khaldun sought to transform and transcend what had come before him. Much of what Ibn-Khaldun does in the opening pages of Book One is to explain the similarities and differences between his work and related works done by philosophers before him. In the Introductory chapter, Ibn-Khaldun (p. 30) states the reason why he in the first place set on writing the *Muqaddimah*:

When there is a general change of conditions, it is as if the entire creation had changed and the whole world been altered, as if it were a new and repeated creation, a world brought into existence anew. Therefore there is need at this time that someone should systematically set down the situation of the world among all regions and races, as well as the customs and sectarian beliefs that have changed for their adherents...

If the above passage offers clues as to whether or not Ibn-Khaldun was aware of the contribution he was making to the growth of knowledge, in the following one he was even more forthright, but without relinquishing his characteristic modesty:

(The subject) is in a way an independent science with its own peculiar object—that is, human civilization and social organization...In a way it is an entirely original science. In fact, I have not come across a discussion along these lines by anyone. I do not know if this is because people have been unaware of it, but there is no reason to suspect them of having been unaware of it. Perhaps they have written exhaustively on this topic, and their work did not reach us. There are many sciences. There have been numerous sages among the nations of mankind. The knowledge that has not come down to us is larger than the knowledge that has. Where are the sciences of the Persians that 'Umar ordered to be wiped out at the time of the conquest? Where are the sciences of the Chaladaeans, the Syrians and the Babylonians, and the scholarly products and results that were theirs? Where are the sciences of the Copts, their predecessors? The sciences of only one nation, the Greeks, have come down to us, because they were translated through al-Ma'mun's efforts (p. 39).

In the same section, Ibn-Khaldun added:

If I have succeeded in presenting the problems of this science exhaustively and in showing how it differs in its various aspects and characteristics from all other crafts, this is due to divine

guidance. If, on the other hand, I have omitted some point, or if the problems have got confused with something else, the task of correcting it remains for the discerning critic, but the merit is mine since I cleared and marked the way (p. 42).

The contribution of Ibn-Khaldun to human knowledge pales when compared to the attention, or recognition, it has received thus far. But the reasons for this are yet to be fully explored. Ibn-Khaldun had clearly anticipated or suggested some of the major intellectual issues that were to preoccupy the modern man and woman. It is my hope that the foregoing analysis would provoke scholars to look further into the multi-faceted works of Ibn-Khaldun both to situate them in the discursive realm of modernity and postmodernity as well as extract lessons from them.

One question which has dominated much of the post-September 11 political discourse about the Middle East has been whether or not Islam could be modernized, but not whether or not modernity itself could be Islamized. We have raised in this essay the second question too, and offered broad affirmative suggestions. Irrespective of how we answer it, there is no doubt that the question itself is relevant.

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