



*The Notion of Asabiyya (group feeling) in Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy"*

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**Abstract ;**

*Our study is an attempt to shed light on some aspects of the life of the thinker Ibn Khaldun, who reflected the spirit of his time, through examining the key intellectual issues he was concerned with, particularly the concept of " Asabiyya" (social solidarity). This concept is considered a fundamental key to understanding his philosophy.  
We have concluded that the concept of Asabiyya (group feeling), in Ibn Khaldun's perspective, is not only essential for understanding historical events but also carries multiple meanings and connotations that can be fully understood through exploring its relationships with other interconnected concepts such as urbanization, religion, and ethics.*

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## 1. Introduction

Contemplating writing about Ibn Khaldun, his social and historical philosophy, or even his status among the great philosophers and Muslim scholars - who left their mark on human thought in general and Arab and Islamic thought in particular - renders the question of accountability trivial from the outset. This is if we do not recall what the contemporary Arab thinker, Mohammad Abid al-Jabri, stated, that discussing Ibn Khaldun is a redundant and repetitive topic. Furthermore, any attempt to engage in excessive praise or critique of the presented arguments and writings can only be made after studying them, refining them, and providing some explanations and additions to them.

What we aim to do through our subject is an attempt to highlight some aspects of the life of the thinker who reflected the spirit of his time. This will be done by delving into the key intellectual issues he was concerned with, notably the concept of "asabiyya" (social solidarity), which is one of the fundamental laws of society and politics and forms a key to understanding Ibn Khaldun's philosophy. When examining the topics of human civilization, as Ibn Khaldun referred to them, or their manifestations in what is now known as sociology, as well as their intersection with what is commonly referred to as the philosophy of history, we find that they are primarily based on the concept of Asabiyya.

Based on our belief that Ibn Khaldun is the founder of the historical research methodology and the first to philosophize

about history and establish its alphabet, studying "asabiyya" in his works and connecting it to the concept of the state is a return to Arab heritage and sheds light on the present in the political sphere in general. When it comes to the issue of "asabiyya" and its relationship to states in particular, how can we not consider it as one of the inevitable factors in human history, as Ibn Khaldun described it.

In a serious attempt to understand the extent to which "asabiyya" has influenced political and social dynamics in the establishment of states, especially considering that the concept of "asabiyya" lays the foundation for political systems, we delve into an exploratory journey. We seek to examine the impact of "asabiyya" as a political and social catalyst in the formation of states, particularly as the idea of "asabiyya" represents a prospective path upon which political systems are built.

## 2. Philosopher Ibn Khaldun's trajectory:

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 CE) was born in the 14th century CE, the 8th century AH. This period was marked by political and intellectual changes. In Europe, the signs of the European Renaissance were emerging on the horizon, while for the Islamic world, this period was characterized by decline. In 656 AH (1258 CE), the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad fell at the hands of the Mongols, led by Tamerlane, whose attacks devastated the Islamic East. It was soon replaced by Ottoman rule, with Bayezid I being one of its prominent figures. The region became a stage for intense power struggles and

dominance between the Turks and the Mongols (Hamish, 1998, p. 11).

**2.1** As for Al-Andalus (Islamic Spain), Ibn Khaldun witnessed the Muslims' inability to defend themselves during his journey there. They had lost their strength due to their indulgence in luxury. On the other hand, the Christians, through what is known as the Christian Reconquista (Reconquest), were motivated to eliminate the remnants of Al-Andalus and reclaim Spain. The most important centers of Andalusian civilization had fallen into their hands, leading to political revolutions and upheavals.

All of this, along with the events such as the Black Death, which Ibn Khaldun witnessed and chronicled, sheds light on the period of the 14th century. Merely reading "The Biography of Arabs, Persians, Berbers, and Other Great Rulers" takes us on an exciting journey through time, illustrating how dark and turbulent that era was. While the Hundred Years' War tore apart the organs of Western Christendom, the Arab world was crumbling under the influence of external threats. Its strength was exhausted, and it disintegrated due to internal conflicts that scattered Al-Andalus and the Arab Maghreb (Balsaih, 1986, p. 7)

**2.2** As for the narration of his life

we find no better source than what was detailed by "Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun" in his book "Introduction to Ibn Khaldun and his Journey West and East" (Ibn Khaldun, 1979). However, this has not deterred many researchers and scholars from exploring his life, recounting his most

important works, and providing commentary on them. Perhaps this is because the philosopher's life itself is a philosophy. Among these researchers and scholars, we can mention Dr. Ali Abdulwahid Wafi in his book titled "The Genius of Ibn Khaldun," as well as Khaled Azab and Mohamed El Sayed in their book titled "With Ibn Khaldun on His Journey." Additionally, there are scholars such as Mohamed Abdullah Anan in his book "Ibn Khaldun: His Life and Intellectual Heritage" and Abdelghani Maghribi in his book "Ibn Khaldun: His Life and Works" (Hassan, 2014, page 8).

As for his lineage, he is Wali al-Din Abu Zaid Abd al-Rahman bin Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad bin al-Hasan bin Muhammad bin Jabir bin Muhammad bin Ibrahim bin Abd al-Rahman bin Khaldun, from the Banu Khaldun family of the ancient Arab origins in Hadhramaut, Yemen. Some members of the family migrated to the Hijaz in the pre-Islamic era, and among them was Wael bin Hajar, one of the companions of the Prophet. Ibn Hazm traces the lineage of Ibn Khaldun back to the companion Wael bin Hajar, as mentioned by Abu Omar Ibn Abdul Barr in the "Isti'ab." It is said that Wael bin Hajar visited the Prophet, who spread his cloak for him and made him sit on it, and he said, "O Allah, bless Wael bin Hajar, his children, and his grandchildren until the Day of Resurrection" (Al-Abda, 2009, page 38).

Ibn Khaldun was born in the city of Tunis on the first day of Ramadan, 732 AH,

corresponding to May 17, 1332 CE. His family was renowned for their knowledge and involvement in politics. They migrated from Andalusia to Tunis, where Ibn Khaldun learned and memorized the Quran under the guidance of Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Saad bin Beral al-Ansari. As for the Arabic sciences, he studied them with his father and many teachers in Tunis, including Abu Abdullah bin Al-Arabi al-Hasairi, the leading scholar of Arabic language and literature in Tunis, and he studied jurisprudence under Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Jiyani and Abu al-Qasim Muhammad al-Qasir. He also studied under the qadi al-jama'a Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Abdul Salam (Ibn Khaldun, 1979, pages 17-20).

He studied logic, mental sciences, and history under renowned scholars. At the age of eighteen, his studies were interrupted due to a pandemic that swept through Tunis. He began his public life with a humble position as a scribe in the office of the Hafsid State Minister. He then moved to the farthest part of Morocco, where he became a member of the scholarly council under Sultan Abu Inan, serving as the sultan's scribe. He even became part of the inner circle (Al-Abda, 2009, page 39)

He traveled to Al-Andalus and was appointed as an ambassador, but he later abandoned positions and sought seclusion. He spent four years in Algiers without employment, during which he began writing his famous work, "The Introduction." After significant events and successive upheavals that turned the tide against him, he withdrew from public positions and began closely observing

events and tracing their course to understand the laws that govern social phenomena. His observations and experiences became valuable material and the foundation for writing his great introduction (Marhaba, 1989, page 13).

Thus, the introduction became the preface to his book "The Muqaddimah" (The Introduction), as well as "The Diwan of Badiyah and Mudaharat" (The Collection of the Beginning and News Regarding Days of Arabs, Non-Arabs, and Berbers, and Those Associated with Them from the Great Sultans). In it, "Abu Zaid Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun" presented new foundations for the science of history by identifying the sources of error and falsehood in historical accounts, deriving from them the scientific spirit that historians should possess. He also laid out his methodological approach, both contemplative and critical, for understanding the manifestations of human civilization and analyzing historical events.

The introduction thus became the foundation of the philosophy of history. The British historian Arnold J. Toynbee considered it the greatest work that the human mind has ever produced throughout history in his book "A Study of History." It stood out with its unconventional methodology, connecting events from a perspective that paved the way for a new study of history. According to the French sociologist Gaston Bouthoul in his book "Ibn Khaldun: His Social Philosophy," it represents an attempt at historical criticism, a general explanation of social phenomena, and a study of the laws that govern social and political development. One of his beliefs is that this study made him the first

precursor of material interpretation and historical debate (Hassan, 2012, page 188).

After Ibn Khaldun completed writing his famous book "Al-'Ibar" (The Lessons), which is known for Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, he traveled to Egypt and held judicial positions while also engaging in teaching. He continued in these roles until his death on the 25th of Ramadan, 808 AH, corresponding to March 15, 1406 CE.

## 2- In the concept of Asabiyya,

"Nationalism is originally about a man separating himself from the women of his companion and working for his victory. It is derived from the term 'asaba,' meaning the man's relatives from his father's side, as they are the ones who defend him against those who threaten him. Then it came to mean the group of people who fiercely support him, even if they are not his relatives, whether he is an oppressor or oppressed." (Al-Fakhouri and Al-Jar, 1993, p 510 ).

Eve Lacoste has gathered several definitions of nationalism, including: (Lacoste, 2017, pp. 200-203).

- Arwin Rosenfeld defines nationalism as the driving force behind the evolution of a state.

- Nationalism is defined as the collective sense of permanent common interest, which can be translated as "spirit of solidarity," as expressed, for example, by "De Salan."

- Helmut Ritter defines nationalism as an inherent propensity for political authority and military action.

-Eve Lacoste defines nationalism as "the political and social structure that determines the transition from a non-

stratified society to a stratified society" (Lacoste, 2017, p 232).

## 3. from Ibn Khaldun's perspective

Ibn Khaldun's study of nationalism stems from the attempt to reconcile the idea that humans are inherently social with the recognition of their aggressive nature. On one hand, humans cannot do without the community they belong to and cannot live without it. The individual is in an interactive relationship with others of his own kind, influenced by them and influencing them through cooperation and mutual support to meet the requirements of life and face the challenges of existence. On the other hand, the individual is driven by aggressive instincts towards others. Faced with this contradiction, Ibn Khaldun's concept of "al-waz'" (the restraining force) emerges. This concept is "imposed by human nature itself, considering the individual as a being inclined towards both good and evil, towards cooperation and aggression. The establishment of social life, and thus the survival of humans, requires a form of authority that preserves the cohesion of society and strengthens cooperation among its members, restraining the aggression of individuals or groups against each other" (Al-Jabri, 1994, p. 163).

Therefore, the individual's need for others gave rise to cooperation, which led to the establishment of a social life that limits human freedom and aggressive nature, imposing the necessity of organization. It is this very need, embodied in the concept of "al-waz'," that led Ibn Khaldun to search for the higher power on which the ruling family relies in seizing power, ensuring stability, and acting as a

formidable barrier against external aggression. However, the question arises: What is the nature of this power that Ibn Khaldun envisions? What are its dimensions and manifestations? On what does it rely? More precisely, if the idea of the state guided Ibn Khaldun's thinking, then the power on which the ruling family relies in seizing power is Asabiyya. So what is meant by it in the Khaldounian conception?

In Ibn Khaldun's perspective, nationalism serves as the key that can solve all the problems posed by the course of historical events in their various aspects. It is considered one of the most central concepts in Ibn Khaldun's introduction. This is effectively expressed by the Moroccan thinker, Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri, who raises a series of sub-questions derived from the major themes of Ibn Khaldun's thesis and its main challenges in his historical philosophy. The essence of these questions is as follows: "Why does nationalism, at a certain moment, transform from a mere social-psychological bond into a force of confrontation and assertion, leading to the establishment of monarchy and state? Why does nationalism weaken (...) once it achieves its goal of establishing monarchy and starts reaping its benefits? Why does nationalism deteriorate due to luxury and comfort, while it is fundamentally based on lineage or its equivalent? Why does the state collapse due to the decay of its nationalism, only to be replaced by a new nationalism that establishes a new state?" (Al-Jabri, 1994, p 12 ).

Doesn't this indicate that, according to Ibn Khaldun's approach, nationalism is

the dynamic driving force of society and the historical indicator that allows for understanding of development? Isn't it, in essence, the latent power within humans to create innovation?

Ibn Khaldun's theory of Asabiyya (social solidarity) is a bold attempt to study social cohesion in general and social cooperation in particular. He incorporates within the concept of Asabiyya various types of social bonds and cooperative phenomena. This demonstrates his comprehensive and in-depth thinking in studying social events and explaining historical facts (Al-Hassari, 1967, pp. 351-352).

According to Ibn Khaldun, Asabiyya plays a fundamental role in the social and political theories, as it organizes the relationships among individuals within a tribe and regulates the external relations of the cohesive group in the desert, both in relation to one another and in their interactions with the state. Asabiyya is essentially a socio-psychological bond, encompassing both conscious and unconscious aspects, connecting individuals within a group based on kinship. It is a continuous bond that intensifies when the individuals or the group face threats, whether as individuals or as a collective entity (Al-Jabri, 1994, p. 168).

The foundation of Asabiyya is based on the concept of lineage, as the natural bond of blood ties is associated with mutual support and solidarity. However, Ibn Khaldun introduced a new concept, which is loyalty based on affiliation rather than birth lineage. Thus, Asabiyya, according to him, is not limited to those of a particular

lineage but also includes loyalty based on actual belonging to a specific group. Ibn Khaldun states, "The natural bond of blood ties is common among humans, at least to some extent. When blood ties are combined with mutual support and solidarity, people feel aversion to harm inflicted upon their close relatives and kinsmen. They would wish to prevent any harm or misfortune that may befall them. The close relative feels annoyed when harm or enmity comes from his relative, and he would like to prevent any harm or misfortune that may befall him. These are natural tendencies in humans, as they have always been" (Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun, 2004, p. 256).

Therefore, Ibn Khaldun's theory of Asabiyya is a profound exploration of social relationships and cooperative dynamics. It highlights the significance of Asabiyya as a driving force in understanding social development and creativity.

It is evident from the above that the concept of 'Asabiyya carries multiple connotations reflected in the translations and studies of thinkers. Some have seen it as tribal affiliation based on lineage or loyalty and alliances, while others have described it as social solidarity. Some equate Asabiyya with the concept of nationalism, while others attribute it with a religious dimension.

To further understand the essence of Asabiyya in Ibn Khaldun's thought, it is necessary to explore its relationship with some fundamental concepts in his philosophy, such as urbanization, religion, and ethics.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion Ibn Khaldun is considered one of the greatest thinkers of the 14th century. He was described by the philosopher Mohammed Abed Al-Rahman Marhaba as one of the pillars of scientific thought in Islam and a pinnacle of Arab culture. His contributions are hailed by humanity as the fruits of a unique season characterized by contrasting historical periods between the Arab-Islamic world and the Western world. While the latter was experiencing upward progress and advancement, the former witnessed a significant decline.

The concept of Asabiyya , which embodies the driving force behind aggression, is the foundation of governance and the state according to Ibn Khaldun. Asabiyya is the essence of the state's existence, starting from its establishment, construction, and development, and ultimately leading to its collapse. However, since Asabiyya is linked to the nature of human beings, their desires, and inclinations, it requires another restraining force on one hand and enhancing force on the other. Ibn Khaldun identified religion as the essential component that refines human nature and encourages individuals to strive for the greater good of themselves and their society. When Asabiyya is subject to the dominion of religion, it can achieve social efficiency that contributes to prosperity and cultural advancement. Likewise, religion needs human strength to consolidate its values and principles in the psychological, social, and economic realms, and this strength, according to Ibn Khaldun, lies in Asabiyya .

Ibn Khaldun places great importance on Islam as the sole source from which ethical values are derived. He emphasizes the necessity of the interconnection between Asabiyya and religion because religion is a prerequisite for the preservation and continuity of Asabiyya . He demonstrates its moral strength. Just as Asabiyya is essential for religion, if it is not supported by the force of religious

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legislation and virtuous ethics from its adherents, it quickly weakens and fades away. Similarly, ethics alone, without a material force to rely on, will not sustain the state, and its fate will be inevitable collapse. Thus, even the prophets themselves needed a material force to assist in establishing righteous laws for societies.

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