

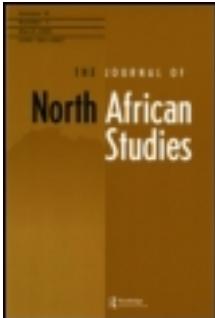
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### Ibn Khaldun's influence on current international relations theory

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# Ibn Khaldun's influence on current international relations theory

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Ibn Khaldun has been cited as an alternative progenitor of realism and social constructivism in the academic world of international relations. Dr Susan Strange, for example, offers him as an alternative to Machiavelli as an inspirer/foundational text author for the discipline of international relations (1995, 'Political economy and international relations', in *International relations theory today*, K. Booth and S. Smith, eds, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 172). This paper argues that there is great value in re-examining Ibn Khaldun's contribution in terms of his concepts of '*asabiyah*', the dynastic cycle and the relationship between religion and power. A basic re-examination of the concepts reveals that they are the ancestral forms of what is called today identity, the hegemonic cycle and the notion of 'civilisations'.

**Keywords:** international relations theory; Ibn Khaldun; social construction

## The nature of the *Muqaddimah* and the framework of analysis

The primary reason to uphold the placement of Ibn Khaldun into the cannon of international relations lies in his placement of the state at the centre of his analysis. About 79 of the book's 229 sections mention politics, the sultan, kingship or the state directly, and the content of many of the rest contains references to things we would consider to be state-related. Ibn Khaldun tells us that his book is about '*'umran*', which he defined as 'human gathering' (Ibn Khaldun 2005, p. 41). Yet, while his definition of 'human gathering' may appear to be the same as society, and that his proposed discipline is therefore what we regard as sociology, that argument is taken apart by Mohamed Abid al-Jabiri in his 1971 analysis of Ibn Khaldun's work. While confirming the emphasis placed by Ibn Khaldun on the state, al-Jabiri places him in the context of Sunni political thought, but he argues that Ibn Khaldun developed his approach to a stage where he left that tradition behind when he shifted the main question from how government should exist under Islam to how it takes place under 'political' conditions. For al-Jabiri, the *Muqaddimah* is a text in politics (El-Jabiri 1971, pp. 178–206). Indeed, the original author does not mince words; in his 42nd chapter, he argues that the state and kingship are the 'primary

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markets for the world' and the 'mother of all markets'. He also states very clearly that the subject of '*umran*' depends on the state and on kingship.

To that extent, the book has a natural home in the political sciences. The more specific question does remain whether it can fit into the study of international relations. As we shall see below, it probably does given some of the similarities that Ibn Khaldun shares with the existing canon and his ability to enrich it with that in which he differs from other authors. In general, Ibn Khaldun has not been brought into the world of international relations which remains centred on Europe and North America. To the extent that his work has been brought into the field, it was brought in at the margins and periphery rather than into the theoretical core of the discipline and the various contending theories within it. There have been exceptions, of course, particularly in some of the works that compared him to Thucydides and others.

As implied by the comparison to Thucydides, the basic logic of this paper is that of conceptual comparison. Several of Ibn Khaldun's key topics will be compared to their most approximate current equivalents in the field of international relations. The three topics selected for comparison are '*asabiyah*', historic cycles and religion. From an international studies perspective, these three factors are crucial because they are closely related to the issues of identity, hegemonic cycles and civilisation clashes. These three topics are of some importance in international relations theory and for that reason, they are crucial in any evaluation of the possible benefits of including Ibn Khaldun in the classical readings in international relations. There are, of course, other topics, and some may be very useful, especially Ibn Khaldun's reading of economics and the role of the state in the market. There are particularly fruitful avenues for comparison in the sub-field of international political economy, as illustrated by Haddad's work earlier, but for the purposes of this paper, the focus will remain in factors and topics relevant to international studies in a more general sense.

## Literature review

### *An overview and a typology*

In general, Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* influences modern and postmodern studies of international politics in three distinct ways. First, his cycle and economic analysis have been applied to situations and cases. Second, his thoughts have been fought over as part of the discourse of colonialism and anti-colonialism. Third, he has been studied from a more purely theoretical perspective. While international relations is most closely related to the last approach, it is not a stranger to the first two approaches. Under the first approach, scholars abstract patterns from Ibn Khaldun's work, which he would have called laws, and then compare them with current cases and issues. In other words, this first approach is coherent through its methods rather than its subjects.

Under the second approach, Ibn Khaldun and his methods have become objects and frameworks for the continuing conflict on the post-colonial legacy. Many of these scholarly battles are over translation and essentially 'ownership' of the legacy of Ibn Khaldun. Nevertheless, there is a healthy aspect to the post-colonial discourse surrounding the thinker. For example, it has been suggested that Ali Mazrui is a Khaldunian thinker and he uses Khaldunian methods. The third approach is the least applied of the three. Here Ibn Khaldun is a denizen of the classics, postmodernity and a possible heir to Thucydides. The third approach is the most likely channel for Ibn Khaldun's influence to percolate into the discipline of international relations. There are dozens of books in Arabic and other languages on Ibn Khaldun, so this

literature review is by definition incomplete. There are so many materials in fact that al-Jabiri felt compelled to defend his selection of Ibn Khaldun as the subject of his thesis. The triune typology used here emerged upon reflection on the nature of articles within the sample gathered.

### **Applying or (ab-?) using Ibn Khaldun's approaches**

Writing in 1977, L. Haddad, then a professor at the University of Sidney, argues that Ibn Khaldun's approach to economic development, despite its lack of precision or rigor, is basically sound and comparable to that of Adam Smith, who would write more than 400 years after Ibn Khaldun. Haddad rightly points out that many of the descriptive concepts used by Smith, such as the division of labour, had been developed by Ibn Khaldun first. Furthermore, unlike today's economists, Ibn Khaldun was 'multidisciplinary' in his approach. In other words, it was impossible to separate economics from society or politics in his approach. His economic cycle differed from other authors in his age in that it assumed that civilisation and its economy are in a constant flux, declining or growing economically (Haddad 1977, pp. 195–213).

While Haddad abstracts economic concepts from Ibn Khaldun to discuss development theory, Malise Ruthven, a professor of Islamic studies at Dartmouth and the University of Aberdeen, uses the notion of religious-based revolts that infuse Ibn Khaldun's discussions of *al-'asabiyah*. Ruthven compares and contrasts Al-Qaeda with the Mahdist movement of the nineteenth century Sudan. He uses a Khaldunian approach to explain each movement. He outlines how Muhammad Ahmad, the rightly guided one (the Mahdi), broke off from his largely pacifist Sufi order to establish an alternative tradition with himself as its 'guide' or 'khalifa'. The *Mahdi* declared the Egyptian government to be in apostasy and that he was a *mujaddid*, a renovator rightly guided by God to restore Islamic purity. In a similar manner, Bin Laden condemns Arab governments, especially the government of Saudi Arabia, as apostate. He is regarded by his followers as a renovator, and he is often referred to as a 'shaykh' by his supporters. Ruthven clearly points out that Islamic history appears to be full of such figures. Ruthven structures his approach along the lines of the religiously motivated tribal revolts described by Ibn Khaldun (Ruthven 2002, pp. 339–351).

Ruthven is not alone in applying Ibn Khaldun to Saudi Arabia. Madawi al-Rasheed, professor of social anthropology at King's College in London, outlines how the Shi'ite opposition in Saudi Arabia is using the theories of Ibn Khaldun to deconstruct and de-legitimise the Saudi government by describing it as a corrupted product of one of the cycles of nomadic conquest. She argues that Saudi Shi'ite intellectuals found in Ibn Khaldun a treasure trove of concepts and arguments with which to attack the ruling dynasty. She relies heavily on published materials produced by the Shi'ites in opposition, including their journal, *al-Jazira al-'Arabiya*. She argues that they tend to import their subject matter directly from Ibn Khaldun's work:

This description of the main themes developed in *al-Jazira al-'Arabiya* demonstrates that they rely on a specific interpretation of Saudi history, politics, and society. This interpretation draws heavily on Ibn Khaldunian concepts, specifically his description of Bedouin society. His views seem to correspond to the Shi'a's political agenda, which remains critical of Saudi hegemony. From the Shi'a perspective, the so-called Bedouin style of government resulted in the marginalization of important groups and regions while at the same time failing to establish a modern national identity in which they can be incorporated as equal citizens. (Al-Rasheed 1998, p. 130)

A similar political use of Ibn Khaldun was carried out by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab al-Ghassani during the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Nabil Matar, a professor at the Florida Institute of Technology, shows us that the temptation outlined by al-Rasheed is

very old and is likely to repeat in political discourse many times. A Moroccan travelling in Spain in generations after the final expulsion of Spanish Muslims in 1609, he invoked the Khaldunian cycle to suggest that Spain is predestined for Islamic reconquest. Applying the Khaldunian cycle to a Christian state for the first time, he found a substitute for the Bedouins in Spain's peasantry and found a cause for corruption in Christianity. Matar explains that his views were a rebuttal, however implicit, to Morisco writers who wrote about the need to adopt European technology and structures, like the Ottoman Turks, in order to resist the rise of Western power (Matar 2005, pp. 51–78). The use of Ibn Khaldun in political discourse is not limited to the North Africa and Eastern Mediterranean; his legacy was claimed by colonial powers as well those who have made it their aim to fight colonial discourse.

### ***Colonialist and anti-colonialist discourse***

This is a very special category of the use and abuse of the works of Ibn Khaldun. It is easy to fall into the trap of futile debate about the colonialism of translations dating to the 1850s, yet this seems to be precisely what defines this much of this particular current approach to Ibn Khaldun, with the discourse of Ali Mazrui as a significant exception to this rule. Mid-nineteenth century translations like that of William de Slane used Ibn Khaldun as part of a colonial project of interpreting Amazigh people as Europeans. This approach was discredited by Yves Lacoste in his 1966 book on Ibn Khaldun (Lacoste 1984; first French edition 1966). Yet, some writers in the anti-colonial tradition are not satisfied with merely discrediting the colonial translation and appropriation of Ibn Khaldun. Abdelmajid Hannoum, a professor at Simon's Rock College of Bard, tries to construct a case that casts Ibn Khaldun as a unifier of Arab and Amazigh peoples and suggests that Islamic *fatah* cannot be translated into terms like 'conquest' (Hannoum 2003, pp. 61–81).

This approach begs a very serious and direct question. If Ibn Khaldun did not view Amazigh people as a distinctive group within the Islamic world, why does he physically divide 'the news' of Arabs and Berbers into separate books that follow the *Muqaddimah* despite his support for claims of common ancestry? In fact, Ibn Khaldun uses ethnic categories consistently throughout the book. For example, he states that he will compare the Arabs with the Nabateans, Syrians, Persians, Israelites, Copts (ancient Egyptians), Greeks, Romans, Turks and the Franks in his second book. He reserves the third book for the Amazigh, especially the Zenata. There is a conspicuous absence of religious categories of comparison in the preface, despite the use of *hadith* and Qu'ranic verses throughout the book (Ibn Khaldun 2005, p. 12). In addition, Ibn Khaldun does not spare his own ethnic community from severe and largely unwarranted criticism. There are two chapters linking Arab rule with the destruction of countries and buildings. In the 26th chapter of the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun blames Arab tribes for the destruction and depopulation of Yemen, Iraq, Tunisia, and the Maghreb 'from the Sudan (the Sahel) to the Roman Sea (the Mediterranean)'. As always, the chapter concludes with a prayer that 'God inherits the earth and is upon it for He is the best of inheritors' (Ibn Khaldun 2005, pp. 148–149). In his dissertation on Ibn Khaldun, Taha Hussein, one of Egypt's leading scholars of the twentieth century, takes issue with Ibn Khaldun's grave criticism of Arab life (Hussein 2000, pp. 133–139).

In short, this subset of the post-colonialist approach to Ibn Khaldun tends to view his person and his work as another forum for colonialist/anti-colonialist struggles. I invite the reader to evaluate the value of this approach from a scholarly perspective, concerned with understanding Ibn Khaldun and his legacy, rather than transforming him into yet another object of trans-Mediterranean/Atlantic discord. A better approach to post-colonial discourse is the use of

‘Khaldunian’ methods by Ali Mazrui, whose travels and encounters provide him with his ‘data’ on the West and its impact on the Third World, especially its Muslim components. Seifudein Adem Hussein, a scholar associated with the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs, argues that Mazrui is ‘a post-modern Ibn Khaldun’ (Hussein 2003, pp. 127–145). While the object of Mazrui’s criticism is the West, he does represent a parallel to Ibn Khaldun in that he is the product of the educational system of the culture he is criticising (Mazrui 1997, pp. 118–132).

### **Theory and history**

The branch of politics called international studies is dependent on two other disciplines in a nearly complete way. It is not possible to study international politics without reference to philosophy and history. This is a view held by all schools of thought that operate within international relations, including realists, liberals, Marxists, constructivists and postmodernists, despite their deep differences over the content and meaning of history and theory (Smith and Baylis, 2001, pp. 1–13). At the centre of discussions concerning philosophy and history is the contested legacy of Thucydides. Long the dominant thinkers in international relations, the realists regard Thucydides to be their founder and model scholar (Mingst 2004, p. 4).

The crux of the dispute over Thucydides actually lies between international relations and the classics department. Much like the conflict over the heritage of the translations of Ibn Khaldun, classical scholars present Thucydides as a tragedy-writer, with the moral, human and ethical concerns of the Greeks who wrote the goat-plays in Athens. Scholars of international relations see him as a scientific realist lacking such normative concerns. In 1972, Lenn Evan Goodman, now of Vanderbilt University, wrote a systematic comparison of Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides. He found a number of striking similarities. He holds that they were both naturalist, empiricist, and favoured cyclical approaches to history. Both believed that history had lessons for humanity and that these can be discerned through observation. In keeping with the classicists’ perspective on Ibn Khaldun, Goodman argues that he fundamentally shares the perspective held by the classicists’ Thucydides:

What answer then has Ibn Khaldun to the problem of values and of God in history? His answer, fundamentally, is the same as that of Thucydides: the laws of human and social nature (if not those of human existence) bring men into conflict, cause them to overstep. In the dialectic of history, each man in his society pursues what may seem goods (and partly be as such) which lead to both virtue and vice (in a partial sort of way) and bring in their train, or rather contain, their own retribution and their own reward. For societies, as for individuals, crime and punishment, virtue and reward are inextricable from one another. Caligula must live the life of Caligula and die the death of Caligula and so must ever empire or horde live the life which is in its nature and die the death which is of its nature. For nations, like individuals, must pay for their crime, even when those crimes were the products of natural desires. (Goodman 1972, pp. 269–270).

Goodman continues to emphasise in his conclusion that the two authors saw in human limitations both ennoblement and degradation – which is the material of tragedy. Ironically, the classicists’ traditional reading, which is also Goodman’s reading, of Ibn Khaldun finds support among those who read Ibn Khaldun through postmodern lenses today. George Katsiaficas, a professor at the Wentworth Institute of Technology of Massachusetts, argues that Ibn Khaldun’s ‘*asabiyah*’ is basically the postmodernists’ identity. Katsiaficas’ Ibn Khaldun takes a postmodernist turn into an inspirer of waking dreams that can foresee a better world. He argues that Ibn Khaldun’s approach to the issue of the individual within a group is a necessary aspect to understanding the present state of humankind. Katsiaficas advocates a ‘New Age’ reading of Ibn

Khaldun (his own words). While I find 'New Age' ideas to be useful for some people on spiritual quests and journeys, I do not believe that they are of academic utility (Katsiaficas 1999, pp. 45–57).

A more serious approach was followed by Hellmut Ritter in 1943 and 1947, despite the embroilment of his country, Germany, in a World War. Ritter begins by describing discussions with his brother on Machiavelli. The Ritters argue that Machiavelli's assessment that armed prophets thrive while disarmed ones fall victim to power is very similar to Ibn Khaldun's idea that religious messages do not succeed without the back up by the force of arms provided by tribal forces united through '*asabiyah*', which the Ritters equate with Machiavelli's *virtu* (Ritter 1948, p. 2). While Ritter uses the controversial Rosenthal translation, it is clear that as a citizen of a state with no colonial history in the North Africa/Middle East region, he brings a good dose of detachment from the colonial project that seems to have infected many earlier works. For example he cites both Western and Arab examples of sacrificing oneself in defence of a group identity. Mindful of Germany's condition during the war and its aftermath, Ritter outlines the problems associated with a strong group identity and its effects on the group and people outside it. As Ritter argues, the 16th and 17th chapters of the *Muqaddimah* are particularly similar to Machiavelli's discussions on international relations within *The Prince*. Ibn Khaldun argues that wilder nations are more capable of overcoming their opponents and that the solidarity group will expand until resistance from other groups limits its expansion and it eventually settles within a clearer frontier (Ritter 1948, p. 40, Ibn Khaldun 2005, pp. 138–139). In his conclusion, Ritter suggests that the solidarity group's behaviour is hardly irrational by telling a story about pigeons that escape a net by cooperating.

So is Machiavelli an imitator of Ibn Khaldun? The main difference between Machiavelli and Ibn Khaldun lies in the former's use of the Prince's perspective in *The Prince* and the State's perspective in *The discourses on Livy*, while Ibn Khaldun uses the tribal identity group as his unit of analysis. Ritter's analysis illustrates that Machiavelli's contribution was preceded by similar logic by Ibn Khaldun. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun argues that polities have limits in terms of territory and areas that they conquer and control. This last argument is only implicit in Machiavelli's work (Ibn Khaldun 2005, p. 160).

### ***The literature and international relations***

The academic literature on Ibn Khaldun close to international relations tends to focus on similarities between Ibn Khaldun and other foundational texts such as Machiavelli and Thucydides. Yet the key concepts remain untouched except in work carried out by scholars of the classics who often do face the questions facing scholars of international relations. Identity remains one of the main puzzles in international relations today. It seems to motivate many wars, conflicts, disputes and dilemmas that resist any prescribed solutions. Within the field, it is derided as a cause of violence by liberals, often ignored by realists, who prescribe against the emotions it engenders and Marxists who see in it a false consciousness. The only schools which have some degree of comfort with the idea of identity are the social constructivists and the postmodernists. Yet the latter are particularly weary of the idea despite the fact that it is used to explain many of the conflicts. In contrast, social constructivist scholars of international studies tend to accept the existence of a darker side to identity in general, but they seek to use it to explain problems in order to solve them.

This brings us to the second bone of contention within international relations: the nature of human progress. Realists and Marxists believe that history has a discernable pattern. Classical

realist IR scholars have always argued that the basic fallen nature of man simply insures the cycle of war, peace and the construction and dissolution of states. Perhaps the most direct statement of this realist position came from Bismarck who once proclaimed that the *Mark Brandenburg*, the core of the Prussian state, will one day come under the rule of ‘unbelieving Jesuits’. While Marxists also believe in episodic conflict described as revolution or Third World independence movements, they mainly foresee a catastrophic end to world capitalism and the establishment of a utopian future. Liberals see human development as linear and would dispute the cycles suggested by Ibn Khaldun’s analysis.

Ibn Khaldun’s work is not ‘secular’ in the sense that religion plays a very important role in the cycles he proposes. The discipline of international relations since 1648 generally preferred to view the issue of religion as a strictly internal matter to be determined by each state on its territory and on its own terms. It had no place in analysis save for the role assigned to it by classical realists: the creation of an internally coherent state through the use of an ideology. The Treaty of Westphalia’s cornerstone provision was that religion belonged to whoever held the region. The treaty ended a worldwide conflict between European states that began as a war of religion and ended with the collapse of traditional alliances with Roman Catholic France aligned with Lutheran Sweden, so the discipline that eventually emerged to study international relations traditionally refused to include the issue of religion. This clear state of affairs came to an abrupt end on 11 September 2001. Including Ibn Khaldun in the cannon of basic texts can help account for this gap in the discipline. Fortunately, international relations can turn to help from Middle Eastern Studies, the classics and Philosophy whose literature, partially discussed above, has tried to account for the importance of religion.

### **‘Asabiyah and identity**

In the seventh and eighth chapters of the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun uses the story of Joseph in the Qu’ran to define his concept of ‘asabiyah. He recounts that Joseph’s brothers claim that ‘a wolf ate him, and we are an *‘asabah* [sic, the root of ‘asabiyah], therefore we are losers’. He argues that ‘asabiyah is based on two factors: kinship and loyalty based on allegiance or *wala* and *hilf*. After he defines the term, he limits its application to Arabs and similar peoples and argues that the decline of the Arab world is the story of the decline of ‘asabiyah through conquest of other peoples, settlement and intermarriage, which led to the loss of the tribal unity necessary for the maintenance of ‘asabiyah (Ibn Khaldun 2005, pp. 126–130). In the following chapters, he further argues that there is no equivalent feeling of solidarity among non-Arab Muslims, and non-Muslims living under Muslim rule, whether free or slave, unless they are amalgamated into a tribal Arab lineage. It is useful at this stage to refer to Ritter’s work on Ibn Khaldun. It is clear that Arabs are not the only group that uses lineage, both real and imagined, to establish group solidarity. Examples abound from Korea to North America of groups that developed deep solidarity, particularly against outsiders. Yet, we must remember that Ibn Khaldun’s sample was limited by two historical shadows that distorted his perspective: the two cosmopolitan empires into which the Islamic world was borne, Sassanian Iran and Byzantium. In both empires, elites from diverse ethnic and tribal backgrounds intermarried as did their respective populations. This stood in sharp contrast to the tribalism of the earliest Arab rulers, itself destined to be eclipsed by the cosmopolitanism of the urban civilisations they absorbed. While there were other cultures and peoples, these were often marginal and unstudied. Some of these groups were also agricultural, non-Muslim and in subject status, therefore lacking the importance necessary to attract an analyst’s attention. The concept is not flawed, it is simply

an earlier form of what is described today as *identity* by postmodern authors in international studies.

Deriving their arguments from Nietzsche and Foucault, postmodern writers indict the state and nationalism, along with identity, as the single most dangerous human construction. J. Ann Tickner, a professor of international relations at the University of Southern California and this year's International Studies Association annual conference president, encapsulates this perspective when she cites David Campbell's work on identity:

Campbell claims that the state requires this discourse of danger to secure its identity and legitimation which depend on the promise of security for its citizens. Citizenship becomes synonymous with loyalty and the elimination of all that is foreign. (Tickner 1995, p. 189)

More bluntly, but passionately, James Der Derian, 'one must have recourse to a philosophical, reflexive and critical approach that helps us to understand how one's own identity is implicated in the study of the killing of others – for this remains the greatest weight of [international relations]' (Der Derian 1997, p. 71). These postmodernists define identity with reference to inclusion and exclusion dynamics that used to create social and political groups. While Ibn Khaldun recognised that there are instances where non-relatives can form strong bonds of identity, he gave primacy to blood relations. Also, in Ibn Khaldun's world, the state was not constituted in the same way it manifested itself in the current Westphalian world. Nevertheless, there are some advantages in including his work, because it is one of the first to introduce the notion of political identity, albeit in a narrow and tribal form. His was a more cosmopolitan world where belonging to a great empire meant adopting its religion. One of the reasons that make Ibn Khaldun's work appear modern and even postmodern is that he was partially seeking to explain the collapse of the Arab Empire of the Umayyads and the Abbasids into a fragmented collection of smaller empires that occasionally warred despite a common religious basis. Indeed, the thing that most closely resembled today's national identity in his world may have been '*asabiyah*'.

Does Ibn Khaldun frown on the tribes that overthrow states and establish dynasties? It appears that Ritter's assessment of Ibn Khaldun as an ethical thinker may have some bearing on this question. In many respects, tribal takeovers are both necessary and inescapable under his system. While he does respect the tribes, he also scorns some of their actions. This suggests that he would not necessarily believe that '*asabiyah*' is as destructive as today's national identity. We live in a world where tribes are no longer capable of deposing established states, except in some very marginal parts of the world, and we do not know how Ibn Khaldun would respond to this problem.

## Cycles

Cycles, in contrast to powerful tribes, persist today, according to realist thinkers in international studies. Ibn Khaldun's cycle updates earlier Greek works. He outlines factors that aid and hasten the collapse of the state and the rotation of the cycle of the birth and death of states. Ibn Khaldun argues that the state has a finite life, like that of a human being. Ibn Khaldun argues that the state has a life cycle that lasts three generations or 120 years (Ibn Khaldun 2005, pp. 167–168). The state begins to fall due to two things: the military's passing into the hands of mercenaries and overspending by the royal household. Both of these factors gravely weaken the state and especially its tribal core identity, opening it up to attacks by alternative tribes centred on a different '*asabiyah*'. The cycle of dynasties centred on today's Morocco is used as evidence for this

thesis. The rise of the alternative tribal forces is often associated with long wars until the new dynasty is firmly established (Ibn Khaldun 2005, pp. 276–281).

The object of dynastic struggles is, of course, the throne. Struggles between states, on the other hand, involve contests for hegemony between states or groups of states that have the capacity to engage in the bidding process for global leadership. Building on earlier work by Quincy Wright and using insights from the business cycle, George Modelska, then a professor at the University of Washington, developed a cyclical theory of hegemony in the global system. Outlining his differences with the Marxist tradition in international relations, he points out that the world has always lacked a single state structure, but has had an order based on hegemonic states. He outlines five long cycles of hegemony, with each cycle lasting 100 years on average and 130 years at most – about the same number given by Ibn Khaldun for the life of states. At one point, he even mentions three generations as the normal life of hegemony – again a number used by Ibn Khaldun as the lifespan of a state. Between 1494 and the current period, Portugal, the Netherlands, Great Britain and the United States have dominated the global system. Great Britain enjoyed hegemony in two such cycles, with the last one ending in 1945. Modelska's method centred on two elements: a descriptive history and an attempt to explain the causes of the shift of power. He argues that the long cycle is the product of preconditions: the urge to establish a world order and the asymmetric distribution of resources needed to establish it. Each of the five cycles of hegemony has its origins in a world war, was based on a monopoly of a trade route or routes at sea, served a certain function and ultimately was drawn out of the sea into land-based territorial disputes. At the core of each system lay a nation-state, with its empire accreted around it rather than a cosmopolitan world system. For Modelska, the nation-state is the core component because it is the best unit for organising people for armed conflict. The system eventually collapses because other nation-states imitate the hegemonic power in economic matters and try to use nationalism and counter-nationalism against it (Modelska 1978, pp. 214–235). Modelska echoes Ibn Khaldun when he makes this last point, because the latter predicts that a state's extent will always be limited by the '*asabiyyah* of other states.

In contrast to Modelska's concentration on nationalism, Robert Gilpin, one of the leading scholars in international relations, argues that the root of violent change in World Politics, defined as the establishment of a new world order is caused by the redistribution of power among states in the world system. As long as all of the major states see benefits in the continuation of the hegemony of one power, its system would continue to dominate, but if a major state or group of states believe that the continuation of the hegemony is not in their interests, they are bound to challenge it (Gilpin 1981, pp. 1–15, 39–44, Viotti and Kaupi 1999, pp. 145–153). Gilpin had built on Modelska's work and helped start a trend. The study of these cycles became fashionable in the 1980s and 1990s, and works by historians like Paul Kennedy, Mancur Olson, Charles Kindleberger and Joseph Lepgold added additional detail to the basic outlines of the arguments of Modelska and Gilpin. These historians tended to concentrate on economic rather than other forms of power. Decline sets in as the hegemon begins a process of imperial overstretch, lavish arms expenditures and a failed domestic system (Kindleberger 1973, Olson 1982, Kennedy 1987, Lepgold 1990, Viotti and Kaupi 1999, p. 79) These factors may be the modern forms of the lavish court life that dooms that Khaldunian state discussed earlier.

A leading argument for including Khaldunian classical readings in international relations lies in his use of historical cycles. The realist tradition is almost wholly cyclical in its view of history, and the Khaldunian cycle of the state seems to capture the same variables noted by Modelska. Like Modelska and other realists, Ibn Khaldun also centres his analysis on the rise and fall of the state. In short, given any reasonable criteria for classifying him in international

relations, Ibn Khaldun is a realist, and perhaps the most systemic and extensive of the pre-modern realists. Nevertheless, there are some significant differences to note. First, the Khaldunian state is not the same as the European and North American states described by Modelski. Defeats in major wars suffered by France, Germany, Japan and Spain did not doom these states to oblivion. Their regimes and sometimes their dynasties changed, but they continued on. The state of Ibn Khaldun's world was centred on the ruling dynasty. It would even be fair to say that the state *was* the ruling dynasty. Its defeat could lead to its extinction, and for that reason, it often tried to hold on to power as long as possible – witness the fate of some North African dynasties. Second, under Ibn Khaldun's system, a dead state could not be revived (Ibn Khaldun 2005, pp. 145–146, 275, 347–349). Modelski outlines two periods of British hegemony, suggesting that there have been changes concerning the historic cycles since Ibn Khaldun's time. It is now conceivable to have a state lose its hegemonic role and then recover it for a second cycle, as was the case with Great Britain. This second difference may be closely linked with the first factor – the survival of the dynasty or the ruling regime is no longer the guarantor of the continuity of a state. Third, the nation-states described by Modelski are based on *nations* and not tribes. There are significant differences in size, extent, and cohesion between the two categories of comparison. It would be easy in light of these three factors to be tempted to dismiss Ibn Khaldun's work from international relations. This temptation should be rejected because the basic pattern of rise and fall due to economics, distribution of power, and counter-nationalism were outlined by Ibn Khaldun hundreds of years ago. Modelski, Gilpin and the others simply provide us with the updated edition of the same argument applied to bureaucratic, secular, national states rather than dynastic, religious, tribal ones.

## Religion

Writing in an Islamic context meant that Ibn Khaldun could not avoid addressing religion. He argues that great states are based on either prophetic faith or a 'just call' or reinforcement of an existing faith, in this case Islam. The basis for this observation is that religion enhances the strength of '*asabiyah*', because it increases the tribe's cohesion. He also cites several cases of success and failure of combining tribal solidarity with religious fervour. His standard of evaluating the religious correctness of any of the particular movements he cites was their military and political success (Ibn Khaldun 2005, pp. 156–158). This is a curious position for a Maliki judge to take, at least from my perspective. There is no discussion of the religious ideas proclaimed by the various rebels. We have a brief assessment based on their military success or failure. If they were defeated along with the tribe they incited to revolt, then Ibn Khaldun regards their call to have been false. This is perhaps too pragmatic for a 'normal' Muslim jurisprudent. The pattern he identifies probably persists to this day. The combination of religious ideology with tribal fervour was the path to power for many Middle Eastern and North African dynasties, including the Qajars in recent Iranian history. Indeed it can be argued that it is precisely such a cycle that produced the Saudi state, as shown earlier in the discussion on the Saudi Shi'a appropriation of Ibn Khaldun. It is also noteworthy that he does not regard the religious factor by itself to be determining. He argues that a religious mission or calling does not succeed without a strong base in '*asabiyah*'. Would the reverse be the case then? Can a tribal group succeed without a religious base? There is apparent silence on this point.

In contrast, the discipline of international relations has not paid much attention to the role of religion in world politics. Curiously, the impact of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine and

Aristotle on the ethical dimensions of states' international behaviour was not only embraced but endorsed by classical realists of many religious traditions. Yet, the realists themselves did not wish to proceed from the perspective that religion itself motivates state behaviour in ways that do not relate to its interests. They sought to use ethics, often derived from religious traditions, as a *limiting* factor on state behaviour rather than an affirmative motivator for actions taken by the state or by groups. The classical realists did argue that culture informs state policy and that it has a role to play in the formation of foreign policy, but they preferred to use the broader category to avoid marking some religions as better or worse than others. In contrast, the postmodernists were much more aware of the relationship of religion to identity and to violence. The discipline, dominated by realists, tended to not address religion directly. James G. Mellon, a US scholar, viewed the role played by religion in analysis offered by international relations scholars in a recent article and this paper owes its treatment of the problem to his work (Fallows 2002).

Religion reappeared in the domain of international relations due to Samuel Huntington's *Clash of civilizations* article in *Foreign affairs* (Huntington 1993). Huntington's thesis does not need restatement here, but it is different from Ibn Khaldun's approach in that it places religion rather than identity at the centre of analysis. After the ensuing controversy, the discipline responded with an edited volume (1994) and two special issues of *Orbis* (1998) and *Millennium* (2000) (Fallows 2002). After the attacks of 11 September 2001, the academic market was flooded with books on religion and political violence, but many of these works were sensational and sometimes anti-Islamic; so it is worthwhile to limit the discussion to the period before 11 September 2001. All of these works concluded that the role of religion has been neglected in international relations and that religion is a vital and important factor to consider in discussions of foreign policy.

The edited volume, produced by Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, was titled *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Johnston and Sampson 1994). The book presents a balanced view of the role of religion in international relations arguing that it has often restrained the worst of state behaviour and fostered peace while at the same time it has caused wars. Edward Luttwak, a leading US international security scholar, argues that religion is often ignored in the study of international relations:

Policy-makers, diplomats, journalists, and scholars who are ready to over-interpret economic causality, who are apt to dissect social differentiations most finely, and who will minutely categorize political affiliations are still in the habit of disregarding the role of religion, religious institutions, and religious motivations in explaining politics and conflict, and even in reporting their concrete modalities. (Luttwak 1994, p. 9)

Fallows argues that the authors writing in the special issues dedicated to religion in *Orbis* and *Millennium* reach similar conclusions concerning the relationship between faith and international relations (McDougall 1998, Hasenclever and Rittberger 2000). This suggests that the mainstream liberal, realist and social constructivist approaches to international relations are becoming more cognisant of the role played by religion in motivating international behaviour. Yet, this recognition falls safely short of the 'clash of civilisations' argument advanced by Huntington. Religion is an important factor, but it is not the central factor in international relations. In other words, international relations is moving to a perspective similar to that of Ibn Khaldun.

It is noteworthy that Machiavelli deeply differs from Ibn Khaldun on this particular issue. Machiavelli was extremely hostile to the Church and in *The discourses on Titus Livy*, he pins

the blame for the Samanites' defeats at the hands of the Romans on the formers' over-reliance on religion. To that extent, Ibn Khaldun represents a moderate middling position between assigning no role to religion (as with Machiavelli) and over-emphasising the role of religion (as with Huntington). There are some problems with including Ibn Khaldun's contribution on religion in international relations. First, he is inseparable from the Islamic context in which he lived and wrote. We live in a world with plural Truths (with a capital T) and languages; so translating him in a manner that would make him relevant to non-Muslim scholars of international relations would be difficult, particularly as there are authors ready to pounce on such 'colonialist' appropriations of his legacy. Second, he is, at least according to Taha Hussein, a rather unusual Islamic jurisprudent who wrote in the domain of the secular. May it have been that he also privileged the secular over the spiritual? He explains that '*asabiyah* is more important than religious fervour, but to what extent? There is an absence of precision. Third, there is the issue of his personal character and reliability. He left the employment of the ruler of Egypt to write a book on the geography of the Maghreb for his new boss – Timur Leng. This brings his own religious commitment into question, given the fact that his decision to work for Timur Leng could be seen as a profound act of opportunism at the very least.

Yet these are problems that face every scholar of international relations today. We are products of the contexts that produce us and are often incoherent outside them. We face the problem of using both philosophy and history without a commitment to either. And finally, much of what we write ends up being used by policy makers for their own purposes. Worse yet, it is not very likely that any international relations scholar would fail to cooperate today with powerful politicians who would physically destroy them – even the confrontation between Hans Morgenthau, one of the founders of classical realism in international relations, and Lyndon Baines Johnson, then president of the United States, did not involve the possibility of the murder of Professor Morgenthau.

## Conclusion

Morgenthau and other classical realists emphasised the importance of understanding the history and cultures of foreign countries as a basic requirement for the proper practice of international relations as a discipline or a profession. For example, George Ball, then a leading United States diplomat, read the Portuguese national epic before his meetings with Salazar concerning decolonisation of Angola and Mozambique. Unfortunately, the discipline itself is not inclusive in those ancient and medieval authors it uses to illustrate its roots. We read Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes before moving on to Locke, Kant and Rousseau. These old texts are then followed by the products of the modern and postmodern worlds we are living in. We do not read Kautilya, Ibn Khaldun and Sun Tzu. Some of the arguments raised against including these authors are that they were not systematic or, more commonly, they did not write about the post-Westphalian world order of states.

But this begs the question, did Thucydides? Did Machiavelli? Did Hobbes? Of course not, but they are included nevertheless. The peculiarities of the Greek city-states of Thucydides' world make them as distant as the Islamic states and empires described by Ibn Khaldun. The latter brings a comprehensive approach to the discipline beginning from setting the geographic context to addressing economic and religious factors. He also sets identity in the form of '*asabiyah*' at the core of his analysis. His approach includes elements of realism, liberalism, Marxism, and postmodernity. The text is also older than many Western texts of its kind, save that of Thucydides. There is no warrant for its exclusion from basic international relations texts, especially the sections concerning the rise of the state and the relationship between identity,

religion and the state. In the literature review, we have seen that Ibn Khaldun is appropriated by current scholars and propagandists for their own purposes, but we did not see him being invited into international relations – just into many of its components.

It is also important for international relations to steer clear of being involved in any post-colonialist arguments surrounding Ibn Khaldun because we no longer live in a colonial world. International relations is primarily interested in learning from the past to manage the present in order to shape a better future. It is keenly aware of the past, but refuses to remain hostage to it, particularly its less admirable aspects. While what the anti-colonialist scholars are offering is an interesting spin on history, it is very important to have adequate, reliable and politically neutral translations of the *Muqaddimah* in many languages in order to share Ibn Khaldun's insights internationally. To insist that Ibn Khaldun's Arabic is not translatable is to isolate Arabic language scholarship to the detriment of the Arab world and Arabic-speaking scholars. Such a position also feeds an identity-based confrontation that exacerbates the clash of identities in international relations. It does nothing to improve the possibilities of coexistence.

This paper illustrates that Ibn Khaldun understood the role of identity, historical cycles and religion in the construction and destruction of states. It also shows that these concepts are very similar to key ideas used in international relations today. In addition, it showed through a review of the literature that Ibn Khaldun was aware of the role played by economics in politics and of the role of the state as the creator of markets. There is yet an added benefit to including Ibn Khaldun today in basic reading in international relations. He outlines the role played by Muslim preachers and guides in organising and developing resistance movements against states and governments, which should help to demystify that particular process in the non-Muslim world and perhaps help improve mutual understanding and perhaps relations in the future.

There are some pitfalls, however. Ibn Khaldun does not value civilisation as much as habitation. He regards it as corrupt and corrupting. He does foreshadow Rousseau in this respect, but some of his reasons may appear to be politically incorrect. For example, he regards civilisation as leading to human vice. In addition he views African people as childlike and emotional and lambastes his own people unfairly and certainly harshly. Yet these sorts of problems also exist with many writers who wrote long after him. Machiavelli has a very misogynistic streak and Hobbes' view of human beings is undeniably negative. Yet these discussions are in sections that do not directly lead to discussions of international relations. These sections can be included to allow students to criticise the thinker and to develop a nuanced view of the man and his period rather than a hagiographic appreciation of his genius, which was certainly special.

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