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A Khaldunian Perspective on the Dynamics of Asiatic Societies

Syed Farid Alatas

INTRODUCTION

During the last twenty years or so, scholars in the Third World began to become critical of what came to be known as the captive mind. The captive mind is uncritical and imitative in its approach to ideas and concepts from the West.¹ Discussions on the problem of mental captivity coincided with efforts to indigenise the social sciences in the post-war period when most of the Third World gained formal independence.²

At the theoretical level, indigenization refers to the generation and use of concepts and theories from indigenous intellectual traditions, historical experiences, and cultural practices. This essay represents such an activity and indicates an avenue for the application of the theory of state formation developed by the Arab historical sociologist, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun to the case of the Safavi Iranian polity (907/1501-1134/1722).³ In doing so, a number of theoretical problems in the study of Safavi state formation that arise from the application of Marxism and work-system theory are touched upon. Accordingly, the safavi political economy can be characterised in terms of a tributary mode of production as the dominant mode in a secondary state-based world-system. Ibn Khaldun's work provides a theoretical framework with which to understand the rise of the Safavi world empire.

In what follows a brief outline of ibn Khaldun's theory is sketched. In the following two sections, I then provide an overview of Safavi economy and society. In the fourth and fifth sections, ibn Khaldun's theory is used to explain the rise and nature of the Safavi 'Asiatic' state. This is followed by some concluding remarks on ibn Khaldun and the indigenization of the social sciences.

IBN KHALDUN ON THE RISE OF THE STATE

Before we proceed let us turn to a brief excursus on ibn Khaldun's theory.⁴

Abu Zaid 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun Wali alDin al-Tunisi al-Hadhrami al-Ishbili al-Maliki was born on 1 Ramadan/5 May 732 AH/1332 AD. After receiving a customary education in the traditional sciences ibn Khaldun held posts in various courts in North Africa and Spain. After a number of unsuccessful stints in office he withdrew into seclusion to write his *Muqaddimah*, a prolegomena to the study of history which was completed in 1378.

Ibn Khaldun's central concern was with the study of the rise and fall of the various Maghribi states for which he developed an original method. This begins with theorizing the differences in social organization between nomadic (*'umran badawi*) and sedentary (*'umran hadhari*) societies. He elaborated on the concept of authority and the nature of power that it entailed. He saw nomadic civilization as naturally evolving toward sedentary civilization not in the sense that the one gives way to the other but rather in the sense that "sedentary culture is the goal of bedouin life" and that "the goal of civilization is sedentary culture and luxury."⁶ Fundamental to his theory is the concept of *'asabiyya* or group feeling. Only a society with a strong *'asabiyya* could establish domination over one with a weak *'asabiyya*.⁷ In this context, *'asabiyya* refers to the feeling of solidarity among the members of a group that is derived from the knowledge that they share a common descent. As we shall see later, however, descent is not the only consideration. Because of superior *'asabiyya* among the bedouin they could defeat sedentary people in urban areas and establish their own dynasties. Having done so, they became set in the urban ways of life and experienced great diminution in their *'asabiyya*. With this went their military strength and their ability to rule. This left them vulnerable to attack by fresh supplies of pre-urban bedouins with stronger *'asabiyya* who replaced the weaker urbanized ones. But the relationship is not one of the domination of the city by the tribes. Rather it is a relationship of dominance in the other direction of which there are two important aspects. First of all, the nature of the existence of the tribesmen makes them dependent on the cities for the basic necessities of life.⁸ Secondly, the tribes are dependent on a prophet or saint (*wali*) ulama who interpret religion for them.

When there is a prophet or saint among them, who calls upon them to fulfill the commands of God and rids them of blameworthy qualities and causes them to adopt praiseworthy ones, and who has them concentrate all their strength in order to make the truth prevail, they become fully united (as a social organization) and obtain superiority and royal authority.⁹

The social cohesion expressed by the concept of *'asabiyya* is only partly derived from agnatic ties in tribal social organizations. While all tribal groups have stronger or weaker *'asabiyyas* based on kinship, religion can also bring about such social cohesion as was the case with the Arabs who needed Islam in order to subordinate themselves and unite as a social organization.¹⁰ But beyond this social psychological aspect of *'asabiyya*, there are its material manifestations. In order to proceed it will be necessary to refer to the concept of *mulk* (royal authority) in ibn Khaldun. This is not merely leadership.

Leadership means being a chieftain [*sahib*], and the leader is obeyed, but he has no power to force others to accept his rulings. Royal authority means superiority and the power to rule by force.¹¹

Because of *'asabiyya* a tribal chieftain will be obeyed by his followers, a pre-

condition for achieving royal authority. But it is not merely the psychological feeling of cohesion that achieves this. '*Asabiyya* refers to the authority that is wielded by the chieftain that derives, in addition, from his material standing as a result of profits from trade and appropriation from plunder and pillage.¹² For ibn Khaldun, then, '*asabiyya* referred to 1) kinship ties, 2) a socially cohesive religion such as Islam that provided a shared idiom legitimizing the chieftain's aspirations for *mulk*, and 3) the strength of the chieftain through trade, booty, pillage and conquest.

Once a tribe founds a dynasty and its members assume the various positions of the ruling class the conditions for the decline in '*asabiyya* are established. There are at least two general ways in which this takes place. One is where the second generation of tribesmen who founded the dynasty experience a change "from the desert attitude to sedentary culture, from privation to luxury, from a state in which everybody shared in the glory to one in which one man claims all the glory for himself while the others are too lazy to strive for (glory), and from proud superiority to humble subservience. Thus, the vigour of group feeling is broken to some extent." By the third generation '*asabiyya* disappears completely.¹³

Another distinct way in which '*asabiyya* declines is when the "ruler gains complete control over his people, claims royal authority all for himself, excluding them, and prevents them from trying to have a share in it."¹⁴ In other words, when a tribal group establishes a dynasty and its authority becomes legitimate the ruler can dispense with '*asabiyya*. The ascendant ruler then rules with the help of, not his own people, but rather those of other tribal groups who have become his clients. The rule attempts to exclude the supporting tribe from power. The ability of a tribal chieftain to maintain '*asabiyya* under these circumstances is diminished.

When we speak of diminishing '*asabiyya*, then, we refer to the circumstances under which a chieftain is no longer able to command tribal support 1) by appealing to kinship and/or other ties, 2) due to the corrosion in social cohesion that results from either luxurious urban life or from attempts by the ruler to dispense with '*asabiyya*. As '*asabiyya* decreases, the power of the ruling dynasty diminishes until it is finally conquered by another tribal group with superior '*asabiyya*. And so the cycle repeats itself.¹⁵ In what follows, I will present a brief overview of Safavi economy and society, and the Safavi mode of production, after which an explanation of Safavi history in terms of ibn Khaldun's theory is presented.

SAFAVI ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

The question of the emergence of the Safavi state will be dealt with in a later section. In this and the next section, a description and conceptualization of the Safavi political economy is provided.

The three areas of surplus appropriation were agriculture, industry, and trade.

The ruling class consisted of the state and military bureaucracy, and the religious institution. The following account on the sources and recipients of surplus is largely based on the situation in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹⁶

In the area of agriculture, land was generally owned by the state. Land tenure was based on the contract of *muzara'a*, a share of the crop being the rent.¹⁷ All categories of land, state, *mulk*, *tuyul/suyurghal* (benefice) and *vaqf* (religious endowment) lands were worked by peasants.¹⁸ Tribal khans who were granted *tuyul/suyurghal* land in return for their military services to the Safavi state¹⁹ had the right to collect tax revenue from these lands.

The next source of revenue was the urban surplus obtained by means of taxes and duties imposed on craft industry and trade. In Safavi Iran craft guilds (*asnaf*, sing. *sinf*) were subject to various taxes, as well as to corvees, but the rations, pay and fringe benefits they received were substantial.²⁰ As far as trade was concerned, in Safavi Iran merchants were relatively free from state control.

Apart from the shah and the sultan and their bureaucracies which collected the surplus, there was also the ulama (religious clerics) who formed part of the ruling class. The ulama had sources of wealth and economic power such as *vaqf* land. The *sadr* administered the *arbab-i 'ama'im* (religious institution) and *vaqf* property.²¹ In addition to this, the Iranian Shi'i ulama derived economic power by virtue of being the direct recipients of a tax called the *khums* unlike their Sunni counterparts in the rest of the Muslim world. In addition to this, a poor tax, the *zakat* was also paid directly to the Safavi Shi'i ulama.

The ulama were critical of and antagonistic towards the state, this antagonism increasing as financial problems of the state emerged. The ulama were not unified into a religious institution and were able to avoid being totally incorporated into the Safavi state.²² That is, a distinction can be made between the local Persian ulama and the imported Arab ulama who were patronized by the Safavi shahs.²³

Thus, the picture that we have of the Safavi state in the sixteenth century is one of a strong ruling elite consisting of the civil, military, and religious fractions extracting surplus from the peasantry, craftsmen and merchants.

There is one more element of the class structure of this society that we need to mention before we proceed. This is the tribal population. For our purposes, two important aspects of the tribal population must be understood. One is that they had played key roles in the establishment of the Safavi dynasty.²⁴ Beyond this, various tribes continued to exert an influence on the state and constituted a threat to the central authority of the state.²⁵ Together with the ulama they constituted the main opposition to the state.

Between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries the various tribes constituted approximately one-fourth of the population of Iran. These tribes were divided into five major ethnic groups, Turkoman, Iranian, Kurdish, Arab, and Baluch.²⁶ Of

particular importance, as far as the rise of the Safavi state is concerned, were the Turkoman tribes. As early as the eleventh century the administrative, economic, and social systems of Iran came under the influence of the Turkoman tribal institution. After the Safavi state was established with the aid of tribal military support, vast territories of Iran came under the administration of *uymaqs*. The *uymaq* was a Safavi concept of tribe that was constituted by economic, administrative, and military ties between groups that were not necessarily related by ties of kinship, although succession to the rule of the *uymaq* was based on kinship. Tribal chieftains or *khans* controlled the various *uymaqs* in Iran to which oversaw both rural and urban production.²⁷ The *uymaq* was the means by which the tribal population became integrated with sedentary society and participated in the administration of the state.

THE SAFAVI MODE OF PRODUCTION

Hitherto works on Safavi society have tended to describe its economic system in terms of unitary modes of production.

Attempts have been made to characterise the economic system in terms of the feudal mode of production.²⁸ Others have characterised the system in terms of the Asiatic mode of production.²⁹ The various characterizations of Safavi Iran as feudal or Asiatic tend to stretch the meaning of the terms Asiatic and feudal too far and also amount to obscuring the nature of the relations and forces of production that operated there. Foran's recent article on the modes of production in seventeenth century Iran is a significant improvement on previous works in that he views Safavi society as having been made up of three distinct modes of production.³⁰

Following Amin and Wolf,³¹ my approach will be to view various precapitalist systems that are based on political coercion in the relations of production as tributary modes of production. Thus, the feudal and Asiatic systems would be examples of tributary modes of production, the former being less centralized than the latter. The intention here is not to engage in an elaborate discussion on the various modes of production that co-existed in Safavi Iran. The Safavi mode of production was a tributary one of the 'Asiatic' variety, although this must be understood in terms of a number of qualifications.³²

Marx made brief excursions into the history of India and other "oriental" societies in order to discover what he regarded as the barriers to capitalist development in these societies. Marx conceptualised the economic systems of these societies in terms of the Asiatic mode of production.

In the Asiatic mode of production, power is centralised in the state. The entire economic surplus is appropriated by the state and the state is the legal owner of landed and manufacturing property.³³ Such a state is extremely strong when it controls a strategic element in the production process such as irrigation works or an army of superior military ability.³⁴ In addition to the centralization of power in the

state, the Asiatic mode of production is defined in terms of the absence of private property in land,³⁵ and the combination of agriculture and manufacturing within the self-sustaining small community.³⁶ The basic ingredient of historical progression, class struggle, was missing and Asiatic societies were, as a result, stagnant.³⁷ Abrahamian, in his discussion on the Asiatic mode of production in Qajar Iran, finds two separate explanations for the power of the Asiatic state in Marx and Engels: "1) the public works were the business of the central government; 2) the whole empire, not counting the few larger towns, was divided into villages, which possessed a completely separate organization and formed a little world in themselves."³⁸ In the first explanation, the state is strong by virtue of its having a large bureaucracy to administer public works. In the second explanation, the state is strong by virtue of the existence of a weak and fragmented society. This is the distinction between what Abrahamian calls the theory of bureaucratic despotism and the theory of fragmented society.³⁹

Clearly, two traits stand out as not being relevant to the case of Safavi Iran. These are the prominence of large scale public works and the absence of classes and class struggle. The centralised despotic state of Safavi Iran derived its power from neither the administration of largescale public works (theory of bureaucratic despotism) nor from the existence of a fragmented, classeless society (theory of fragmented society). There were no large-scale public works for the state to administer and Safavi society was not classless.

What then was the basis of the power of this state? It was derived from the control by the state of the superior military capability provided by pastoral nomads. Invading nomads aided in the establishment of a centralised state. The tribute paid by tribal members to the tribal chieftain was the forerunner of the Asiatic tax/rent.⁴⁰ The Safavi state was established as a result of the migrations of nomadic peoples. This then is one trait of the political system that existed in Safavi Iran.

Another trait of the Asiatic mode of production concerns the extraction of surplus directly from the dominated classes. In the Asiatic mode of production the state is both landlord and sovereign. Taxes and rent coincide in the sense that there was no tax that differed from ground-rent.⁴¹ The tax/rent couple is a result of the "coupling of political sovereignty and landownership in the state which appropriates the economic surplus directly from the populace then it will be clear that the Safavi economic system cannot be characterised by 'Asiatic' forms of surplus appropriation alone. A distinction was made between *divani* (state) and *khassa* (imperial estate) land.⁴³ It was revenue from the latter which accrued directly to the ruler and his household.⁴⁴ However, not all revenues went directly to the ruler or the state. There were other forms of surplus appropriation that are to be found in the tributary mode of production in Safavi Iran. Benefices (*tuyul* and *suyurghal*) were also granted in which cases revenues accrued to the holders of such benefices.

Iqta' is a term for a form of an administrative or military grant.⁴⁵ It is an institution which became regularised during period of the Seljuk Empire (A. D. 1087-1157).⁴⁶ During Safavi times the term was replaced by *tuyul* and *suyurghal*. *Tuyul* referred to grants of land that were not hereditary and were made mostly in outlying areas, resembling provincial governments. In return, the *tuyuldar* (*tuyul* holder) provided a military contingent for the shah in times of need. He was also entrusted with the administration of the land.⁴⁷ The term *tuyul* was also used to designate land assigned in lieu of salary.⁴⁸ Other uses of the term referred to grants of immunity of property and grants of *khassa* (imperial estate) land to the army. ⁴⁹ The term *suyurghal* was used mainly to denote hereditary or life grants of *khassa* and *vaqf* land, and usufructory property, and often included a grant of immunity.⁵⁰

There are superficial similarities between the institutions of the *tuyul/suyurghal* and the fief.⁵¹ These include the grant of land in return for military service, the grant of land in lieu of salary, the grant of immunities, the high status of the military, and the existence of an exploited peasantry.⁵² However, there is a fundamental difference between the fief on the one hand and the Safavi institutions on the other. The granting of a fief was based on a contract of fealty that established a solidary, fraternal relationship between lord and vassal involving reciprocal obligations of loyalty. This is in contrast to the granting of *tuyul/suyurghal* which generally did not involve a contract of personal fealty carrying reciprocal obligations of loyalty. Rather they were granted mainly out of fiscal considerations and existed in the general context of a despotic state. In the feudal mode of production as it existed in Europe rule at the apex of the system was relatively fragile and weak. Power was held mainly by local lords. In Safavi Iran, however, rule at the apex of the system was strong. Land was owned by local lords in the case of European feudalism but was the property of the state in the case of Safavi Iran. It would, therefore, not be accurate to characterise the Safavi system in terms of the feudal mode of production.

Any discussion on the Safavi mode of production cannot ignore the presence of nomadic tribes. The term nomadic pertains to the absence of permanent habitat; pastoral refers to subsistence by the products of domesticated animals.⁵³ These animals provide nomadic society with its basic needs in food (butter, cheese, meat, yoghurt), drink (milk), clothing (hides, wool), fuel (dung), and means of transportation (camel, donkey, horses, oxen).⁵⁴ Animals, tools, and dwelling items were owned on an individual basis while grazing land was the collective property of the tribe. The system of property relations can be understood in terms of the kinship system. Property is transferred from one individual to another through such mechanisms as inheritance by sons, marriage agreements, and redistribution through the agency of tribal chiefs.

The Turkoman tribes of Anatolia are a pastoral nomadic people that are of direct concern to us because it was the various Turkoman tribes that played significant

roles in the founding of the Safavi empire. There are various types of pastoral nomadism but only one is found among the Turkoman tribes. These are multi-animal pastoralists who breed sheep, goats, cattle, and camel. But the most important animal among the Turkomans is the horse.⁵⁵ This is due to the fact that very often the means of subsistence were procured through conquest or raids for which horses were indispensable.

IBN KHALDUN, MARX, AND THE RISE OF THE SAFAVI ASIATIC STATE

Ibn Khaldun's theory has been used to both reject and support the theory of the Asiatic mode of production. In describing the Asiatic mode of production, Marx spoke of the stagnation of Asiatic societies such as India, which has "no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history is but the history of successive intruders who founded the passive basin of that unresisting and unchanging society."⁵⁶ Andreski says that the theory of the Asiatic mode of production (or Oriental Despotism) is contradicted by the fact that "oriental" societies were characterised by change on a by no means small scale, as indicated by ibn Khaldun's theory of dynastic succession.⁵⁷

However, reference to this dynamism in itself does not constitute a critique of the theory of the Asiatic mode of production. It is important to make the distinction between stagnation on the one hand and the absence of or barriers to capitalist development on the other. Marx's point was to reveal the absence of certain pre-requisites to capitalism in "oriental" societies. He did not assert that "oriental" society was literally stagnant but just that it lacked the dynamism in the direction of capitalist development of the European sort.

On the other hand, ibn Khaldun has also been used in support of the theory of the Asiatic mode of production. The latter claims that the "oriental" despot derives his power from the fragmented nature of his society. The stratification of Asiatic society into clans, tribes and ethnic groups and the consequent lack of unity among them along class lines, enables the ruler to keep a firm hand over his subjects. Ibn Khaldun's theory of dynastic succession, it is said, provides one component of the orientalist view of despotism in that it stresses the lack of urban and social integration and thereby supports the view of the insignificance of class as a prime mover of history.⁵⁸ Although Turner is critical of this version of the theory of the Asiatic mode of production, he has not addressed the issue of ibn Khaldun being used to support this theory.

Ibn Khaldun's theory can be used in support of Marx's theory of the Asiatic mode of production, but not in the sense referred to above.

How does ibn Khaldun's theory support the theory of the Asiatic mode of production? It provides a basis for the despotic nature of the state, that is, for the

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theory of bureaucratic despotism (one variant of the theory of the Asiatic mode of production). While Marx attributed the power of the state to the control of public works, ibn Khaldun referred to tribal military power as a source of state power. This situation particularly fits the case of Safavi Iran which did not have large-scale centralized irrigation works, but which did derive their power from the tribes. The periodic conquest of dynasties by tribes does not violate the Asiatic mode of production model for the basic structure of society remains unchanged and the state remains despotic, merely going through periods of conquest, rise and decline. Engels himself recognised this Khaldunian cycle in a note worth quoting in full.

Islam is a religion adapted to Orientals, especially Arabs, i.e., on one hand to townsmen engaged in trade and industry, on the other to nomadic Bedouins. Therein lies, however, the embryo of a periodically recurring collision. The townspeople grow rich, luxurious and lax in the observation of the "law". The Bedouins, poor and hence of strict morals, contemplate with envy and covetousness these riches and pleasures. Then they unite under a prophet, a Mahdi, to chastise the apostates and restore the observation of the ritual and the true faith and to appropriate in recompense the treasures of the renegades. In a hundred years they are naturally in the same position as the renegades were: a new purge of the faith is required, a new Mahdi arises and the game starts again from the beginning. That is what happened from the conquest campaigns of the African Almoravids and the Almohads in Spain to the last Mahdi of Khartoum who so successfully thwarted the English. It happened in the same way or similarly with the risings in Persia and other Mohammedan countries. All these movements are clothed in religion but they have their source in economic causes; and yet, even when they are victorious, they allow the old economic conditions to persist untouched. So the old situation remains unchanged and the collision recurs periodically.⁵⁹

While Engels makes no reference to ibn Khaldun it is quite likely that both he and Marx were aware of ibn Khaldun's works.⁶⁰ What Engels described above is very similar to what ibn Khaldun discusses in his theory. However, Marx and Engels failed to relate this to the Asiatic mode of production. All they could see was that the tribes were "successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society."⁶¹ The periodic rise and fall of dynasties through successive tribal conquests left the basic structure of the Asiatic mode of production unchanged.

Ibn Khaldun's theory provides the basis for the despotic nature of the Safavi 'Asiatic' state. This was a tributary mode of production in which state power derived not from the control of large-scale irrigation works but rather from tribal support. The Safavi empire was founded with the aid of tribal groups.

Iran was ruled by the Safavi dynasty from 907/1501 to 1134/1722. The Safavi sufi order upon which the dynasty was founded was established some two hundred

years before the state itself emerged.⁶²

The migration of Turkoman nomads from what is today called Outer Mongolia to the Middle East was represented in part by the *Oguz*, a nomadic band of warriors also known as the Seljuks, during the tenth century.⁶³ By the eleventh century when the Seljuk Empire was centred at Isfahan, various Turkoman tribes, which were autonomous from the Seljuks, were trying to establish themselves in Anatolia. The Seljuk Empire disintegrated in the midst of Turkoman nomadic opposition, giving way to the establishment of the Great Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century.⁶⁴ The Mongol Empire itself broke up into several parts, divided among the relatives of the Great Khan. One of these parts constituting Iran, Iraq, and Anatolia became the *Ilkhan* Empire founded by Hulagu.⁶⁵ Several Turkoman tribes were able to establish independent principalities as the Seljuks and the Mongols weakened, however.⁶⁶

One of these was the Ottoman (*Osmanli*) principality established by Osman of the *Kayi* tribe⁶⁷ which was to subordinate other Turkoman principalities and establish the Ottoman Empire.

Contemporaneous with the emergence of the Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth century was the founding of the Safavi Sufi movement by Sheikh Safi al-Din. His descendant, Ismail (905/1499-930/1524), a Turkoman from Azarbaijan, was the founder of the Safavi dynasty.⁶⁸ In the mid-tenth century, during Ottoman attempts to centralize their control in Eastern Anatolia, Ismail took advantage of the turmoil and attempted to make inroads there.⁶⁹ His tribal support came from a number of Turkoman tribes, the *Ustajlu*, *Shamlu*, *Taqalu*, *Baharlu*, *Zulqadar*, *Oajar* and *Afshar*, collectively known as the *qizilbash*.⁷⁰ What held these tribes together was an '*asabiyya*' based on the Safavi mystical order to which the *qizilbash* owed allegiance.⁷¹ Unsuccessful in Anatolia and on the defensive, Ismail and his followers retreated to Iran and established the Safavi state in 907/1501. By 909/1503 he had control over Azerbaijan, western Iran, and the Tigris-Euphrates basin.

The point of this brief reference to the tribal origins of the Safavi empire is to emphasize the tribal bases of power in this state. Two types of tributary or 'Asiatic' states have been recognized, one based on large-scale public works and the other on pastoral nomadism.⁷² Safavi Iran is an example of the latter in which there was a "non-hydraulic" genesis of the 'Asiatic' mode of production, which can be explained by ibn Khaldun's theory concerning tribal '*asabiyya*', religious fervour, and military superiority.

The Safavi case can be a vivid illustration of the use of both world-system and Khaldunian theory. The key here would be to view the historical development of the Safavi political economy in terms of the evolution of a core-periphery hierarchy.⁷³ The attractiveness of this approach is that the unit of analysis encompasses the set of social relations that are held to be central to the rise of the Safavi polity, that is, the relationship between nomadic and sedentary society. This goes beyond the

conventional association of civilizations with settled peoples organized around states. This approach is also compatible with the Khaldunian definition of civilization. For ibn Khaldun, *'umran* refers to the totality of life encompassing cultural, social and political aspects. Within this totality, there is nomadic and sedentary civilizations. The core of ibn Khaldun's theory is the role of nomadic-sedentary interaction in the cyclical rise and decline of civilizations.⁷⁴

There is another variant of the theory of the Asiatic mode of production that should be considered here. This is the theory of fragmented society, which stresses the fragmented nature of "oriental" societies into clans, tribes, ethnic groups, and villages as a source of state power. When it is said that ibn Khaldun's theory of elite circulation is in harmony with the theory of fragmented society, this is to say that the tribes, by their very presence as tribes, are an element in a fragmented society which precludes unity along class lines, thereby bestowing power to the state. The main objection to this is that ibn Khaldun's theory is not a theory of fragmented society. In the theory of fragmented society, the tribes play a different role than they do in ibn Khaldun's theory.

Ibn Khaldun's theory does not provide support for the theory of the Asiatic mode of production in the sense of the theory of fragmented society. In his theory the tribe does not play the role, side by side with the village and ethnicity, of fragmenting society. That is to say, his is not a theory of fragmented society. The circulation of tribal elites neither radically alters nor reinforces the fragmentation of society. All it does is to cause the state to swing back and forth between periods of centralization and decentralization.

Why has ibn Khaldun's theory of elite circulation been seen as support for the theory of fragmented society, when it seems clear that the role of tribes in the two theories seem to be vastly different? To my mind, this question can be answered by recourse to Durkheim's concept of mechanical solidarity. Some have referred to the similarity between ibn Khaldun's tribal *'asabiyya* and Durkheim's mechanical solidarity.⁷⁵ It is true that tribal *'asabiyya* and mechanical solidarity both refer to solidarity that arises out of similar states of conscience, duties and responsibilities, that is, a low level in the division of labour.⁷⁶ In this sense, both ibn Khaldun and Durkheim referred to mechanical solidarity. If we stay at this level of comparison, then it is easy to proceed to the next step, to say that mechanical solidarity/tribal *'asabiyya* is exemplified by the fragmentary/segmentary nature of society in which there is a very low level in the division of labour and, therefore, no social classes. Ibn Khaldun's theory, therefore, supposedly supports the theory of fragmented society because it is a theory of fragmented society based on tribal *'asabiyya* or mechanical solidarity. This is opposed to more complex societies of organic solidarity, based on a complex division of labour and, therefore, social classes. While all this may be a somewhat accurate portrayal of the similarity between tribal *'asabiyya* and

mechanical solidarity when both are considered in the abstract, when considered in their proper historical contexts, the comparison is unfounded. Ibn Khaldun, unlike Durkheim, was looking at the conflict between tribal and urban societies. Ibn Khaldun described the role of tribal *'asabiyya* as not fragmenting society but as weakening the state.

There is also the issue of whether or not Safavi society was a class society. While ibn Khaldun's description of the role of *'asabiyya* did not seek to explain its fragmenting nature can we, nevertheless, see this aspect of tribal *'asabiyya* as well? That is, can the existence of tribes, alongside ethnic groups and villages be taken to mean that Safavi society was classless? This has been the claim of the theory of mosaic society. According to this view Middle Eastern societies of the past are seen as mosaics or patchworks of tribes, minorities, social groups, and associations rather than an integrated social wholes with a class structure.⁷⁷ However, ibn Khaldun, apart from the fact that his theory was not one of fragmented society, was perfectly aware of the existence of social classes (*tabaqa*) in the Middle East.⁷⁸ Thus, ibn Khaldun's theory of elite circulation does not provide support for the theory of fragmented society as a version of the theory of the Asiatic mode of production.

THE DIFFUSION OF 'ASABIYYA IN THE TRIBUTARY STATE

In the foregoing section I discussed ibn Khaldun in connection with the support of the tributary state by tribal military power. Once these empires were established, however, there were attempts to absorb the supporting tribes into the sedentary life of the empire, or in Khaldunian terms, to dispense with *'asabiyya*. The very forces behind state formation eventually become a source of instability for the new state. The stability of the new state rested on its ability to destroy its own nomadic foundations.

In the event of the establishment of a dynasty through tribal support there arose the problem of providing adequate remuneration to tribal elites and their armies who by now aspired towards an urban, luxurious life. The granting of benefices to tribal chieftains achieved the aim of such remuneration. But, as we shall see, the absorption of tribal society into the state also had the effect of diminishing the *'asabiyya* of the dominant tribes upon whose power the dynasties rode.

When the Safavi Empire was established, benefices were granted to tribal chieftains. In Iran benefices known as *tuyul* were granted to *qizilbash* tribal chieftains. These were non-hereditary benefices and differed from *suyurghals* which were granted on a hereditary basis.⁷⁹ Indeed, it is clear that the "reason for avoiding *suyurghal* grants in such cases was the intention to restrict, at least formally, the autonomy of the high *amirs* in the provinces."⁸⁰ The absorption of tribal society into the state by way of assigning benefices tribal chieftains and other tribal members

achieved the dual goal of paying them and reducing their ability to maintain superior '*asabiyya*', indicated by their lack of ability to maintain superior military strength and vie for state power. This decline in '*asabiyya*' took place in Safavi Iran. Although, in Iran, the tribal factor remained central to Iranian politics, nevertheless, there were signs of a decline in '*asabiyya*' among the *qizilbash* as indicated by the difficulty in obtaining sufficient troops encountered by their chieftains⁸¹ as well as their decline in wealth, territory, and military power.⁸²

The effect of incorporation into the state on '*asabiyya*' was exacerbated by another tactic described by ibn Khaldun and resorted to by the Safavi rulers. As mentioned above, according to ibn Khaldun, once a dynasty is established with the aid of tribal military power, the ruler attempts to dispense with '*asabiyya*'. The form that this took in Safavi Iran differs from that described by ibn Khaldun. In the latter case, the ruler attempts to blunt the aspirations of the people who shared in his '*asabiyya*' by relying on clients and followers who were nurtured in the shadow of '*asabiyya*', or on tribal groups of a different descent who have become his clients.⁸³ In Safavi Iran, however, the rulers attempted to dispense with tribal military support altogether. Shah 'Abbas attempted to reduce the power of the *qizilbash* elite by creating a *ghulam* (slave) regiment through the recruitment of Georgian slaves.⁸⁴

The Safavi Empire was established as a result of the migration of nomadic peoples. The rulers attempted to diffuse the power of tribal groups once they (the rulers) were firmly established in power. Nevertheless, for centuries up until the twentieth, tribal military power was essential in bringing dynasties to power. What accounts for the prevalence of tribal power in Iran?

One reason has got to do with geography. In the case of Iran, her topography is such that centralization was more difficult than in other regions such as the Ottoman Empire. The mountainous terrain made it much more difficult to control the tribes.

Another reason is the location of the various tribal groups. In Iran the population of the tribes (estimated at half of the total Iranian population at the beginning of the nineteenth century)⁸⁵ occupied large geographical areas of the empire.⁸⁶

Thirdly, in Iran, the *tuyuldar*, consisted of a great number of tribal *khans* (chiefs), that is, they were drawn by and large from the tribal population.

Another reason is that, apart from the fact that there were a larger number of independent and armed nomadic tribes in Iran, the Iranian state was very dependent on the tribes for its military force.⁸⁷ The proximity of tribal groups to the central state in Iran coupled with the fact that they were superior warriors made them a constant threat to the state. As ibn Khaldun says of the bedouins: they

are alone in the country and remote from militias. They have no walls or gates... they provide their own defence and do not entrust it to ... others...

They always carry weapons... Fortitude has become a character of theirs, and courage is their nature.⁸⁸

The reason why the bedouin are superior fighters is their life-style. They must have the ability to pick up and run and start over at another locality. This they can do much more efficiently than sedentary people as they only have to move people and flock. And for this reason they are much more difficult to control. They become a weakening element in the state. Iranian history is testimony to this, the state having been subject to long periods of breakdown during which time various tribal forces came to power. For example, in the eighteenth century tribal dynasties such as the *Afshars*, *Zands* and *Qalars* competed for power, and military power was dominated by the tribes.⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

An immediate concern of this paper has been to make an argument for the cogency of the Khaldunian theory of state formation for debates surrounding the 'Asiatic' mode of production and its applicability to Safavi political economy. This effort is to be seen within the context of the call to the indigenization of the social sciences in many non-Western societies where there are attempts to draw on indigenous concepts and theories. The application of ibn Khaldun's theory to a civilization and period other than his own is case in point. However, such an effort does not entail the rejection of scholarship that originated in the West, a point that is conveyed in the above attempt to apply Khaldunian theory within a modes of production framework.

This paper indicates an avenue for the integration of a modes of production framework into ibn Khaldun's theory of state formation, the field of application being Iranian history. While the economic system of Safavi Iran had been couched in terms of Marxist concepts, their dynamics had been described in terms of ibn Khaldun's theory of state formation. As mentioned at the outset, the Safavi political economy can be characterised in terms of the tributary mode of production as the dominant mode in a secondary state-based world-system. Ibn Khaldun's work provides a theoretical framework with which to understand the rise and dynamics of the Safavi world empire.

At this point it would be useful to point out the sense in which this integration is a theoretical one. The integration of some Khaldunian and Marxist ideas is not merely at the substantive level where certain historical facts arising out of the application of ibn Khaldun's theory are combined with other historical facts arising out of the application of the concept of mode of production, with a resulting picture of the past. Although this level of integration is itself important because it highlights the explanatory value of ibn Khaldun's theory and his continuing relevance to historical sociology, there is also a theoretical level at which this integration can be

appreciated.

The object of the field of theoretical history is the “bridging of the gap that divides the cautiously objective technique employed to ascertain the isolated facts of history, and the arbitrarily subjective method by which these facts are assembled into a picture of the past.”⁹⁰ As such, the territory of theoretical history has a number of provinces, two of which concern 1) the study of the pattern and rhythm of history, and 2) the study of driving forces in history.⁹¹ It is these two concerns of theoretical history that have been brought together in the integration that I have attempted. Ibn Khaldun’s work was a study of the pattern and rhythm of history while the Marxist framework emphasises the modes of production in the study of the driving forces of history. Ibn Khaldun’s theory which established a pattern and rhythm in history was applied to Safavi history, while the Safavi political economy was conceptualized in terms of the mode of production.

In what follows, I would like to make a number of remarks on Khaldunian studies by way of emphasizing the theme of indigenization.

The study of ibn Khaldun’s theory of state formation can be divided into three aspects. One is the discovery of ibn Khaldun as the founder of a number of disciplines in the social sciences. Secondly, there are works that seek to draw comparisons between ibn Khaldun and several Western thinkers. Thirdly, there are those who attempt to develop and apply ibn Khaldun’s theory to specific problems in the historical and social sciences.

Regarding the discovery of ibn Khaldun, ever since European and American scholars proclaimed ibn Khaldun as the true founder of sociology before Comte as well as the precursor of ideas in many other fields such as economics, political science and anthropology,⁹² there have been many descriptive treatments of his works in the light of his contribution to these various disciplines.

Apart from this, there have also been many works seeking to draw comparisons between ibn Khaldun and the giants in modern Western thought. Some have ignored or glossed over profound differences in the historical and philosophical contexts in which they wrote. The tendency has been to remain at the level of making comparisons to show that ibn Khaldun had anticipated the ideas of modern thinkers in the humanities and social sciences.⁹³

There have also been works, however, which go beyond the mere comparison of some ideas and concepts in ibn Khaldun with those of modern Western scholars toward the theoretical integration of his theory into a framework that employs some of the tools of modern science, although the field of application has been confined to West Asian societies.⁹⁴ It is this kind of work on Ibn Khaldun that must be supported and developed if there is to be more than an historical interest in his works.

If by indigenization is meant that there must be conscious attempts to engage in social scientific activity with a view to taking into account the worldviews,

sociohistorical contexts, cultural practices, and scholarship of the indigenous societies so that indigenous concepts and theories can be generated, then ibn Khaldun is a logical candidate for an exemplar.

The call to indigenization is not simultaneously a call to nativism or reverse orientalism. This refers to the trend of 'going native' among both Western and local scholars and constitutes an almost total and wholesale rejection of Western social science. Indigenization is to be seen as a simultaneous call to internationalization as long as the latter is understood not as a one-sided process but rather as one emanating from developing societies while incorporating selectively the Western social sciences.

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