

"Ttaba'i al-'Umran, Features of Sociability" in the Syrian State

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The "misfortune" of the civic society in Syria in the past, followed by the civil one in modern Syria, was that they always found themselves facing repressive ruling authorities. Some were sometimes alien to the country (Mamelukes, Ottomans, English and French imperialists...), and some others were local and factionalist. In such a framework, when we talk about how the contemporary Syrian society has been formed and the causes of its misfortune, it seems as if we are talking about the history of the emergence and development of the Syrian State itself as a framework, since it has always played a decisive role in shaping the different segments of the society in Syria from the "top of the community pyramid" down, and not vice versa. That is to say, having an authoritarian minority skydiving and imposing its will from "above", instead of a "substructure", to produce a "superstructure" of elites, that obey its will to a great extent.

In this place, one might wonder about the connection between the introduction above and the Khaldunian¹ concept: "Structures of Sociability" mentioned in the title, prior to continuing reading the article, and asking himself, what is the relationship between religion and politics in the days of Ibn Khaldun with the political and humanitarian catastrophe that Syria is currently experiencing?

Indeed, Ibn Khaldun tried to understand the deterioration of state of things in his time by gradually surveying the historical background of what happened since the beginning of the "Islamic Da'wa" (the Islamic missionary campaign) during the days of the Great Prophet (Mohammad) and concluding in the analysis of the reality in his time. But what is the relationship between the history before Ibn Khaldun and the events taking place after his era?

¹ Ibn Khaldūn, (born May 27, 1332, Tunis [Tunisia]—died March 17, 1406, Cairo, Egypt), the greatest Arab historian, who developed one of the earliest philosophies of history, contained in his masterpiece, the Muqaddimah (“Introduction”) (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica).

The answer is that we might find in Ibn Khaldun's analysis things that could shed a light on aspects of our modern history and current reality. Aren't there some similarities between some of the features of the chronic contradiction that dominated in his time and our current life? Perhaps some of Ibn Khaldun's analysis tools in "Arab Sociology" would be more suitable to understand some aspects of the current Syrian conflict that are hardly understandable using the usually used tools of western "rational and logical" analysis. In particular, in order to understand some of the issues and psychological responses, such as the degree of brutality displayed by local and foreign parties of the conflict, and also to try to understand the persisting support of some segments of the Syrian society for the existing Regime, which remains the main responsible for what happened, with the pretext that there are no alternatives less harmful than this regime itself. We are also entitled to scrutinize the legitimacy of the Regime's claim that it is still the sole legitimate authority, which has the right to use all means, including the right to ask old and new colonial powers and their Arab and foreign proxies, to collaborate with it in the biggest war crime of our era.

Indeed, one of the most important factors that influenced the Arab Nation and is still influencing it is that factor that it is difficult to distinguish and isolate because it consists of the combination two very strong elements: politics and religion. There is no way to understand our present and past unless this issue is clarified. This means that a literary, political or social historian should make the question of religion and politics among Arabs the basis of the study to be conducted

First of all, there is a prior consent on the validity of the statement leading us to recognize that the history of peoples in Europe, for example, consists to some extent of differentiated historical periods: classical era, middle ages, and modern era, each one distinct from the others. On the contrary, our history is a connected continuity. In other words, pre-Islam, the so-called High period of Islam, the Enlightenment, and our present era are all intertwined and we are still experiencing them side by side rendering past and present inseparable. The result is then the existence of the "*cultural islands*", according to Al Jabiri², and their simultaneous presence in the present day Arab consciousness. That is, when one of us moves from the pre-Islamic era to the Islamic era and then to the Renaissance, one does not perceive it as moving through

² Mohammed Abed Al Jabiri, (27 December 1935 – 3 May 2010 Rabat) was a Moroccan critic and professor of philosophy and Islamic thought in Mohammed V University in Rabat. He was also an expert in Arabic and Arabic

literature. He is considered to have been one of the major intellectual figures in the contemporary Arab world. He is also known for his academic project "The critique of the Arab Mind". He published several influential books on the Arab philosophical tradition (Source:Wikipedia). His book about: The thought of Ibn Khaldun- Al 'Asabiya and the State-, published 1992, in Beyrouth, is at the basis of this paper.

time. This is reflected, of course, on the Arab intellectual and on other Syrian fellows, since the Umayyad era and until our present day, who are still experiencing in their consciousness, the conflicts of the past intermingled with all kinds of other conflicts that are taking place in their present.

Our present turns, according to Al Jabiri, into an "*exhibition*" of the realities of our past, in a manner that we witness our past living in our present in one single sentence, without varying the tense, without history. Who among us did not recall in his memory the "*inherited legacy*", for instance the battle of Siffin in the seventh century, between Ali ibn Abi Talib and Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan the Omayyad that was fought near Raqqa on the banks of the Euphrates River, as one watched news about the battles for Raqqa in the summer of last year? And who among us did not remember the Battle of Marj Dabiq between Sultan Selim I of the Ottoman Empire and Qansu al-Ghuri Sultan of the Mamelukes in Egypt and the Levant, after hearing recently news about the march of the Turkish army towards Afrin, located on the outskirts of Marj Dabiq? The examples are numerous...

But what is this "Khaldunean legacy" that we seek to be guided by some of its light coming from the past, hoping to illuminate some of our dark present? Let's recall some of Ibn Khaldun through Al Jabiri's, review of Ibn Khaldun's famous "**Muqaddima, the Introduction**":

Let's start with the title of this paper. The: "Structures of Sociability, *Ttaba'i al-'Umran*", stand according to Ibn Khaldun for the characteristics inherent to sociability resulting from (*al-'Ada*, habit). It usually means every physical or mental act that is cemented by repetition to become a (*Ttabi'a*, a structure) or a mood, plural: *Ttaba'i*. As for *al-'umrān* i.e. sociability of Ibn Khaldun, it means the social life and what result from it or accompanies it, such as social, political, economic and cultural phenomena. All these phenomena have sometimes an overt relationship, and occasionally a hidden one linked to a general "*Ttabi'a*" of social life which is: **Al-'Asabiya**, i.e. the cohesive force.

Al-'Asabiya, does not refer to a general law that can control the fate of humanity. It is rather a kind of social bond that, in special circumstances, outweighs the other bonds, while remaining hidden or weak in other circumstances.

Al-'Asabiya, derives from "*al-'Asaba*", meaning the "group" (or the "community"). Ibn Khaldun does not associate al-'Asabiya with parental blood kinship

in an absolute manner since the true and real basis upon which al-'Asabiya is based is the permanent common interest of the group.

Al-'Asabiya is a force of confrontation that only stands out when there is a threat to it in its common interest of the group, an interest that is always attached by Ibn Khaldun to "*Umur al-'Aish*, i.e. "matters of living", that is, the "economic" factor, but according to Ibn Khaldun's epoch, as we will see later.

Still, the fundamental problem that preoccupied Ibn Khaldun remained: how do States emerge, and what are the factors of their development and the causes of their fall and decay.

The **State** is established according to Ibn Khaldun as a deterrence. It is a social necessity, imposed by the impossibility of humans to survive in "chaos", without a ruler that interposes and arbitrates among them. Ibn Khaldun says that the ultimate goal of al-'Asabiya is the coming into political power. He further says that

" the seizure of power is not a choice, but is an existential necessity". This means that al-'Asabiya would lead to the accession to power by necessity since God is the one who established this "habit, al-'Ada" in the universe in this manner, so he says. This habit evolved, according to Ibn Khaldun, to become "Ttabi'a" inherent to the sociability, to 'Umran, permanently and then it occurred like all natural things as a divine will.

It is clear from this statement that the khaldunian "Ttaba'i al'Umran" do not mean laws in the modern sense. However, their use was sufficient for to the analyzing the manner how the Arab Islamic state rose from the time of ad-Da'wa, the missionary campaign, until Ibn Khaldun's days, and why Caliphate was chosen as a ruling form.

What matters in this context is the **voluntarist** nature of this state, in its philosophical sense, which lasted until the Colonial powers came to the country. The head of state did not only rule by the will of God, but the community itself remained "voluntary" in its social structure, without distinct classes unlike the European societies. In the Islamic society there was "al-Khassa, the upper strata", and "al-'Ammah, the commoners," without them being represented in the political arena. In other words, there were no "stands councils" in the Islamic state equal to that existed during the absolute rule of the European monarchies, in exception of the "majlis al-mab'uthan, Chamber of Deputies"³ during the last years of the Ottoman Empire.

The concept of the State of Ibn Khaldun is linked organically with his theory of al-'Asabiya, especially, when explaining how the Arab-Islamic state originated

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³ Meclis-i Mebusan, The General Assembly, (Turkish: Meclis-i Umumî was the first attempt at representative democracy by the imperial government of the Ottoman Empire. Also known as the Ottoman Parliament, it was located in Constantinople (Istanbul) and was composed of two houses: an upper house (Senate, Meclis-i Âyân), and a lower house (Chamber of Deputies, Meclis-i Mebusân)(Source:Wikipedia)

tribal society, i.e., from different tribes each of them possessing a proper ‘Asabiya linked to an overall Arab ‘Asabiya, that set out to create a state.

Furthermore, the State for Ibn Khaldun is either a **Personal State**, which is the rule of one person of the ruling ‘Asabiya, say the state of Mu’awiya, or the state of Heraclius, or it is a **Total State**, ruled by one ‘Asabiya over a whole period. The Umayyad State, for example, is a Total State, because it was especially governed from one of Arab ‘Asabiyas, namely the Bani-Umayya ‘Asabiya. In the same way, the Arab State, whether it is Umayyad or Abbasid, which is also a Total State, because it was governed from a single ‘Asabiya, that of all Arabs ‘Asabiya, in contrast to the Roman or Persians states.

The question is, why does al-’Asabiya evolve in a moment from a certain tribal link to the quest for political power and the founding of a state?

In order to answer the question above, Ibn Khaldun says that al-’Asabiya plays a historical role only after the fulfillment of one of the two following necessary conditions:

The existence of an Overall ‘Asabiya unifying various ‘Asabiyas of the

"Bedouin Sociability", which may seize political rule **but only within a religious approach...** Religion is meant here in its broader sense, even when it is used as a disguise or a mask. The religion for the writer of the Muqaddima, was a necessary condition for the establishment of a state for the Arabs or those similar to them, like the Kurds or the Turkmen, as he says ... and later on, of course, the Ottomans. However, this ideological factor, i.e. missionary campaign, in Ibn Khaldun's concept, was "only achievable with ‘Asabiya".

The ‘Asabiya of the tribe of Quraysh’s and that of all Arabs were a necessary condition at the beginning for the success of the Islamic Missionary Campaign and the establishment of the state of the Arabs. Besides, Ibn Khaldun links the need to sociability mainly to the need for people to cooperate in order to "*Tahsil al-ghitha*’, amass food", i.e. the “economic” factor. The seizure of the power, which is the object of al- ‘Asabiya, required an explanation of how the transition from the status of the "Bedouin Sociability " in its broad sense was transformed to the stage of "al-’*Umran al- Hadari*, Urban Sociability" and the "gracefulness of civilization". Ibn Khaldun's goal was to elucidate the cause of what happened in Arab Islamic history and the pace of succession of states and kingdoms in it leading to the chaos that dominated during his time.

He suggests that this was the result of an abnormal initial transition of a human group from the first stage to the second, insofar abnormal, because it was not the result of a gradual development and a steady improvement in the conditions of "production" in society and in its resources. It rather occurred in the form of a "Ttafra, a leap" during which the members of the 'Asabiya seized the power.

I will not go further in describing how the existence of an overall 'Asabiya is a prerequisite for the emergence of states, a matter that was profoundly discussed by Ibn Khaldun, in order to show the reasons that led to the chaos in the Islamic countries that dominated in his time. What matters to us more now when we are speaking about contemporary Syria, is the second condition that was mentioned by Ibn Khaldun, in which the 'Asabiya may play his historical role:

The ageing of the state

The "ageing of the state " is the stage in which the ruling 'Asabiya becomes corrupt, driving the ruler to resort to seek aid from militias and mercenaries to defend his position, according to Ibn Khaldun. This is usually accompanied by the exploitation of the common people (the middle strata communities of farmers, craftsmen and merchants ...) with various kinds of penalties and taxes, driving them into disobedience. They would then revolt against the ruler driven by the awakening of their own 'Asabiyas and would then unite against his 'Asabiya, which is by then decadent and paralyzed. The success of their 'Asabiyas in the establishment of an alternative depends on the paralysis of the state at the last stage of its decline ... However, being in the stage of decline does not necessarily mean it reached the stage of final collapse, since the rate of such downfall depends on the dominating circumstances and conditions:

Ibn Khaldun says that if the state is small, i.e. it has a limited geographical area and dimensions, it is easier for the claimants to overcome it in one blow, provided their strength exceeds its strength. If their strength is equivalent to or weaker than that of the state, they would content themselves with seeking independence in one or more regions and wait for a favorable opportunity. The revolutions that occur against the state at the stage of its decay are often carried out by one of the 'Asabiyas that previously submitted to the state's 'Asabiya. Among them are the 'Asabiya of the "Bedouin farmers dominated by the urban

landowners" that is, the peasants. The conditions of the state disappearance are always accompanied by the exhaustion of the peasantry in various types of charges and levies. Their 'Asabiyas wake up then and unite against the 'Asabiya of the ruler, who is then paralyzed, and they will revolt against him. Perhaps, so do also some of the "Urban 'Asabiyas". This urban 'Asabiya is the alliance of

social groups against others in special circumstances, which arise in situations of state collapse.

In his book "Al-‘Asabiya and the State", Al-Jabiri states that Ibn Khaldun's analysis of the state decay is similar to Lenin's theory of revolution and revolutionary situation.

Lenin says that the revolution can succeed only if two basic conditions are met: the occurrence of a revolutionary situation and the existence of a revolutionary masses organization as well. The two correspond to Ibn Khaldun's previously explained according to the terms of the circumstances and facts of his era, the existence of two conditions: i.e. the state decay and the existence of an alternative unifying ‘Asabiya.

But why should the ruling ‘Asabiya decline at all, in order for an another ‘Asabiya more or less close to it, to begin to establish its state from, possibly from scratch? In other words, why this " 'Asabiya Cycle"?

In this place, Ibn Khaldun introduces a third dimension to his equation in order to clarify what is meant by it, so that it becomes:

Al-‘Asabiya - the State - and "al-Hadara, Civilization that corrupt the ‘*Umran*, urban sociability". Ibn Khaldun gives these three data special meanings, some of which we mentioned concerning al-‘Asabiya and the State. As for the civilization that corrupts Al-Umran, Ibn Khaldun means a pattern of living and a way of consumption, **inherent** to the ruling class, and for its employees and others, which are in place when the state is declining. That is, the sum of the political, social and economic data that accompany the ageing of the state, and that are "inherent to it, like the illness that is inherent to the ill, *fil ‘illati wal ma’lul*":

Politically, the political unity embodied by the state dissolves when the "implicit contract" on which this unity is based on is reversed. Loyalty in a ‘Asabiya society is a loyalty to the common interest in which each person sees his or her own interest, which can only be achieved through it. When the individual senses the ability to achieve the own interest by oneself, the common interest becomes irrelevant and meaningless. The cohesion turns to rivalry, and the struggle for the common good turns into a struggle between antagonistic private interests.

Socially: At this stage, the effects of the conflict between special interests manifest in the large number of those rebelling against the state, and in the civil wars that only rest then to resurge and expand. Such "Personal states" and autonomous principalities arise after the already mentioned "implicit contract" has

been dissolved. At this stage, the struggle of the rebellious 'Asabiyas against the ruling one becomes continuous, and victory in it is accomplished "by dodging, and not by direct confrontation," as

Ibn Khaldun says. This political and social rupture at this stage leads to "the multiplicity of death" and to the "increment of discord due to the disruption of the states, leading to a boost in uproar and killings and to the spread of epidemics".

As for the **Economic** aspect: All this struggle incurs a heavy financial burden on the treasury of the ruling 'Asabiya, leading the state to resort to all possible twisted methods to acquire the money necessary for it, and "to aggress people in their wealth", says Ibn Khaldun. At this stage of the state decay, the corrupted sociability means that of the ruling 'Asabiya, in other words its social structure. This is regarding human resources. Also in terms of decay of the "image of sociability" that was established by that 'Asabiya, the fall of the state often leads to the den of its architectural monuments, social, economic and cultural structure as consequences of a suffocating economic crisis, leading to the emergence a new state, which in its turn collapses one day when it finds itself when it becomes overwhelmed by a similar and inevitable crisis with no possible any way out of its distress.

The fundamental contradiction according to Ibn Khaldun lies behind this recurrent "'Asabiya cycle", which is responsible for the perpetual dialectical process, and the cyclically recurring economic crisis: the transition of a human group from one social situation to another through a brief "Ttafra, leap, surge" to seize power. It doesn't emerge through extensive production relations and conflict between contradictions, as in the Marxist concept.

This is about relationships of a special kind, i.e. of 'Asabiya relationships that grow individuals together as long as the confrontation with others exists, to disintegrate later as a result of the emergence of conflicting private interests. In other words, the political power for Ibn Khaldun is not the result of economic power, **but rather the economic power or the creation of wealth is in general the result of the seizing political power** of the ruling 'Asabiya, in other words, of the state. The "Ttafra, leap, surge" in the seizure of power, says Ibn Khaldun, is what "created the wildness that is entrenched in them because *"they remain isolated from the society... and their wildness in the suburbs... rendering them more capable to prevail... and because they act with people like beasts.."*. The foundation upon which they built *"their civilization, is the prerogative they have acquired was by the force of arms, which enabled them to enrich themselves"*, a stage that Ibn Khaldun also calls "Ruling with the help of military after bribing them". This situation continues until *"their expenses exceed their pay, and their income does*

*not meet their expenses... They then snatch what is in the hands of many others...
weakening them and thus weakening the state*

as well...and so that the state collapses and it is then attacked its by neighboring enemies or by those who had submitted to its rule ".

Al-Jabiri says that the genius of Ibn Khaldun is not due to highlighting the emergence of this or that factor, but rather because he interconnected them all this in one system, pairing and blending 'Asabiya with religion, and looking at their synergy. He also connected the economic factor "*Shu'un al-Ma'ash*, living costs "", with the natural and geographical factor of the country (the impact of the climate and location of the country under study), and analyzed their impact as a whole. He was not compelled to favor a separate geographic determinism, or a definite religious coercion, or a certain social or economic determinism. He, rather, united all these imperatives into one single "imperative", namely, "Sociable Determinism," as al-Jabiri says. These factors were regarded by Ibn Khaldun as constant factors, which constitute what he called "*Features of Sociability, Ttaba'i al-'Umran*", by which the movement of Arab-Islamic history, from the beginning of the Islamic missionary campaign until the days of Ibn Khaldun, that appeared in the form of a cyclic movement characterized by the process of formation of states and their fall, was governed.

"Al-Mulk bil-Jund wal-Jund bil-Mal, Ruling with corrupted military"-The Syrian Case.

The author of this paper has already dealt with the topic of the subject of the development of the Syrian state, and its evolution to our times since the presentation of his doctoral thesis four decades ago about the Economic History of the Levant and also through the writing of his book on Syria during the French Mandate, by describing the difference in our social structure that lead to taking a direction different than that taken by others, for instance in the Occident, and to which extent the peculiarities of our history played a role in the formation of what we are now. This was conducted using methods that were influenced by the western "logic" that governed the Western universities, in which we studied, and which was also influenced by the Marxist approach to social analysis. This does not mean, of course, that did not achieve reasonable results by using this scientific research methodology. However, I still remember the words of one of our professors at the university in this regard, who taught us neo-classical political economy, when he

turned to us foreigners, during the lecture to say: "What you hear from us will not help you much in analyzing and dealing with your

situation in your home countries. You should make your own contribution in this regard."

Those who have read the above mentioned thoughts of Ibn Khaldun must have been astonished at his amazing description and analysis of the dire situation that existed seven centuries ago, which is much like the current situation in Syria after seven years of revolution, and also in other Arab countries after the outbreak of what was known as the "Arab Spring".

At this point, we can reiterate that what has happened since the introduction of modernity into our lives is that the three dimensions of the equation mentioned by Ibn Khaldun have been subjected to a kind of repression and exclusion, which has become our political and social repressed. The successive setbacks led now to the reemergence of this "blocked" in its tribal, sectarian, religious, and rental economy aspects, *"to render our present similar to our past and to reduce our era of national and ideological Renaissance to an exceptional episode in the chain of our history."*

I was writing these last lines, as I heard the news coming from the Damascus outskirts, about the barbaric bombardment of the villages, towns and cities of Ghouta with warplanes and other weapons, to which our people are subjected to. When the German Luftwaffe bombed the town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, the world it was utmost appalled, and Picasso perpetuated this famous battle with a painting that became one of world's known artworks. Today, the air force of the ruling 'Asabiya in Damascus and its Russian ally, is relentlessly bombing the villages, towns and cities of Ghouta to the point of utter crushing and annihilation, and the world community is indifferent.

I shall begin, trying without further ado, to tell the story from the beginning, until others come and complete it:

The Commoners, i.e., the middle strata of farmers, craftsmen, and merchants were seldom mentioned by Ibn Khaldun in his review of seven centuries of Arab-Islamic history, to have, played any major role in the events of Arab-Islamic history. The farmers were often described by Ibn Khaldun as being *"feeble and shabby"*. Most of the agricultural lands conquered by the Arabs in the Levant were left to their owners, in return for paying Islamic tax on agricultural land, Kharaj. Likewise, taxes were levied on crafts, and commerce. These financial burdens among other coercive measures of the dominating Islamic state prevented the

middle social stratus to form an economic power or a social class capable of playing an active role in political events. These middle “classes” were exploited by the state itself and not by another social “class”.

In short, it can be said that this situation continued during the Middle Ages and until the colonizer came to the country after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the last Total Islamic State with an overall 'Asabiya, the Ottoman 'Asabiya, according to the Khaldunian concept. The dominant type of society in the Levant was extremely pluralistic. This system was also known as the Ottoman Millet system. A society composed of multi-religious and multi-ethnic communities, each group retaining its own or proper 'Asabiya.

During the French Mandate period, a newly formed urban bourgeoisie "class" began to emerge outside the traditional framework that dominated in the upper social stratum at the end of Ottoman rule in Syria. This upper social stratum consisted of senior old ottoman civilian and military government servants, the wealthiest Bedouin tribal leaders, and top merchants associated with the ruling class.

After the independence and since the 1960s is that a new "integrationist" state gradually replaced the emerging "bourgeois class" in the control of the social order, expanding its administrative apparatus to overwhelm all social subdivisions, and finally, to replace them under the ruling Baath party, or of those who act in his name, the society itself, cutting it down to a "level of political organization", which they manage in whatever way.

This trend of governance began to deepen after the defeat of 1967 against Israel, in particular, when the 'Asabiya composition of the ruling class in Damascus began to become more and more obvious.

The author of these lines, when he presented 2006 a study entitled The Syrian "Bourgeoisie" in our days, described the Syrian state, as a new Mameluke state in our long history. But I said then that it should not be described as fascist, since there are no common denominators between its structure and origin, and those which lie at the basis of the fascist Western European States that arose prior to the Second World War. Truly, the latter were born from the womb of an advanced capitalist system, enabling them to attract financial support from the old liberal and secular European bourgeoisie. I carried on by saying that the authoritarian, oppressive and populist character of our state in Syria is not enough to classify it as fascist and totalitarian in its modern sense, unless we refer to fascism, when we describe some common traits that it shares with other fascisms, and when characterizing some of its brutal acts. Our "fascism" is less modern than its European-style counterparts, and it truly has a Mameluke style, that was recalled

from our "repressed" arsenal in its form of tribal, sectarian, religious, and rental economy. This is, of course, different from what happened in European outbreaks.

Also, I said that it is not practical in our case to use the usual "class" analysis to evaluate our society that is still forming, and which is still composed of factions, i.e. religious or ethnic groups, where every group still retains its inherent 'Asabiya, ready to re-surface and appear when there is a danger to its members in their common interest, as the events of the recent Syrian revolution showed.

What happened in Syria during the two decades following the military coup known as the "corrective movement" in 1970 can be summarized according to Ibn Khaldun's theory on the stages, "Atwar", of the state formation, i.e., during the stages of its development, always in the framework of transition of presidency and governance from one limited 'Asabiya to another similar to it within a broader 'Asabiya. Since the 'Asabiya is based on common interest, the policy of governance at this first stage was based on the system of "participation and contribution" and collective management within the ruling 'Asabiya, in order to preserve unity and cohesion within the group. However, this was not done without tremors when Rif 'at al-Assad tried to seize power from his brother Hafez, the president. When Basil Assad the president's son died in a car accident, depriving the head of state from a precious pawn during this phase, in which the ruler was concerned, as Ibn Khaldun described it, *"to gather supporters and followers to face and deter the noses of his own clique and of his own family ..."* In this phase, the state also tried to follow the policy of *"winning hearts, and rewarding both its true and untrue followers"*, to ensure the allegiance of the various groups. This target was reached during the suppression of the Hama rebellion in 1982, when the strata of merchants and of other financial actors and religious scholars, especially in Damascus, aligned themselves with the regime.

In other words, a relative "shift" has emerged in the foundations of the entire social and political structure in Syria since the late 1970s. The aim of this shift initiated by the regime for the benefit of the Alawite community is to guarantee its permanent control over the country. Not only by continually granting them generous privileges, but also by encouraging them after been isolated in the past, to "mingle with" the other components of the Syrian society which were already converging toward more integration and modernity. This was in a time when it was assumed that the clan, sectarian and cultural affiliations of these other components of the Syrian society were diminishing, and that their proper 'Asabiyas had faded so that they could no longer resist the dominion of the newly emerging and vigorous 'Asabiya in the political arena, and its quest for the sole reign of the country.

This way, the "clannish 'Asabiya" that had marked the insular society in the Alawites mountains was given way to replace it by a more flexible 'Asabiya, which Ibn Khaldun called " al-'Asabiya al-Hadariya." This "Urban 'Asabiya" which is also "*in cit-*

ies and villages...", as he put it, replaced its self-clustered predecessor without losing its former operational and confrontational characteristics, if necessary, and without prejudice to the genuine and the real basis of its 'Asabiya. That is to say, to continue to defend the common interest of the Alawite community within a context, in which it is this time forced to open up to the outside world, locally, regionally and internationally.

In other words, the political and economic base of the regime has expanded and opened itself up during the last two decades of the last century, while the rest of the Syrian society was also undergoing a process of transformation in its social structure, especially in its critical attitude towards its traditional elites.

We have already mentioned how the state has attempted to follow the policy of winning hearts during this phase, in order to ensure the allegiance of various groups, and that the state in Syria has always played a decisive role historically in forming the different segments of the society, beginning from the "top of the social pyramid", not vice versa.

This "*Infitah, opening up*" occurred to other social components, through the role played by the Regime, as the main coordinator of social activities, and as an primary distributor of national wealth. It moved, thus, from a defensive position of the narrow collective interest of its proper community to the stage of large scale offensive along the front of the whole Syrian society, depending in this on a team that excels in maneuvering in the "home front" and that is skilled in harnessing the state apparatus in the sphere of power relations with the rest of the country.

In a quick reference to the current social structure in Syria, it can be said that the Syrian "bourgeoisie", which includes various social strata from within and outside the ruling 'Asabiya, was before the revolution and is still in the pre-modern stage. It owes its relative prosperity, above all, to the "frame state", in which it has been re-warded financially in order to earn its loyalty. A state that is itself a rental state, which obtained its revenues during decades mainly from the Gulf funds before being currently acquired from the funds of the Iranian people. A state whose main concern was how to "reallocate the resources of the public treasury" and distribute them to its beneficiaries and close partners instead of focusing on optimal economic management of productive capacity in the national economy. This productive capacity of the country and its infrastructure, were on the top of all what the ruling power recently destroyed, so as not to fall in the event of defeat in the hands of an alternative 'Asabiya, as well as the hope that when circumstances

helped to win, to return and be the first beneficiary from the reconstruction of the country:

The earliest segments of the "Syrian bourgeoisie" are "businessmen", merchants and industrialists sprouts from families of prominent notables who were influential in the past. Those of them who survived the economic reforms and did not migrate abroad, maintained their pride and identifying themselves as "national bourgeoisie", excluding the other segments that were formed within the modern authoritarian state in Syria from this designation. On the eve of the revolution of 2011, they were dealing with the new created states bourgeois elites, through mutual need and interest, but with caution and vigilance, and not without some arrogance.

A second group of businessmen emerged from more modest social origins than those of the previous group. Policies of the so-called "economic openness" have produced this segment, which can be described, with great reservation, as the new "middle class". A kind of "class consciousness" emerged in some members of this "class", which they tried to express in vain. However, many members of this group have cooperated with the corrupt ruling junta, hoping to join one day the ranks of the upper class of the nouveaux riches. Their moderate tone, calling to "social harmony", and their disapproval for the popular uprising, with the pretext that "*we were living well before*", doesn't prevent them from continuing to be good tools in the hands of the regime. This group benefited from the emergence of a "consumption society" in Syria, following in a first stage the establishment of a movement for export to the countries of the former Soviet Union. This was followed in a second phase by the establishment of joint-venture projects and other allied industries, in cooperation with French, Italian and German groups. Another group has also been active in the agronomic sector by leasing land belonging to farmers benefiting from agrarian reform, in collusion with the Regime, thereby exploiting the farmers' inability to acquire technical means and their helplessness obtaining the necessary financial loans to exploit their land. While other members of this strata took part in the speculative movement on real estate, the prices of which rose to levels not proportionate with the purchasing power of the Syrian citizen. They took advantage of the exceptional situation that arose after the occupation of Iraq 2003, and continuing after the revolution 2011 to take profit of the disastrous situation created by the civil war.

The third social group, which emerged through the financial aid provided by the Arab Gulf States to Syria after the 1973 war, is the most closely related to the country's financial circuit, and, therefore, the most closely linked one to the

Regime. This segment benefited more than two mentioned before from the economic "opening up" processes of the regime in 1973 and in the late 1980s. This was done mainly when the Regime allowed them to play the role of a mediator, which helped them establish direct relations with the various organs of the state. This enabled them to play a semi-

monopolistic role when setting up infrastructure projects launched by the state since 1973. In addition, since the second half of the 1980s, this new "class" has diversified its business activities, investing in real estate, construction, in the food and pharmaceutical industries, and the tourism and transport sectors.

The upper slice of this new "class" is a sort of "Assembly of Notables". It is almost identical to what was known in the Mameluke State as "Afrad al-Halaqa, Members of the Ring". i.e., a kind of "Board of Seniors" of the Mameluke state, which was then headed by the Mameluke Sultan. This enabled the group in modern Syrian to strengthen its social status in the state and to assume a pivotal position in it. It played the role of a bridge between the administration and economic management of the country. From the womb of this intersection, which has taken place since the beginning of the consolidation of the present regime, was born what was famous in the economic literature under the name of "Military-Mercantile Complex." That is, the industrial and commercial sector, which is managed and directed by the State. The relatives of the former as of the latter president, their senior aides and retired military veterans, has been at the head of this complex, who have dominated the economic life of the country for four decades. Just as, during the days of the Mameluke State.

This development arose as a result of the relative social "displacement, Inziah" we referred to previously in the ruling 'Asabiya under the influence and requirements of the urban economy and its transformation into an "Urban 'Asabiya". The system was gradually transformed from a form of 'Asabiya of a "sectarian interpretations and internal symbolism" to a system that depended more on societal ties established with other social groups on the basis of common and pragmatic material interests, i.e., it becomes more operational. But, as we have already pointed out, this urban 'Asabiya did not lose its provocative and combative character as much as its pre-urban "clan-nish" character, which came back to the surface when the 2011 uprising began, as we shall see later.

The above said was about the composition of the social Upper-Strata in contemporary Syrian society which is equivalent to the former Ibn Khaldun notion of *al-Khassa*.

As for the larger and more numerous class of the Syrian society, the "Common Strata, *al-'Amma*" of peasants, clansmen, workers, employees, small ranchers, shop-keepers and sooks craftsmen, we shall also briefly mention some things regarding them:

In particular, the Peasantry, which is numerally at the forefront of the "common strata", and which some of its members played since the coup of March 13, 1963, an

important role, negatively and positively, in the history of contemporary Syria. Does this mean that Ibn Khaldun whom he described as "*feeble and shabby*" and as "*Bedouin farmers who are subjugated to the townsmen*" have now become otherwise, after some of their sons are ruling now the country?

And is it not in this statement that contradicts our proposal when we said at the beginning of the research that the State in Syria, has always played, and continues to play, a crucial role in forming the various segments of the society, starting from the "top of the social pyramid"?

At first glance, the vision is that what happened now is a process of emancipation that has started from the "substructure" of Syrian society, or rather from a part of it after it has been agreed upon, to produce the elite that governs the country now, and is conform thereto to the will of the Syrian people.

In reality, the team that rules Syria since half a century has imposed itself from "above" during a "Ttafra, leap", after a Putsch in which the nascent 'Asabiya managed to seize power. I.e., the movement doesn't emanate directly from the rural base alongside Syria by "democratic" elections or the like.

Thus, the modern authoritarian Syrian State does not change from that of the Mamelukes. Except that the Mamelukes were integrated slaves stranger to the country and were bought by their masters on the markets of slavery, and who in the end revolted, and seized the reins of government in both Egypt and Syria.

As for the ruling junta currently in power in Syria they are but locals who forcibly seized power and keeping on shedding blood without any sanctions:

Syria witnessed major changes in its social structure and population distribution from the beginning of the 1960s until the eve of the revolution 2011, in which the percentage of urban population, i.e., "urban" by the current statistical definition, increased between 1960 and 2004, from 37% to 53% of the total population of the country. On the other hand, the percentage of the rural population decreased from 63% to 47% during the same period, in a clear reference to the flow of rural people to the cities of the central Syrian provinces, and to their rural areas located on their outskirts.

For example, the Governorate of Damascus Countryside, where fierce battles between the Regime and the armed Resistance are currently taking place, witnessed during the period referred to, migration from all governorates, especially from the city of Damascus towards the towns of Ghouta, such as Harasta, Jobar and Duma. In this regard, without going further into the language of figures, the proportion of the urban population in Damascus countryside rose between 1960 and 2004, from

1.6% to 12.7% of the total population of the country. With this in mind, it is not everyone who

moved from the countryside to live in cities, became urban overnight. They move their rural background with them and remain close to it during a shorter or longer period of time, perhaps for decades. This leads us to note that the rapid "ruralization" movement that took place in the various areas of life that accompanied the coming of the Baath party led to a disruption in the social structure of the large and medium-sized Syrian cities. In particular, because they were still fragile and semi-rural even in some of their large districts, and do not resemble to the configuration of a class society in developed countries. This is reflected now through what we have seen in some Syrian cities such as Homs, Aleppo, and now in Damascus, in the fights taking place between the districts inhabitants of the same city, but which follow different 'Asabiyas.

In general, it can be said that Syrian peasants are ranked in the strength of their clan ties, as well as in their 'Asabiyas, according to the regions in which they live. Those of al-Ghouta and "*Ahl al-Oud*" in the Idlib area, and those living in the orchards in the vicinity of Homs, Hama and Aleppo, as well as the Alawites coastal farmers, are mostly without deep tribal affiliations. But this is not the case of the farmers in the plains of Horan, Mount Druze the Alawites Mountains and the peasants from in the Syrian al-Jazirah region. - Although Bedouins are decreasing everywhere in the region resulting from the pursuit policy of Bedouins settle down and the disintegration of tribal organization, the peasants here still keeping their tribal affiliations, and many of them still living on their old lands, and their old 'Asabiyas are still waiting for opportunities to re-emerge.

Syrian farmers and peasants differentiated by their distinct religious affiliations: The Sunni peasants majority of Syria are spread in all governorates except in the governorates of Latakia and Suwayda. There are Kurdish-speaking Yazidis in the Afrin river basin, north-west of Aleppo, Alawites and Shi'a Imamites in Sit Zeynab near Damascus, others of them in some areas of Aleppo, Ismailis in Salamiya and Misyaf, Druze in Jabal Druze and in north-west Aleppo. There are also a large number of Christians, the majority of whom are Roman Orthodox, Syriacs, and Roman Catholics. The number of Alawites peasants is still higher than that of Christian peasants.

Generally, changes in the social status of peasants since the early 1960s, due to modern methods of agriculture, relative improvement in health care, broad steps in the fight against illiteracy, and increased education have led to increasing their acceptance of new ideas on the political front. This development in politics was

inter- rupted by the Baath Party's accession to power in 1963. Munif al-Razzaaz, the general secretary of the Baath party back then, said "*As the military committee with the civil- ian section of the Party has done, many members of the organization have been in-*

roduced without any previous party guidance because of their closeness, friendship or tribal affiliation." Al-Razzaz referred to the behavior of the Alawite members of the Military Committee.

The nucleus of the Military Committee was entirely rural and belonged to several branches of Shiite Islam During the period 1960-1965. On the eve of the March 1963 coup, ten out of nineteen members of the Military Committee were rural dignitaries or members of the middle-class rural strata. But none of them belonged to the majority, i.e., to the peasantry lowest strata of sharecroppers or those deprived from land ownership. Since March 1964, extensive cleansing of the armed forces culminated on the eve of the 1967 war by the expulsion of one third of the army's officers' corps, majority of them were Sunnites, and their replacement by reserve personnel, almost all of whom were rural school teachers. This intensive ruralization of the armed forces witnessed the rise of the Alawite officers to the highest military ranks.

The predominance of Alawite officers was made possible by the fact that most of them were of rural origin and originated from a single geographical area. That is, they were more homogeneous as 'Asabiya than others were. They were ideologically at first glance more cohesive. They were either Baathists or they pretended to be so. Later, the conflicts that arose between the Alawite officers themselves, were either of interpersonal nature, as a result of divergent views, or due to tribal sensibilities without causing deep divisions that could threaten their control. On the other hand, divisions between their fellow officers representing the Sunni majority in the country had a deeper structural meaning. Some of them were Rurales and others were Urbans who competed within the context of the old urban-rural conflict in Syria. Among those the ones of the cities of Damascus and Hama were the most politically profiled.

The Deir Ez-Zour and Horan groups were also among officers of rural origin. Ideologically, while some of the Damascenes had Nasserites affiliations, most of the rest were aligned with the separatists who were against the union with Egypt. Socially, some of them were bourgeois of origin, from the Muslim Brotherhood, or some were independent leftists belonging to various segments of the middle class. Operationally, the Alawite officers were privileged to the utmost in this conflict, due to the sensitive positions they occupied in the Military Committee and in the military organization of the Baath party.

This enabled them first of all to act in the first stage as patriot Baathists, not

as Alawites. This was backed by the fact that they had control of the army's most striking units, such as the airborne units, missiles, and armored brigades, stationed in and around the capital, as well as their dominance of the Intelligence Services. On the other hand, despite the successive cleansing campaigns in the army, many Sunni officers

remained. They were allowed to continue serving as individuals rather than as a group unlike their Alawite colleagues, and in a professional rather than a political sense. Some of them were even chiefs of staff, some others worked in Moral Guidance, or as pilots, and engineers, while being closely monitored by the "shadow government", the famous Mukhabarat, the security forces.

Heavy ruralization did not only affect the armed forces, but also on the administrative apparatus of the state. Many, if not most, of the new state officials, especially since the mid-1970s and later, were from rural backgrounds. They did not hesitate to show their overt hostility especially towards the urban society in large cities. General Salah Jedid, the chief of staff, complained that the Party's existence is "very weak in the large cities" and that most of the branch leaders in these cities were rural and unable to build a "real party organization capable of moving and leading these cities." In the 1960s, the Regime had to resort to bringing in peasants battalions from the countryside, acting under the name of the "National Guard", to confront the demonstrations and riots that broke out in Hama, Aleppo and Damascus.

On the other hand, Hafez al-Assad's takeover of power in the early 1970s was accompanied with the a widespread feeling, especially among peasants or those of rural origin, that the best way to rise in the community ladder was to join the Baath party. This feeling deepened, especially among the Alawites, who were convinced that the Baath party secures indeed their interests. They left their land at that time and began to flock to towns and cities in large numbers in search of better opportunities to live. They joined the armed forces and at first in those units that were associated politically with the Regime.

This trend has been especially predominant among Alawites of the mountains, rather than those from the plains due to the low quality of land they possessed and lack in income, despite the electrification of their villages and other benefits.

It is true that Assad was the first ruler of Syria of peasant origin, but the basis of his power was in essence, and characterized, in being at first sectarian Alawite. This situation was reflected in Assad the father's rule in the second half of the 1970s and during the first half of the 1980s, which created a political climate fraught with sectarian division at the country level. Assad used his rural background to control the agrarian organizations while allowing them a wide margin of movement to deal with their own issues related to the technical aspects of

agricultural work and in the management of their associations, in return for loyalty to his person, and generally to his policies and economic plans of the country. He also used his rural background to increase his power, and to transform it into a hereditary authority for himself and his children. His peasant origin did not prevent him from stating with a bourgeois arrogance that ordi-

nary citizens were only economic beings who sought to "Umur al-'aish, lifetime things", according to the Khaldunian expression, and that he could satisfy them "in one way or another," but he believed that they were not born to be political. There are "one hundred or two hundred people in a lot" dealing serious with politics, and these, in his opinion, could not be satisfied whatever he did for them. Here, Assad the father concluded to say, "*Mazza prison is originally built for these people*".

The first peasant ruler of Syria, and his son Bashar, after him, ruled the country with such a Mameluke mentality.

As part of this "appeasement" policy, while Assad the Father was talking about the secularism of the Baath party, which was his secretary-general, he flattered the clergy in both the majority and the minorities. Perhaps he would have thought that by doing so his rule was gaining greater legitimacy, especially among the Sunnite majority of the people who had printed Syria since the Islamic conquest. In his days, mosques have flourished more than ever before. The Regime also allowed the establishment of institutions to study the Koran, and promote the establishment of other religious associations, charity organizations and other ones, such as the so-called "Qubaisiat" association, to which activities the Regime turned a blind eye. All this happened, while the Regime, on the other hand, prevented any other political or intellectual activity outside the scope of the One Party system.

This deliberate mix of "politics and religion" led to the negative and successive reactions that took place during the days of Assad junior at the outbreak of the revolution in 2011. In the first stage of the revolt, the Regime released Salafist jihadists from the jails, and he gambled that they would join the armed struggle, which they indeed did. This helped Bashar al-Assad to accuse the revolutionaries of terrorism, after the crushing of its democratic elements by the at the beginning of the revolution . All this development led the revolution to fall into the grip of political Islam done under regional and international auspices.

The ageing of "ad-Dawla al-Asadia, the Assad's state"

We mentioned above, how Ibn Khaldun classified the notion "State" as such. We can, thus, denominate the current Regime in Syria as the "Assad's" State according to him, until its current "'Asabiya" cycle ends, after some short or long period of time .

We are not here about describing what happened, when being killed, displaced and destroyed, in detail, when we talk about the features of the Assad's State. Every one of us watched and still watches the sad daily news about how things turned out in Syria, written, or in sound and in images. What concerns us here is to determine the

degree of ageing of the state of the currently ruling 'Asabiya in Syria, according to the mechanisms of research and analysis of Ibn Khaldun:

We said at the beginning of the research that one of the most important influences, which imprinted and is still imprinting the Arab nation, are those that are difficult to distinguish and separate one from the other: politics and religion in its broader sense, even when it is used as a veil or mask, what is currently happening on Syrian soil. There is from one side the 'Asabiya of the Assad's State, which is hiding behind the Shiite Islam, with its base the Salafist Iran and its vassals along the region from Afghanistan to Lebanon. Nasrallah of Hezbollah, said recently that he is fighting in Syria for Shiism, not for Bashar, a battle that the Shi'a Islam began fourteen centuries ago against the Sunni Takfirists!

The second pole of confrontation and concealment behind religion, is Saudi Wahhabism, which confronts Shi'ite Iran on Syrian soil through armed factions led by warlords. In addition, there are the Jihadis of "Da'ish" and "Nusra" remnants of bin Laden's "al-Qaa'ida" during the Afghan war, when US intelligence utilized these Wahhabis to fight the Soviets. There are also Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen factions, remnants of the "Free Syrian Army", and their different 'Asabiyas confronting the 'Asabiya of the Assad's State.

In short, after the successive setbacks since the catastrophe of Palestine, the occupation of Iraq, the fragmentation of the Syrian state, and its recent division into sectarian and ethnic emirates, and areas with independently local civil administration, the future of the country under Russian mandate and foreign occupation forces in its north, south and east, all that underlined the return of the "bottled-up" repressed in its sectarian, religious, extremist, clannish, as in its rentier state's form more than ever before, making our present akin to our past.

The above indicates ample evidence that the Assad's State is reaching its aging stage, despite its temporal come back due to foreign support, regaining control over areas that were out of its control during the revolution. This means that it is still able to move and it did not yet reach the last stage of its aging phase. Since the speed of its final deterioration depends on the quality of the existing conditions. It is clear, on the one hand, that the claimants of its heritage are currently weaker than it. It is also clear that on the other hand that it is going to be confronted by a second stage of the war of rebellious 'Asabiyas, similar to what happened and still is happening in Afghanistan and Iraq, since victory in this case is

"bil mutaawala la bil munaajasa, by dodging, and not by direct

confrontation", as Ibn Khaldun said,

Furthermore, according to Ibn Khaldun, there are two conditions to be fulfilled in order for completion of the 'Asabiya cycle to be achieved and consequently for state aging and its final demise: "*Fasad 'Umraanuha, the corruption of its sociability, refinement or civilization*", and the existence of an alternative 'Asabiya. That is, the existence of a revolutionary situation, and the presence of a revolutionary organization to lead the revolution against it.

We have presented above under the title "*Al-Mulk bil Jund wal Jund bil Mal, ruling with corrupted military*" the phases of "corruption of 'Umran" of the Assad's State since its inception. We mentioned how political power was seized by a "*Ttafra, surge, Putsch*", not by a normal transition of power resulting from gradual development, and steady improvement in the conditions of "production" in society and its means. This sporadic violence was the basis for the "'Umran" of the Assad's State when it forcibly seized national wealth by force of arms. The "surge" in the seizure of power is what created "*the wildness that is entrenched in them*" says Ibn Khaldun. This savagery of the Shabbiha, militias of the regime composed of different sects and nationalities, is at the root of the brutality, with which they have fought the 2011 revolution and so far, and the resulting reactions of the insurgents are equally savage. In the past, we used to call this "revolutionary violence", trying to find excuses as to distinguish it from the violence of the ruling authority or that of the foreign occupier, until the savage brutality of Da'ish or IS, and the brutality against the prisoners in the regime's prisons, came to reveal all kinds violence committed against the oppressed, whichever they were.

There was one "determinism" according to Ibn Khaldun', which is "*Tabaa'i al- 'Umraan, Features of Sociability*", what can also be called "*Sociability Determinism*" according to al-Jabiri, by which it periodic movement the process of statehood and its fall is controlled and identified. This movement is also largely controlled by the sum of the political, social, economic, and natural conditions that accompany the aging state. It is clear that the fall of the state can only be achieved by rebellion, which stems from "*Sociability Determinism*". The condition of its success lies first in the existence of a revolutionary situation, i.e. in our case the ageing process of the Assad's State which is still standing after reeling, and the existence of a revolutionary organization that mobilizes the majority of the Syrian people, an organization that is lacking, so far.

In conclusion, perhaps some would wonder if in our case: is there only a "revolution" to do the work, after we spent till now seven bitter years of struggle?

Is there no other way to break the 'Asabiya cycle of Ibn Khaldun?

In theory, perhaps yes:

When those who sit "above" can no longer do what they are accustomed to do until now, and until those who are "under" can stop what they have asked for in the past. In other words, until our past becomes separate from our present, we must update the determinants of the Khaldunian components by substituting them through contemporary historical alternatives: transforming the "voluntary" state into a state of law, transforming the society of 'Asabiyas into an advanced civil, political and social body, and freeing our ideological thought from dogmas, no matter religious or secular, all in addition to the transformation of our rental economy based mostly on exports of raw materials, and transformation industries, into a productive economy.

However, the question remains, can we actually resolve all these great burdens without a "revolution"?

Translated from Arabic by: Cœurdelion.