Ibn Khaldūn and Kınalızāde's Concept of *Dāʾirat al-Siyāsah*: A Rethinking of Modern Politics from A Civilisational Perspective

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Abstract

This paper demonstrates that Islamic civilisation is characterised by a unique circular model of political and administrative system as articulated by Ibn Khaldūn and his Ottoman successor, Kınalızāde, in the concept of the circle of politics (*dāʾirat al-siyāsah*). It offers a new perspective to the current quest for good governance from a Khaldunian perspective by presenting an alternative way of restructuring contemporary politics and society in a circular order for a more effective and egalitarian system open to citizen participation. The pyramidal governance structure, having no roots in Islamic political theory and practice, positions the subjects

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at the bottom of the political hierarchy and the ruler at its pinnacle, which leads to significant disparities. Conversely, the circular system espouses an egalitarian and participatory political order rooted in the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muḥammad. This model, embraced by Muslims for centuries until the era of colonisation, engenders a more inclusive and engaging approach to governance. Furthermore, this study contends that the circular model of governance is applicable beyond political institutions to a larger range of social entities as a method of reforming and improving them.

Keywords

Circle of justice, *dāʾirat al-siyāsah*, Islamic political thought, Ibn Khaldūn, Kınalızāde.

What is the State? A Circle or A Pyramid?

When asked to visually represent the state, most individuals tend to draw a pyramid which symbolises a hierarchical structure. However, around six centuries ago, Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) had already challenged this conventional notion of the state as a pyramid with his idea of the "circle of politics" (*dāʾirat al-siyāsah*). While developing this idea, he relied on the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muḥammad and the legacy of Muslim thinkers and rulers. He had also benefitted from the works of some of the most prominent ancient Indian, Persian, Greek, and Arab thinkers and just rulers. Ibn Khaldūn acknowledges the historical references yet emphasises that his formulation of the idea of the "circle of politics" was achieved through divine guidance, independent of Aristotle's theory or the teachings of the Mobedhan.[1] Ibn Khaldūn also emphasises that his insights

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1. The sources of the idea of the "circle of politics" can be traced back to the era preceding and during the Sasanian period. The "circle of politics" is a well-established idea in various genres of political thought, ranging from *ṭabaqāt*-history literature to *adab*, mirrors for princes literature, and

on the state in his *Muqaddimah* serve as a commentary on the "circle of politics."[2]

In later periods, the Ottomans similarly embraced the circular concept of the state, which they commonly referred to as the circle of justice (*dâire-i adliyye*). Their perspective emphasised that politics is the process of good governance while justice is its outcome. The stark contrast between these two divergent forms of state organisation is that one is based on "vertical hierarchy," with the ruler at the top and the people at the bottom, while the other is based on "circular hierarchy," with the ruler and the people within the same circle with equal importance. These two images of the state reflect the deep-rooted and latent notions about (1) the relationship between the leader and the subjects, (2) good governance, (3) the well-being of the nation, and (4) the administration system.

In the contemporary world, the prevailing state structures universally adhere to the pyramid model rather than the circular. This ubiquitous pyramid-like configuration stands as one of the most fundamental sources of numerous challenges faced by humanity today, such as perpetual inequality, corruption, injustice, oppression, and exploitation. This study contends that reviving and reintroducing the circular model of the state could potentially resolve certain prevailing social, political, legal, and administrative issues we encounter today. This reintroduction, if it supplants the pervasive global model of the pyramid state structure, holds promise in addressing these challenges effectively.

The circular model of administration and management holds the potential for broader implications even beyond the state system. It serves as an alternative to the prevailing pyramidal administrative structures that exert comprehensive control over

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practical philosophy literature. For an in-depth analysis of the theme, see Linda T. Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Ilker Kömbe, "Adalet Dairesinin Teşekkülü ve Temel Kavramları." Ph.D. diss. (Marmara University, 2014); Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 2nd edition (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1967), vol. 1, 82.

2. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 82.

our lives across various domains, including family, education, politics, and business. Considering a transition to circular management systems in these spheres represents a revolutionary paradigm shift. This shift towards circular systems could yield extensive and profound positive consequences across our lives, relations, and organisations as it facilitates more equality and participation through circular hierarchy in every sphere of life in contrast to pyramid-like systems, which generate unfair inequality as well as excessive levels of hierarchy, hinder flow of information through organisational levels, and reduce participation in decision making. Indeed, this shift towards embracing circular systems holds the potential to make a substantial contribution to the well-being of nations and humanity.

Figure 1 Pyramidal Political Structure
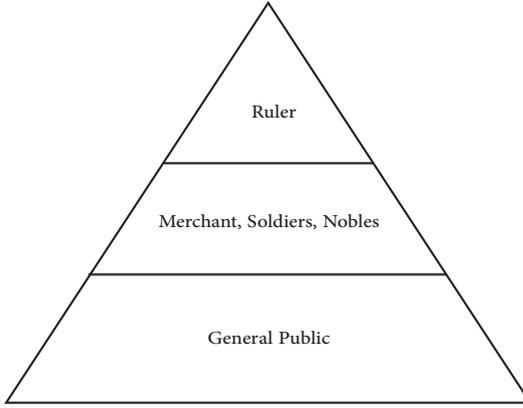
Ibn Khaldūn's "Circle of Politics" (*Dāʾirat al-Siyāsah*)

Ibn Khaldūn's circle of politics, known as *dāʾirat al-siyāsah* in Arabic, is a foundational concept within the realm of Islamic political philosophy and governance. The circular model of political organisation envisioned by Ibn Khaldūn comprises

eight interconnected components and values: society (*ʿālam*), state (*dawlah*), the *Sunnah* and *Sharīʿah*, the sovereign (*malik*), army (*jaysh*), capital or economy (*māl*), citizens (*raʿiyah*), and justice (*ʿadl*).[3] Notably, these elements have neither a specific beginning nor an end within the circle. Each component represents an institution, and within this circular framework, all institutions are considered equal in their value and significance. They are not arranged in descending order as is the case in a pyramidal model, i.e., the sovereign or the head of state is not placed over his subjects. Instead, both the sovereign and the subjects appear to be seated around a roundtable as equals.

> *Dā'irat al-siyāsah*
> *al-ʿālam bustān sayājuhu al-dawlah*
> *al-dawlah sulṭān taḥyā bihi al-Sunnah*
> *al-Sunnah siyāsatun yasūsuha al-malik*
> *al-malik rāʿun yuʿaḍḍiduhu al-jaysh*
> *al-jaysh aʿwānun yuklifuhum al-māl*
> *al-māl rizqun tajmaʿuhu al-raʿiyah*
> *al-raʿiyah ʿabīdun yataʿabbaduhum al-ʿadl*
> *al-ʿadl maʾlūfun wa bihi qawwām al-ʿālam*

> The society is a garden whose wall is the state.
> The state is the authority that survives [with] the *Sunnah.*
> The *Sunnah* is a policy administered by the sovereign.
> The sovereign is a caretaker supported by the army.
> The army is a staff financed by the economy.
> The economy is a sustenance gathered by the citizens.
> The citizens are subjects who are made loyal to the state by justice.
> Justice is loved by all, with which survives the social order.

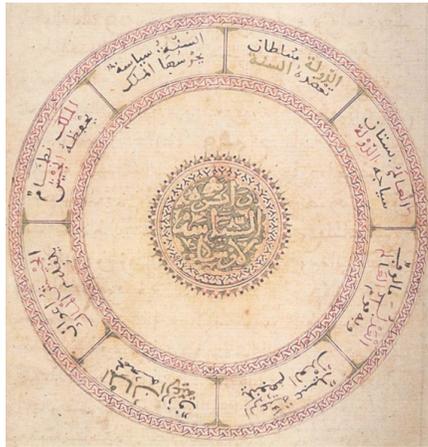
3.   Ibid.

Figure 2 Ibn Khaldūn's *al-Muqaddimah*

Source: Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, Âtıf Efendi No: 1936.
Süleymâniye Library.

Figure 3 Ibn Khaldūn's "*Dāʾirat al-Siyāsah*"

Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 15th Century. MS. British Library Add.
9574, s. 29 v.

Ibn Khaldūn and Kınalızāde's Concept of Dā'irat al-Siyāsah

In his famous work, *Ahlāk-ı Ālāî*, the great Ottoman thinker and scholar Kınalızāde Ali (1516–1571) drew a "circle of justice" (*dâire-i adliyye*) which is similar to that drawn by Ibn Khaldūn in the *Muqaddimah*, and translates the eight Arabic principles into Ottoman Turkish as follows:[4]

> *'Adldir mûcib-i salāh-ı cihan;*
> *Cihan bir bağdır dîvarı devlet;*
> *Devletin nāzımı şeriattır;*
> *Şeriata hāris olamaz illā melik;*
> *Meliki zapteylemez illā leşker;*
> *Leşkeri cem' edemez illā mal;*
> *Malı cem' eyleyen reāyādır;*
> *Reāyāyı kul eder padişah-ı āleme adl.*

Justice brings peace to society;
Society is a garden whose wall is the state;
The state is organised by the law (*Sharī'ah*);
The law cannot be protected unless there is a ruler;
The ruler cannot maintain order unless he has an army;
The army cannot be formed unless there is capital;
Citizens collect the capital;
Justice binds citizens to the ruler of society.

Figure 4 Kınalızade's "Circle of Justice"
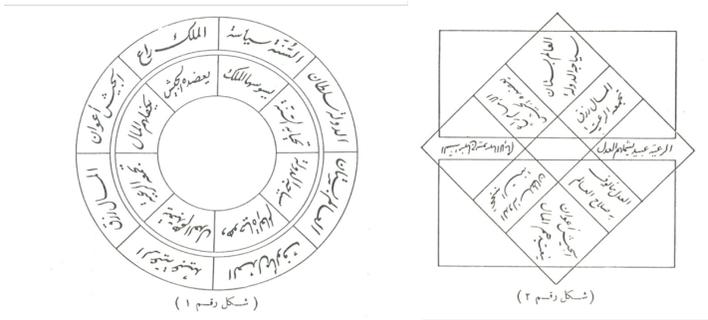
Source: Kınalızade's *Ahlâk-i Alâî*, Klasik Yayınları, 2007.

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4.   Kınalızade, *Ahlâk-ı Alâ'î* (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2007), 539.

It should be noted that the circle begins with justice and ends with justice. The main idea that the "circle of justice" conveys is the interdependence between the governing authority and justice, a relationship in which the wrongful manipulation of power is illegal. As many Islamic scholars have observed, the state can be irreligious and still survive, but it can never survive, no matter how zealously religious, by oppressing its people. They repeatedly said: "A state can survive without religion but never without justice." Kınalızāde's full adoption of Ibn Khaldūn's concept and its integration into his work is important because it is representative of the continuity of Islamic civilisational ideas and, therefore, Islamic civilisation. It also demonstrates the Ottoman profound investment in the circular conception of the state. The "circle of politics" suggests that establishing justice is essential for the well-being of social life and emphasises the role of a governing body as being responsible for upholding justice.

The terms used in the circle of politics may be divided into four categories: institutions, processes, products, and social and political actors. The examples are as follows: (1) *institutions* include state, law (*Sharīʿah*), tradition (*Sunnah*), presidency (*malik*), army (*jaysh*), and economy (*māl*); (2) *process* includes power, survival of the law or tradition, politics, protection of citizenry, support of the state, financing the state and army, collection of wealth, gaining loyalty through justice, and obedience to the state; (3) *products* include justice, survival of society, property-wealth, loyalty, social order, or world order; and (4) *social and political actors* include society, president, army, and citizenry.

The circular shape is divided into eight equally formed components that are inextricable from each other; if one ring is missing, the circle will be completely ruined. In effect, we see an important manifestation of an approach to politics and society: while the pyramid manifests a linear hierarchy and inequality, the "circle of politics" or the "circle of justice" operates with a circular hierarchy and manifests an egalitarian and pluralistic approach to society and civilisation.

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Within the circular model of governance, the role of the ruler differs significantly from that in pyramidal political structures. In the latter structures, the ruler wields absolute power and authority over the general population and is primarily served. One of the best examples of this conceptualisation of the ruler is in the *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), where he represents the ruler as a titan.[5] This setup characterises the ruler as the central figure who commands, governs, and stays above the law. This aspect is very well illustrated by the idea of *the king's two bodies*, where the divine aspect of the king was associated with supreme authority, placing the ruler at the top of the societal hierarchy.[6] Similarly, the modern state possesses a sovereign legal will which is inherently represented by the law of the state.[7] Moreover, within pyramidal political organisations, a defining characteristic lies in the exclusive authorisation to employ violence and utilise threats to enforce the sovereign legal will. This power to use force or its threat is considered among the fundamental aspects of pyramidal political structures. It symbolises the state's ultimate authority, concentrating power at the top of the hierarchy, vested in a single individual or governing body.

Conversely, in the circular model, a distinct aspect is the absence of discrimination regarding being subject to the constitution, which positions the constitution above both the ruler and the ruled. This aspect marks a notable characteristic of Islamic political organisation, which centres on the concept of the rule of law. Constitutionally, the ruler in the Islamic civilisation lacked a sovereign will that is inherent in his legislation. The ruler, or executive authority, was bound by and subservient to the *Sharī'ah* rather than being its ultimate arbiter or creator. The

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5. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002).
6. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007).
7. For more on this theme, see Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

ruler was obligated to enforce the *Sharīʿah* that the ruler did not legislate himself, although *siyāsah sharʿiyyah* granted the ruler the legal authority to complement religious law with administrative regulations within the boundaries of the *Sharīʿah*. The rulers of many states in Muslim lands were required to apply the same law. The *Sharīʿah*, through the principle of *siyāsah sharʿiyyah*, requires the ruler to manage worldly affairs and to uphold the *sharʿī* order on behalf of the Prophet, which in turn entails the maintenance of the interests of the community, repeatedly expressed in the language of *maṣāliḥ al-muslimīn*.[8]

Ibn Khaldūn inherited his approach from his predecessors and systematised it better as a circle. His approach to politics and society was also adopted in the subsequent generations by Muslim statesmen and political thinkers who came after him. The "circle of politics" was adopted by the Ottomans in particular, and they drew different versions of the circle, which are available in many manuscripts. Each of these versions should be regarded as a work of art that reflects a unique artistic interpretation of the concept.

What runs through all these drawings on a consistent basis, however, is the underlying awareness that the aim of political and social processes is to ensure justice. To strengthen this awareness, the Ottomans have also called it the "circle of justice" (*dāire-i adliyye*) to mean that politics refers to a process and justice refers to the outcome.[9] For subsequent generations of Muslims and

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8. Ibid., 66.
9. Justice (*al-ʿadl* or *al-ʿadālah*) constitutes the legitimate foundation of authority or the state, *al-mulk*. It is called "*mülk*" in Turkish which causes some confusion. Authority or sovereignty (*mulk*) in this context means government and administration, as opposed to the prevalent misunderstanding that means ownership. The word "*melik*" (ruler or king) is from the same etymological root. We must avoid being misled by the contemporary Turkish definition of *mülk* as owned property. The two diverging meanings of *mülk* become clear once it is remembered that the word "*melik*" (ruler) shares same root with "*mālik*" (owner). When it is said that justice constitutes the foundation of government and administration (*al-ʿadālah asās al-mulk*), it is meant that providing justice is what legitimates political power; it does not mean that justice constitutes

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the Ottomans, particularly figures like Kınalızāde who followed Ibn Khaldūn, the circular shape signified an integral feature indicating the Islamic concept of the state.

The "circle of justice" visually represents a social and political theory. It also reflects a striking example of how Muslims approach other civilisations. In fact, Ibn Khaldūn indicates that he drew the main idea for the circle of justice from Indian, Persian, and Greek political theories and developed the idea in light of Islamic values.[10] However, he takes great care to note that even in the absence of these influences, Muslims would have been able to put forth the same ideas in a more refined manner. Ibn Khaldūn's treatment of other civilisations, in this case, is noteworthy. The fact that he accepts the intellectual influence of other civilisations—regardless of their religious beliefs—and that he synthesises them within an Islamic moral framework to produce an advanced line of thought, is a clear indication that Islam is an *open civilisation*. This open approach serves as a strong example of how Muslims today should interact with the political ideas and institutions established by other world civilisations while retaining Islamic values. Moreover, it has a precedent in the time of 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb's caliphate (r. 634–644), when Muslims benefitted from the learning of the art of regulating the state treasury from the Persian state tradition.

The open approach rests on two principles: (1) Islam provides us with the basic principles of government, leaving the construction of systems and the methods of the application up to each society and generation; and (2) some constitutional elements of justice and institutional operations are universal; therefore Muslims should be open to learning and benefitting from the experiences of other civilisations. For instance, from an Islamic perspective, justice is seen as a universal value for all political systems.

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the foundation of property ownership. Political power is legitimate only insofar it provides and defends justice, and it loses its legitimacy in the case that justice can no longer be provided.

10.   Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 82.

At this point, it is useful to highlight the concept of *nizām al-ʿālam*, frequently used in the Islamic and Ottoman intellectual traditions, with such meanings as "world order," "social order," "social structure," "social system," and "social organisation." The *nizām al-ʿālam* is what the circle of politics and justice ultimately aims to explain, justify, and build. The above classification of terms demonstrates that world order consists of institutions, processes, actors, and desired products or outcomes. The most important outcome is justice, which depends on the perpetuation of the whole social system and the state. The world order is built by human beings who use their reason and free will. Therefore, it is their product (*kasb*), unlike the natural world, which is organised by Divine Providence.

There is a difference between citizenry and society. The word *ʿālam* has two meanings: the physical world and society. In the social discourse, it is generally used to mean the social world or society. In the "circle of politics," we observe that Ibn Khaldūn makes a distinction between society (*ʿālam*) and citizens or subjects (*raʿiyah*). This demonstrates that the relationship between the ruler and the citizens is a relationship of *riʿāyah* (protection) of the divine trust (*amānah*), as Taha Abdurrahman (1944–present) explains in his works.[11] Taha Abdurrahman's view about politics as "entrusting" (*al-iʾtimān*) is an extension of the Islamic traditional political thought and in line with the concept of *riʿāyah*.

The word "*m-l-k*" in the circle of politics may be read as *mulk* or *malik* as the Arabic script allows for both readings. *Malik*, which means the sovereign or the ruler, is preferable in this context because the words *mulk* (literally means sovereignty) and *dawlah* (state) are generally used as synonymous, and the

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11. Taha Abdurrahman, *Rūh al-Dīn: Min Dīq al-ʿAlmāniyyah ilā Siʿat al-Iʾtimāniyyah* [*The Spirit of Religion: From the Narrowness of Secularism to the Capaciousness of Trusteeship*] (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2012); idem, *Suʾāl al-ʿUnf: Bayna al-Iʾtimāniyyah wal-Hiwāriyyah* [*The Question of Violence: Between Trusteeship and Dialogue*] (Beirut: al-Muʾassasat al-ʿArabiyya li al-Fikr wa al-Ibdāʿ, 2017).

difference between the state and *mulk* is not as explicit. Reading it as *mulk* would be redundant as the word *dawlah* is also used in the circle. Therefore, it reads here as *malik* and translates as sovereign or ruler.

Political *Sunnah* in *Dā'irat al-Siyāsah*: The Epistemic and Moral Role of the State

The most striking element in the circle of politics, from my point of view, is the *Sunnah*. Ibn Khaldūn's usage of the term *Sunnah*, instead of meaning law as used by Kınalızāde, is very significant. Ibn Khaldūn was a specialist in law (*faqīh*); he served as a Mālikī judge in Cairo and penned a work on *fiqh*. We must ask why the term *Sunnah* was his choice instead of *Sharī'ah*, which was his own professional field. Centuries later, the Ottoman scholar and philosopher Kınalızāde used the word *Sharī'ah* to describe the same component in the circle of politics.

Three reasons come to mind. First and foremost, the *Sunnah* is a wider concept than *Sharī'ah*—that is, law encompasses the rules enforceable by the state—and refers to the rules that are enforced by the state as well as to moral rules that are practised by society and embedded in the social conscience. Secondly, the *Sunnah* is the *Sharī'ah* law as applied by the Prophet in a broad and inclusive sense but not strictly law in the sense of abstract legal principles, thereby indicating the concrete foundation of religious law in Islam. Thirdly, the meaning of the word *Sunnah* includes a society's traditional laws and customs. Coincidentally, the written law in many societies is the result of the oral transmission of customs through the generations.

Ibn Khaldūn's emphasis on the state as the means of keeping the *Sunnah* alive is significant: "State is power, the *Sunnah* thrives by it; the *Sunnah* is governance (politics), the sovereign implements it." It is clear from these lines that the purpose of the state's power is to uphold the *Sunnah* and that it is the head of state's responsibility to exercise the *Sunnah*, which is presented as the mandatory means of political and administrative

governance. Ibn Khaldūn's aim is to defend a political system that is grounded on the principles and application of the *Sunnah*, namely, he sets forth a model of state and politics that follows the example of Prophet Muḥammad in his role as head of state. In this respect, Ibn Khaldūn's approach is broader and more comprehensive. It transcends the narrow scope of *Sharī'ah* as law by foregrounding the importance of historical practice by the Prophet Muḥammad.

Given the fact that Ibn Khaldūn aims to analyse the state in general but not the state in Islamic civilisation, tradition—which in Islam refers to the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muḥammad—may not mean the same when other civilisations are concerned. In Islam, tradition goes back to the practice of the Prophet Muḥammad. Yet, in other civilisations, there are different dynamics, be they religious or secular, which play significant roles in the formation of the tradition of those societies.

Likewise, Ibn Khaldūn's usage of descriptive and objective language as a social scientist is highly significant. The discursive style in the "circle of justice" is one that expresses "what it is" but not "what it should be." In other words, rather than take a normative approach and say, "this is how something should be," Ibn Khaldūn says "this is how something is" in an objective approach to the subject. This is because Ibn Khaldūn's purpose is to perform an objective analysis of the state.

Yet, the objective analysis provides a ground for policymaking and normative analysis. Thus, it appears that Ibn Khaldūn intends for the conclusions that may be drawn from his analysis to influence the way politics is done.[12] This intention may be evidenced by how the "circle of justice" was used as a tool of criticism and opposition in Ottoman politics, especially to critique state decisions that did not comply with the principles outlined in the "circle of justice." When the Ottomans wanted to criticise a state decision, they stated that it was a deviation from the "circle of justice" and asked for a return to it.

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12. If we are to understand this distinction in terms of Islamic intellectual tradition, we may say that Ibn Khaldūn uses "*ikhbārī*" (informative mood) rather than "*inshā'ī*" (constructive mood) expression in his work.

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The State Animates the *Sunnah* and Survives with the *Sunnah*

To better understand what is meant by the *Sunnah* specified in the "circle of justice," it will be useful to recollect the Prophet's contributions to politics. The formative period in Islamic political history, thought, and institutions encompasses the rule of the Prophet and his Rightly Guided Successors (*Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn*). This is the time when Islamic civilisation came into being with the development of its institutions and political values. It was nonexistent before the Prophet. In other words, Islamic civilisation was born of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*, whereas Western civilisation predates Christianity. In a way, Christianity was assimilated into the then dominant political system and became one of its colours. On the contrary, the practice of Prophet Muḥammad and the Qur'ān constituted the foundations of a completely new civilisation with a political system. Thus, there was only one colour, and that was the colour of the Qur'ān and the practice of Prophet Muḥammad.

Islamic civilisation carries a rich political heritage, and the main reason for this is that the Prophet Muḥammad was the Head of the State in addition to being a religious authority. The same cannot be expected from the Christian religion as Jesus Christ, for example, was neither a politician nor a ruler, nor was he a civil servant working for the state. Neither can it be expected from Buddhism, as Buddha was also not a politician or servant of the state. In contrast, the Prophet Muḥammad's measures and actions as the Head of State may be said to constitute part of the political *Sunnah*, and he serves as a role model for the statesmen and politicians who come after him.

The ideal statesperson in the West is modelled on the idea of a philosopher-king. On the other hand, in Islam, the ideal model consists of specific examples set by the Prophet and the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn*. This model can be named the *walī-amīr* or "saint-ruler," intended to mean "virtuous ruler" or "virtuous leader." After the Prophet Muḥammad, the foremost examples

of virtuous leaders in the Islamic civilisation are Abū Bakr (r. 632–634), ʿUmar bin al-Khaṭṭāb, ʿUthmān bin al-ʿAffān (r. 644–656), ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib (656–661), and ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. 717–720).

As the head of state, the Prophet Muḥammad made numerous deep-rooted and long-lasting contributions to the development of a model of the state and to political philosophy. For instance, he was the first leader in world history who made the distinction between himself as the head of state and the institution of the state as a corporate legal person. Previously, the two concepts were seen as inseparable, a perspective that lasted until the establishment of the modern state in the West.[13]

The Prophet Muḥammad granted the state its moral character, i.e., its legal personality and corporate identity, and made sure to separate the state as an independent institution from his own private person. An illustrative example of this distinction can be seen in the Prophet's separation of the state treasury, known as *bayt al-māl*, from his private property. He openly declared that it is unlawful (*harām*) for him or his family to extract funds from the treasury, and, considering that state treasuries at the time were normally accepted to be at the disposal of the heads of state to use as they saw fit for both personal and public purposes, this declaration is highly significant. To reiterate, the Prophet made it clear that he—as Head of State—did not have the right to use the state property for his own private ends.

By voluntarily releasing himself from his authority to dispense with state property as he pleased, the Prophet furthermore demonstrated that the power exercised by heads of state cannot be absolute. Such voluntary action on the part of a leader is unprecedented, considering the general reality then that heads of state more often attempted to increase their power and only backed down because of social and political backlash.

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13. The statement, "I am the State" (*l'État c'est moi*), by the French King, Louis XIV (1635–1715), is clearly illustrative of this point.

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In the process of establishing the state as a corporate legal person or entity and of assigning the state treasury to that legal entity, the Prophet was simultaneously drawing the boundaries of the head of state's authority and setting limits to the obedience owed to that authority. He asserted that obedience can only be expected to law and decrees that are socially as well as religiously recognised as good;[14] that is, morally acceptable as well as beneficial for humanity and society. This encouraged restraint in obedience and presented a stark contrast to the expectation of absolute obedience generally practised by other civilisations during the period, and this restraint continued to be upheld during the times of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn* as well as later Islamic societies and states. As an illustrative part of this practice of restraint, Abū Bakr was the first head of state in world history who relied on a salary. Like the Prophet, Abū Bakr barred himself from free access to the state treasury and, by doing so, set the example for the other *Khulafā'* who followed him. Instead, living on a salary imbursed from the state treasury allowed Abū Bakr to avoid having to engage in commercial interactions with his subjects and thus allowed him to devote all his time to state affairs. The salary system was likewise applied by Ottoman sultans, who were also state officials themselves. Just as the grand vizier and other servants of the state had fixed sources of income, so too the Sultans who undertook their jobs on a salary and were held accountable for withdrawing even the smallest sum from the state treasury.[15]

Another revolutionary change brought to the system by the Prophet was his joint institution of justice and public benefit as the sources of political legitimacy. In line with the boundaries the Prophet had set on the exercise of authority, these principles were later formulated in the precept, "the legitimate exercise of

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14. Evidence may be provided from the *hadīth*: "There is no obedience to anyone if it is disobedience to Allah. Verily, obedience is only in good conduct." (*lā tā'ata fī ma'siyyatin, innamā al-tā'ah fī al-ma'rūf*). See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7257 and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1840 in *al-Saḥīḥān: Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī wa Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Tunis: al-Shirkah al-Tūnīsiyyah, 2014).

15. The sultan's salary was saved in the "*hazine-i hassa*;" i.e., private treasury, and state funds were saved in the "*hazine-i amme*;" public treasury.

authority on the subjects is contingent on their benefit,"[16] which illegalises arbitrary political action taken towards citizens. As a result, actions that served socially beneficial purposes were exclusively recorded as legitimate in *fiqh*.

An even more significant revolutionary change was the Prophet's abolishment of hereditary succession, a common custom whereby state leadership would pass from the head of state to his children and grandchildren. This means that the Prophet did not establish a dynasty. Instead, he transferred the custody of the state to capable, knowledgeable individuals who possessed excellent morality and who were proven to have a firm grasp of their responsibilities. The first such custodian of the state (*khalīfah*) was Abū Bakr, who was then succeeded by ʿUmar bin al-Khaṭṭāb, both of whom were not his direct family members.

When we consider Western civilisations from a similar perspective, we see that the separation of the head of state from the state occurred much later, during the formation of nation-states in the modern era. Placing limits to authority in the Western states, likewise, occurred only in the modern era, which only goes to demonstrate how the rules set by the Prophet fifteen centuries ago were extraordinarily visionary. Due to his exemplary application of those rules, political governance later became one of the central issues in Islamic Studies. Much had been written on the subject, but unfortunately, not much of that writing is known today.

The Current Quest for Good Governance

Contemporary Islamic political thought and discourse are generally out of touch with the tradition. Contemporary political theories put forth by Muslim thinkers never engage

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16. Article 58 in the *Mecelle* (*Mecelle-i Ahkām Adliyye*), "*Raiyye yani tebaa üzerine tasarruf maslahata menûttur,*" is recorded as a maxim, and means that the legitimacy of actions taken towards citizens depends on the benefits of these actions to them.

with the "circle of justice" as envisioned by Ibn Khaldūn or Kınalızāde, and, similarly, there is no reference to political *Sunnah* as emphasised by Ibn Khaldūn. Rather, there is only a reference to the *Sharī'ah* as law and universal adherence to the pyramid model of political governance. This is in stark contradistinction with the theory and practice of Islamic political life over centuries until the Western influence.

The history of Islamic political theory undoubtedly consists of more than Ibn Khaldūn and offers a rich, comprehensive store of literature written from different perspectives by philosophers, *fiqh* scholars, theologians, Ṣūfīs, historians, statesmen, and bureaucrats. However, even a brief literature survey is enough to show that contemporary Islamic political theory texts do not belong to any of these centuries-old intellectual traditions. It may even be said that there is an intentional avoidance or rejection of the intellectual heritage offered not just by Ibn Khaldūn and Kınalızāde but by political thinkers ranging from al-Farābī (d. 950) to al-Māwardī (d. 1058), al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) to Koçibey (d. 1650), Dedecöngi (d. 1566) to Katip Celebi (d. 1657), Nizam-ul-Mulk (d. 1092) to Ahmet Cevdet Pasha (d. 1895), and Ebussuud Efendi (d. 1574) to Said Halim Pasha (d. 1921). Modern Islamic political theories seem to converge on an effort to build a system of political thought from scratch, paradoxically bringing about the phenomenon of "traditionalism without tradition."

The solution to the gap in current scholarship is to reclaim the Islamic political heritage and accept its wealth in reconstructing it in the light of current developments through an approach that may be termed "innovation grounded in tradition." What will help in making the innovation is the circular understanding of politics as put forth by Ibn Khaldūn and the Ottoman intellectuals and statesmen who followed in his footsteps. This understanding was designed to uphold the practice inherited from the Prophet Muḥammad, that is, his *Sunnah*, and rests on the foundations of equality and plurality. In our age of open civilisation, the pyramidal model of politics no longer answers the needs of humanity and has become outdated.

The world needs a circular understanding of management, administration, politics, and good governance.

In the case where Muslims today adopt "applied Ibn Khaldūnism" as a methodology, they will achieve a new understanding of politics that, through the perspective of the "circle of politics," will allow them to generate solutions to issues inherent to both their local political systems and global political systems that affect humanity in general.

In conclusion, Ibn Khaldūn's "circle of politics," founded on the intellectual heritage of ancient civilisations and Islamic values, offers both Muslims and humanity alike the potential to create a new political alternative. Contemporary Islamic political discourse must grow its roots in Islamic political tradition and, through an approach best described as "rooted revival" (*al-tajdīd al-muʾaṣṣal*), must revive Ibn Khaldūn's legacy to present to the world an alternative political practice, theory, and methodology. It is important to keep in mind that the term "circle of politics" (*dāʾirat al-siyāsah*) should not be misleading in its specificity; the model embodies an egalitarian and pluralistic approach to social organisation in general that is more universal than only limited to the political sphere.

Ibn Khaldūn and Kınalızāde's Concept of Dā'irat al-Siyāsah

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