

# A Comparative Study: Ibn Khaldun's Asabiyah and Habermas' Life-World

## *Karşılaştırılmalı Bir Çalışma: İbn-i Haldun'un Asabiyesi ve Habermas'ın Hayat-Evreni*

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Received: April 11, 2021

Accepted: June 14, 2021

Published: July 15, 2021

**Abstract:** This study will generally examine the theory of Habermas' life-world and Ibn Khaldun's asabiyah, comparatively. After Derrida's death, Habermas is known as one of the greatest philosophers and sociologists living in our age. He established a very comprehensive 'life-world' theory by taking sociological materials from numerous philosophers and sociologists. Ibn Khaldun is considered to be the founding father of modern sociology. He is famous for analysing historical events in a deterministic way, with a cause-effect relationship. I think it would be a very productive study to compare the concepts and ideas he developed with certain theories of Habermas, especially in socio-economic terms. In this study, I will first investigate cultural reproduction and its functions such as social integration, the formation of belonging, socialization, responsibility awareness, solidarity, and social legitimacy, in the theory of Habermas. Then I will study their correspondents with regard to Ibn Khaldun's asabiyah theory.

**Keywords:** Ibn Khaldun, Jürgen Habermas, asabiyah, life-world, social integration

**Öz:** *Bu çalışmada genel olarak Habermas'ın 'hayat-evreni' teorisi ile İbn Haldun'un asabiye teorisi karşılaştırılmalı olarak incelenecektir. Habermas, Derrida'nın ölümünden sonra çağımızda yaşayan en büyük filozof ve sosyolog olarak bilinir. İbn Haldun, modern sosyolojinin kurucu babası olarak kabul edilir. Tarihsel olayları deterministik bir şekilde, sebep-sonuç ilişkisi ile analiz etmesiyle ünlüdür. Geliştirdiği kavram ve fikirleri Habermas'ın belirli teorileriyle, özellikle sosyo-ekonomik açıdan karşılaştırmanın çok verimli bir çalışma olacağını düşünüyorum. Bu çalışmada öncelikle Habermas'ın teorisinde kültürel yeniden üretim ve bunun sosyal entegrasyon, aidiyet oluşumu, sosyalleşme, sorumluluk bilinci, dayanışma ve sosyal meşruiyet gibi sonuçların işlevlerini incelenecektir. Daha sonra bunların karşılıklarını İbn Haldun'un asabiye teorisinde araştırılacaktır.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *İbn-i Haldun, Jürgen Habermas, asabiye, hayat-evreni, sosyal entegrasyon*

## 1. Introduction

The concept of 'life-world' is used in different branches of sciences such as philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. The idea emphasizes a state of affairs in which the world is experienced. 'The life-world, then, has to be understood as including the overlapping sets of objects which surround us in life as perceptual objects, instruments and tools, food, clothing, shelter, art objects, religious objects, and so on. The life-world, therefore, encompasses both the world of 'nature' (as it presents itself to us in our everyday dealings with it, including mountains, sky, plants, animals, planets, and so on) as well as the world of 'culture', including ourselves, other persons, animals, social institutions, artifacts, symbolic systems, languages, religions" (Moran, 2011, p. 229).

The Husserlian elucidation of life-world provided a starting point for the phenomenological sociology of Alfred Schütz, who tried to synthesize Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness, meaning, and the life-world with Max Weber's sociology and its focus on subjectively meaningful action (Schutz, 2011, V. 5, p. 22). Jürgen Habermas has further developed his social theory by taking many materials from Schutz and Luckman (Schutz and Luckman, 1974).

The term of asabiyah variously translates to group solidarity, nationalism, patriotism, communal spirit, blood relationship, tribal spirit, group feeling, feeling of solidarity, and social solidarity (Jamal, 2012, p. 78; Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 246).

Considering all the passages about asabiyah in Ibn Khaldun's related book, I would like to define the phenomenon of asabiyah as one who can be seen as having a strong and collective consciousness, solidarity, a strong sense of belonging and personality, having high moral and religious responsibility, a wilful unity, and longing toward well-defined goals. Naturally, asabiyah is not only a state of consciousness but also a refined tradition, individual and social justice stock, and heroism that has been formed over a long time. This also expresses the will to resist injustice and persecution (Al-Jabiri, 1992, 163; Duran, 1995, 15f).

Ibn Khaldun's asabiyah theory has been tried to be applied by modern researchers to many fields other than the social-political field, such as economic development, education, social capital, etc. (Esmaili, 2020; Yilmaz, 2020; Randa, 2020).

## 2. Life-World in Habermasian Sociology

Habermas investigates the capitalist and pre-capitalist social structure with dichotomies such as life-world / system, communicative action / strategic action, social integration/systemic integration, pre-traditional ethics/post-traditional ethics, etc. Here we will only examine the concept of life-world, leaving the others aside. According to Siebert, Habermas' main aim is to establish a society in which all people are freed from their fears and are able to make themselves into masters of their fate, a society of reason and freedom (Siebert, 2008, p. 12-13; Habermas, 2002, p.110f; Habermas, 1996, 287f).

At the center of Habermasian theory, the 'life-world' plays a central role. Habermas uses the concept of 'life-world'; a social structure in which undistorted and limitless communication, solidarity, belonging, socialization, legitimacy, and integration are produced (Baxter, 1987, p. 39-86.)

In this study, I will solely focus on the cultural reproduction process, and its functions, such as social integration, identity, solidarity, legitimacy, and motivation, and what types of pathologies arise when the cultural reproduction process is disrupted.

For Habermas, the "structural components" of the life-world are culture, society, and personality. Habermas analyses different aspects of the life-world based on ideas he takes from Max Weber, Durkheim, Marx, Parsons and systematizes them in various figures.

**Figure 1. Contributions of Reproduction Processes to Maintaining the Structural Components of the Life-world**

Structural Components	Culture	Society	Personality
Reproduction Process			
Cultural reproduction	Interpretive schemes fit for consensus ("valid knowledge")	Legitimations	-Socialization patterns -Educational goals
Social integration	Obligations	Legitimately ordered interpersonal relations	Social memberships
Socialization	Interpretive accomplishments	Motivations for actions that conform to norms	Interactive capabilities ("personal identity")

(Habermas, 1987, V. 2, p. 143).

The function of cultural reproduction is to secure the continuity of tradition and coherence of knowledge that is sufficient for everyday practice (Habermas, 1987, V.2, p. 140).

Successful cultural reproduction also has implications for the other two components, society and personality: in the former case, it establishes legitimation for fundamental social institutions, and in the latter, it creates and maintains attitudes and behavioral patterns that are effective for "self-formation" and the attainment of "educational goals."

Social integration is described as the "coordination of action through legitimately recognized interpersonal relations" and the securing of "the identity of groups to a degree sufficient for everyday practice." The fulfillment of these functions may be evaluated according to the degree of solidarity among society members (Habermas, 1987, V.2, p. 140–141).

The power that connects the members of society is a mechanism of social integration. It is known that the factor that ensures social integration is the subsystem of the socio-cultural system. The morality, values, belief system, philosophical and theological accumulation are subsystems that secure the process of social coexistence. According to Habermas, the primary motivation mechanism of social integration is "prestige" (Habermas, 1987, V.2, p. 181, 250, 251, 280; Parsons, 1978, p. 361f).

### **2.1. Disturbances of Cultural Reproduction and its Results**

According to Habermas, the tendencies that correspond to a culture's failure of reproduction has different consequences in culture, society, and person. Their evolution dimension is the rationality of knowledge in cultural reproduction, the solidarity of members in social integration, and high responsibility in socialization. The failure of reproduction manifests itself as a loss of meaning in the cultural sphere, a withdrawal of legitimacy in society, and crisis in orientation and education in person. This also appears as an unsettling collective identity in culture, an anomie in community, and an alienation in person. Its results in the socialization sphere in culture is a rupture of tradition, in society a withdrawal of motivation, and in person, psychopathologies.

**Figure 2. Manifestations of Crisis When Reproduction Processes Are Disturbed (Pathologies)**

Structural components Disturbances in the domain of	Culture	Society	Person	Dimension of evaluation
Cultural reproduction	Loss of meaning	Withdrawal of legitimacy	Crisis in orientation and education	Rationality of Knowledge
Social integration	Unsettling of collective identity	Anomie	Alienation	Solidarity of members
Socialization	Rupture of tradition	Withdrawal of motivation	Psychopathologies	Personal responsibility

(Habermas, 1987, V.2, p. 143).

### 3. Ibn Khaldun's Asabiyah

The concept of asabiyah, which occupies a central place in Ibn Khaldun's theory, is similar in content to the idea of the Habermasian life-world. Here, we can compare life-world and asabiyah in terms of solidarity, responsibility, identity, social integration, social legitimacy, and religious and moral values. These reflect, at the same time, cultural reproduction in the Habermasian sense.

#### 3.1. Reproduction of Asabiyah Consciousness

The vital question to be asked here is whether it is possible to reproduce the consciousness of asabiyah. According to what is understood from Ibn Khaldun's passages, asabiyah consciousness is not a quality that is inherited from the mother but a property that is acquired by private effort. Therefore, it is possible to reproduce through education and daily practice. Ibn Khaldun's view on this subject is similar to Aristotle's theory of character education (Aristotle, 2011: 27; Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p.183).

I will try to explain the process of reproducing asabiyah consciousness with the help of a figure.

**Figure 3. Recreation of Asabiyah Consciousness and its Consequences**

Structures	Society	Culture	Person
Reproduction of asabiyah consciousness			
Traditional Values	Social Solidarity	Ascetic Behavior	Identity-Bravery
Religious-Philosophical Thought	Social Integration	Production of Value and Meaning	Education
Democratic Values	Social-Religious Legitimacy	Tolerance and Patience	Communication-Coordination

Considering Habermas's classification, I also took the structures, as community, culture, and person. I regarded the reproduction of asabiyah consciousness in correspondence to the Habermasian cultural reproduction.

Qualities such as socialization of the new generations, gaining identity and personality, being patriotic and brave are the traditional values. Family values have a significant place among traditional values (Rawls, 1999, p. 406).

The second significant value that must be constantly reproduced in Ibn Khaldun's system is religious-philosophical thoughts. The third value that needs to be reproduced are democratic values. Here, our aim from democratic values is the government's consultation with society, in particular to scholars, enacting the values internalized by society and avoiding all kinds of arbitrary and irrational policies. In this way, social and religious legitimacy in the community, tolerance, and patience against different segments and opinions in the culture, communication, and coordination among individuals can be provided.

The reproduction of asabiyah consciousness at the stage of civilization depends on the healthy relations between the religious and the ruling elite. Naturally, the most crucial task here falls to the ruling elite. First of all, the ruling elite should give religious leaders dignity; they must always keep in touch with them and heed their suggestions. The second important task falls on the religious elite. In particular, religious leaders should use religious values to enlighten society and improve their moral, religious values without instrumentalizing religion in any way. The most crucial point here is that ethical leaders purify themselves from negative images and impressions that may arise. This

means that they must clarify that they do not carry any hidden agendas in their invitation to high religious and moral values. In other words, moral leaders should not have any ulterior motives in terms of economy, politics, etc. If religious and moral values are not used for anything, ethical leaders will be accepted by society, and their advice and suggestions will be adopted. This process is significant for the reproduction of asabiyah values: heroism, sacrifice, solidarity, patriotism, and a strong identity.

Ibn Khaldun assigns an essential function to healthy religious thoughts and practices, which reproduces the consciousness of asabiyah, causes significant changes in the society, ensures social integration, coordination, strengthens belonging, and gives individuals an honorable personality. Religious feelings can motivate people to coalesce in solidarity with each other and help determine their actions in this direction (Gibb, 1933, p.28).

Ibn Khaldun puts the Divine Will into action and attributes it a function in softening people's hearts and making them love each other (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 210). Ibn Khaldun refers to a verse of the Qur'an in which God said, "If you had expended all the treasures on earth, you would have achieved no unity among them" (The Qur'an, Chapter 8, Verse, 63).

According to Ibn Khaldun, the reason for this is that religious unity does away with mutual jealousy and envy among people and causes concentration upon the truth. They can devote all energies towards a common aim. Even if they are willing to die for their ideals (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 211).

In addition to the high character and virtue of the ruling family and the political leader, religious and moral leaders' persuasion and guidance is also crucial for high solidarity and integration among the members of society. Interestingly, for Ibn Khaldun, the religious leaders should also be a member of the asabiyah, not from those detached from the asabiyah, and have not internalized the shared values of the asabiyah. If this is the case, their persuasion and influence will be very high (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 213). This is because religious thinkers must speak the same language as asabiyah members, share the same common goals to produce asabiyah morality.

The reproduction of democratic values depends on the mutual positive relationship between political and religious leadership. Political leaders will guarantee religious leaders the right to express their opinions and criticize wrong policies and practices;

religious leadership will also express the truth without having hidden economic and political agendas (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 190).

### 3.2. Consequences of Reproduction

The consequences of reproduction of traditional values in society is referred to as social solidarity, in culture, ascetic behavior and in person, strong identity. The results of reproduction of religious–philosophical thoughts in society is social integration, in culture, production of sufficient value and meaning, and in person, good education. The consequences of reproduction of democratic values in society is social legitimacy, in culture, tolerance, and in person, the ability to communicate. It is impossible to examine all of these here, hence we will only investigate social integration and its legitimacy, strong belonging and solidarity.

### 3.3. Withdrawal of Asabiyah Consciousness

The internal and external factors carry out the withdrawal of the asabiyah consciousness. They are the result of the disruption of the reproduction process of asabiyah consciousness.

**Figure 4. The Consequences of the Disruption of Reproduction Asabiyah Consciousness**

Structures	Society	Culture	Person
Disruption of Reproduction Asabiyah Consciousness			
Traditional Values	Egoism	Hedonism	insufficient socialization
Religious–Philosophical Thought	Instrumentalization of Religion: social chaos	Loss of Value and Meaning	insufficient patriotism
Democratic Values	Social Legitimacy Crises	Withdrawal of Loyalty	Political Apathy

The disruption in the reproduction of the asabiyah consciousness causes problems in traditional values, religious and philosophical thoughts, and democratic values. This failure motivates the emergence of pathologies such as egoism in society, hedonistic tendencies in culture, and incomplete socialization in individuals. The instrumentalization of religion for economic or political power also causes pathologies. These can be such as polarization and social chaos in society, loss of value and meaning in culture, and insufficient patriotism in individuals. Likewise, a failure to reproduce



democratic values can cause a legitimacy crisis in society, a loss of loyalty, and indifferences in the political community.

Most of the concepts used above are taken from modern sociology. The content of these concepts will be further investigated to find the relevance in Ibn Khaldun's work.

### **3.4. Disruption of Reproduction Asabiyah Consciousness**

Disruption of reproduction of asabiyah consciousness also results from internal and external factors. Internal factors are (1) the defeat and repression of asabiyah by other asabiyah and (2) their assimilation by urban prosperity and freedom. When one asabiyah defeats another asabiyah, they lose their defensive and heroic attributes. Over time, they lose their dignity and are assimilated by the victorious asabiyah culture. Another internal factor is cosmopolitan urban life. If asabiyah values cannot be reproduced, members of the asabiyah will gradually lose their values by being caught up in prosperity and luxury. They neglect their traditional qualities such as helping one another, making sacrifices, and become assertive.

External causes are (1) political authoritarianism and (2) religious degeneration. The first factor reflects itself as the separation of political power from social-cultural values, that is, withdrawal of social legitimacy. The second cause appears as the degeneration of the religious leadership, which is the withdrawal of spiritual and moral values.

#### **3.4.1. Imitation of Vanquished the Victor**

Ibn Khaldun analyses how societies that have defeated other societies have alienated themselves from their own culture and tradition, resulting in other victorious societies' cultures assimilating them. According to him, the dominant society emulates the society's culture that is defeated by exhibiting a deep inferiority complex and loss of self-confidence.

'The vanquished always want to imitate the victor in his distinctive mark(s), his dress, his occupation, and all his other conditions and customs' (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 186). According to Ibn Khaldun, this is because people always consider the society that defeated them in the war to be superior. This belief results in extreme admiration and imitation of the victorious community. According to Ibn Khaldun, another illusion for imitators is that the men may think that the victor's superiority is not the result of his asabiyah conciseness, but his customs and culture (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 196). It is almost impossible to reproduce asabiyah consciousness in a society in this state.

### **3.4.2. Luxury and Prosperity**

Another internal factor is luxury and prosperity. According to Ibn Khaldun, living in luxury and wealth naturally leads people to secularization and eventually the death of some higher qualities. Those who have this kind of lifestyle hardly give up their accustomed pleasures. Therefore, the feeling of sacrificing, sharing, and helping others is reduced. Ibn Khaldun claims that they are the result of living under the organization of a state. The members of the *asabiyah*, in time, lose their *asabiyah* morality and values by the transition from an ascetic to a hedonistic lifestyle, as Max Weber witnessed in puritans. (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 187; Weber, 2005, p. 118–119).

According to Ibn Khaldun, hedonistic tendencies imposed by urban culture can be controlled through religious advice and character education. Therefore, religious counseling and education are essential tools in perpetuating traditional values, albeit with moderate intensity.

### **3.4.3. Despotism**

External factors are political despotism and religious corruption. Political despotism is the main factor of social legitimacy withdrawal; religious corruption is a source of loss of meaning and values. These also lead to loss of society's loyalty to the political elite and social chaos.

#### **3.4.3.1. Social Legitimacy Crises**

External factors that contribute to the weakening of an *asabiyah*'s consciousness is the changing of democratic attitudes of a political leader to the authoritarian character, that is, withdrawal of political legitimacy in society. Ibn Khaldun argues that over time, the other *asabiyah* can assimilate under this powerful *asabiyah* and turn society into a single *asabiyah* (monoculture). At this stage, if crude animal feelings prevail instead of reason and insight, the manager becomes arrogant and despotic; he feels himself a "divine" (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 222).

Thus, all power concentrates in the monopoly of one person. Now, society starts to be governed not by consultation and joint decisions but by applying pressure and violence. The high morals and characters of the *asabiyah* members who are under pressure also erode and in time, these individuals become ordinary and 'norm-free'. The monopolization of power leads society, in the end, to an authoritarian regime. The regime uses political oppression and applies policies that will seize society's property by extending tax sources and increasing rates (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 224).

Within a relevant social climate, almost all policies are based on injustice transactions. These policies, of course, lead society and civilization to collapse (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 365).

Interestingly, Ibn Khaldun's approach is very close to the American economist A Laffer's. According to Laffer, if tax rates exceed the optimum level, the producers are discouraged from producing, and they prefer to stay idle instead of producing too much and paying taxes. As a result, public revenues will decrease (Moore and Tanaus, 2008, p. 200f).

The effect of authoritarianism is not limited to the micro-economy field but also destroys the whole society and civilization established by the labor of past generations (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 366).

#### **3.4.4. The Degeneration of Clergy**

There are two reasons why clergymen degenerate the positive impression of religion in people's minds. One is that religious leaders instrumentalize religious values for their own political and economic interest,; the other is that they interpret religious texts with an authoritarian ideological approach.

The main task of religious leaders is to invite individuals to unity and solidarity. If they struggle to attain power abandoning their primary duties, precisely, this results from many negative issues in society. They lose trust in the community. They reduce religion to a political tool. In the end, they destroy society's unity and integrity: they destroy asabiyah morality.

Looking at the behavior of religious leaders who scramble for political power, members of society begin to believe that altruism, solidarity, and sacrifice are meaningless and worthless things. It makes society meaningless.

Ibn Khaldun reminds many examples from Islamic history on the subject; stresses that each of these crises caused by religious leaders deeply affects society (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 213).

Ibn Khaldun says that some of them claimed that he was either the expected Mahdi or his inviter. Most of them are delusional, insane, or dishonest fraudsters. They wish to seize political power using religion (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 214).

#### 4. Conclusion

The Habermasian life-world is a socio-cultural environment in which children's ability to socialize and communicate with each other, social integration of different ethnic and religious structures is ensured, a strong sense of belonging and responsibility is created, and social legitimacy is produced. According to Habermas, all of this is possible by reproducing culture, in other words, by preventing colonization of the life-world by money and bureaucracy. If cultural reproduction deteriorates, alienation, anomie, unstable personality, irresponsibility, loss of meaning and motivation, and eventually loss of legitimacy will occur.

Ibn Khaldun's concept of *asabiyah* corresponds to Habermas's concept of life-world. The concept of *asabiyah* has almost all of the content of the life-world. Ibn Khaldun begins by examining the *asabiyah* phenomenon's content. According to him, *asabiyah* is a common identity, awareness of solidarity, sensitivity to protect, and defence of each other. It is built on high qualities such as heroism, sacrifice, honor, and self-confidence. It performs great transformations with the high energy emerging from the desert and village conditions' difficulties and challenges. Through reproduction of traditional values, religious and philosophical thought and democratic values, *asabiyah* consciousness, *asabiyah* morality like solidarity, cooperation, obeying laws, political power, compassion for the weak, and respect for scholars, can be maintained its existence and effectiveness.

With this *asabiyah* energy, societies can establish high civilizations. By collecting their forces around a state organization, they can make progress in the economy, trade and infrastructure investments, fine arts and science, and increase social unity, integrity, and well-being.

But high *asabiyah* consciousness does not last forever; over time, it tends to decrease and eventually collapse due to internal and external causes. One of the inner reasons is that the members of *asabiyah* gradually internalize the urban culture and plunge into a life of prosperity and luxury. Switching from an ascetic lifestyle to a hedonistic lifestyle causes them to lose their high *asabiyah* morality.

Another internal reason is the defeat of one *asabiyah* member by another *asabiyah*. This defeat is in the form of losing the honor and self-confidence of the members of the *asabiyah*, imitating their customs and traditions, and forgetting their values by exaggerating the defeated *asabiyah* in their eyes.

External factors that weaken or even destroy the asabiyah consciousness are the authoritarianism of the regime and religious leaders' struggle to gain political power. The fact that the political leader put pressure on the society by abandoning consultation with the society and establishing an authoritarian mechanism, by seizing the cash income with high taxes, or even going further and usurping the wealth of the society, destroys the morality of asabiyah and the loyalty of individuals to the state. Ibn Khaldun refers to the laws regarding despotic rule that are incompatible with society's basic values. Society perceives such laws as external factors imposed on them because they cannot internalize them. Therefore, the thinker suggests that society be governed by Divine laws that can be easily assimilated.

According to Ibn Khaldun, another external factor is that religious leaders' often resort to rebellion as they struggle with the government for political power. Such a path dangerous in that society loses its trust in religious messages and invitations, and eventually, the asabiyah loses its morality.

Ibn Khaldun's asabiyah theory has similar properties to Habermas's life-world theory. Even at some points, the asabiyah extends the content of life-world. For example, while the concept of life-world does not contain any 'creative minority', this institution occupies a central position in asabiyah. Likewise, Habermas's theory does not contain ideas about how the life-world socio-cultural environment is established. It assumes that all pre-capitalist structures have life-worlds. However, Ibn Khaldun says that pre-capitalist structures also differ within themselves. Of course, the life-world theory has some extra features that the asabiyah theory does not include. For example, while Habermas observed and analysed a capitalist society based on political class domination, Ibn Khaldun was historically devoid of observation.

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